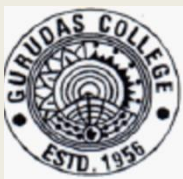
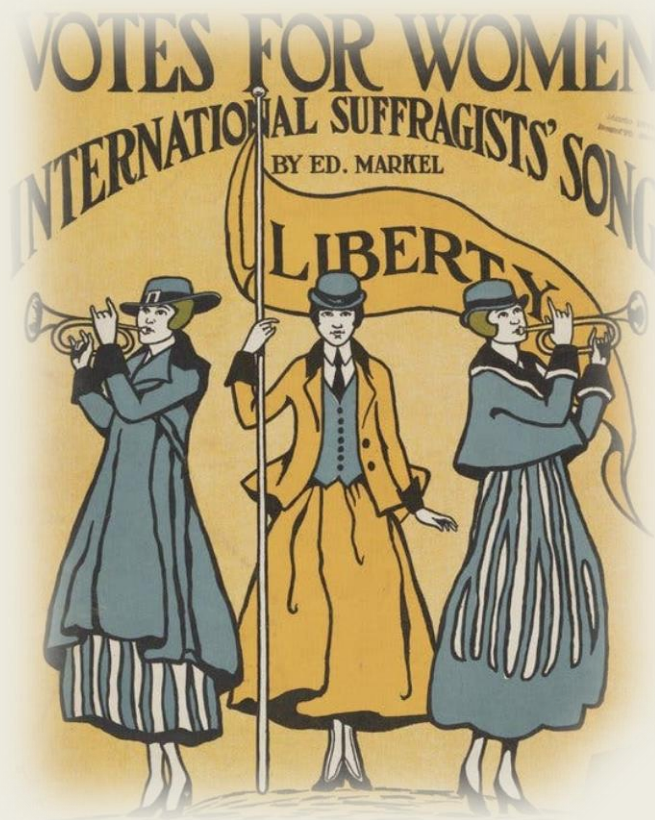


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INDEX

S. No.	TITLE	Pg. No.
1	THE WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT Dr. Swati Mukerji	1
2	ANTICANCER DRUGS IN RURAL BENGAL Dr. Anamika Basu	5
3	PRIMITIVISM IN JOSEPH CONRAD’S HEART OF DARKNESS Anuradha Basu	9
4	THE SELF & THE OTHER: GENERIC, GENERATIONAL AND SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS OF BLACK MOTHERHOOD IN THE MEMOIRS OF MAYA ANGELOU Dr. Suchandana Bhattacharyya	13
5	THE HISTORY OF THE PILL Dr. Titas Biswas	21
6	INFLUENZA: FROM DISEASE TO VACCINE Dr. Babli Halder	24
7	#MeToo AND <i>TESTIMONIO</i> : CONSIDERING THE AFTERLIVES OF INDIA’S #MeToo NARRATIVES Dr. Swati Moitra	28
8	MUMBAI: RURAL-URBAN LINKAGES OF A GLOBAL CITY Dr. Swati Mukerji	35
9	GENDERING MEDIA FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: THE WEST BENGAL SCENARIO Arunima Mukherjee	40
10	করোনা ,বিবেক ও মনুষ্যত্ব ড.সুনীলকুমার রায়	47
11	লবঙ্গলতিকা ড.সুনীলকুমার রায়	49
12	150 TH YEAR OF PERIODIC TABLE: A LONG JOURNEY TOWARDS CLASSIFICATION OF ELEMENTS Dr. Abhra Sarkar	52
13	“THE POOR, BLACK GIRL” : AN INTRODUCTION TO BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT Dr. Kalapi Sen	56
14	CROSS CULTURAL IDEAS OF ‘UTOPIAS’ AMONG THE VARIOUS ETHNIC GROUPS OF DARJEELING AND SIKKIM HIMALAYAS Bhawana Theeng Tamang	61

THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

Dr. Swati Mukerji

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It is universally known that the women's suffrage movement essentially relates to the struggle for the right of women to vote and run for office. Even though it was a decades-long fight, it took activists and reformers nearly 100 years to win that right. Disagreements over strategy threatened to cripple the movement more than once. However, on August 18, 1920, the 19th Amendment to the United States' Constitution was finally ratified, enfranchising all American women and declaring for the first time that they, like men, deserved all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. As we will be completing a 100 years of that legislative measure in August 2020, it would be in order to take a quick glance at the progress and culmination of this historic event.

The campaign for women's suffrage began in earnest in the decades before the Civil War. During the 1820s and 30s, most states had extended the franchise to all white men, regardless of how much money or property they had. Meanwhile, many American women wanted to challenge and break away from what historians called the 'Cult of True Womanhood,' where, a woman was considered to be 'true' only if she was a pious, submissive wife and mother, cocooned within her home.

During that time, it so happened that women were participating in multiple reform groups, like temperance leagues, moral-reform societies and anti-slavery organizations which were proliferating across the nation. This engendered a new way of thinking about the identity of a woman and her rights as a citizen of the United States.

The suffrage movement in the United States gained prominence with the first women's rights convention in the world, which was the Seneca Falls Convention. In 1848, a group of abolitionist activists—mostly women, but some men—gathered at Seneca Falls, New York to discuss the problem of women's rights. The convention was organized by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, active members of the abolitionist movement who had met in England in 1840 at the World Anti-Slavery Convention. Even though the Seneca Falls congregation was not the first in support of women's rights, but suffragists later viewed it as the meeting that officially launched the suffrage movement. Most of the delegates to the Seneca Falls Convention agreed that American women were autonomous individuals who

should have the right to vote as an expression of their political identities. The Declaration of Sentiments, as presented by the delegates, proclaimed that

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men *and women* are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

During the 1850s, the women’s rights movement gathered steam, but lost momentum when the Civil War began. In 1851, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was introduced by a mutual friend to Susan B. Anthony, who was the most active individual in the temperance movement at that time. The two would form a life-long friendship and collaboration, which essentially focused on obtaining suffrage. They formed the Woman’s National Loyal League in 1863 to support the Thirteenth Amendment to abolish slavery and to campaign for full citizenship for blacks and women. Almost immediately after the war ended, the 14th and the 15th Amendment to the Constitution raised familiar questions of suffrage and citizenship. Ironically, the 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, extended the Constitution’s protection to *all* citizens, while defining “citizens” as “male”; the 15th, ratified in 1870, guaranteed black men the right to vote.

Some women’s suffrage advocates, among them Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, believed that this was their chance to push lawmakers for truly universal suffrage. As a result, they refused to support the 15th Amendment and even allied with racist Southerners who argued that white women’s votes could be used to neutralize those cast by African Americans.

The National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was created in 1890, with Stanton as president and Anthony as vice president. Stanton’s position was largely honorary, as she departed on a 2-year European speaking tour shortly after being elected, leaving Anthony as acting president. NAWSA was a national, parent organization to hundreds of local groups that initially campaigned peacefully for women’s right to vote in America. On the other hand, the British suffrage movement was much more radicalized and militant than its American counterpart. England’s more aggressive suffragists faced violent confrontations with authorities and jail sentences; some went on hunger strikes while imprisoned and were made to endure force-feedings to prevent them from dying behind bars, which might increase public sympathy for their cause.

At the beginning of World War I, the women activists criticized the American government for supporting democracy abroad while denying women the right to vote at home, which was nothing short of blatant hypocrisy. By then, the suffragists’ approach had changed. Instead of arguing that women deserved the same rights and responsibilities as men because

they were “created equal,” the new generation of activists argued that women deserved the vote because they were *different* from men. They could make their domesticity into a political virtue, using the franchise to create a purer, more moral “maternal commonwealth.” In June 1917, some of them were arrested on the technical charge of obstructing traffic. Arrests and jail time, hunger strikes and force-feedings would continue for activists until the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. The 19th Amendment reads:

“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”

Ending almost a century of protest, on August 26, 1920, the 19th Amendment was certified by U.S. Secretary of State, Bainbridge Colby, and women finally achieved the long-sought right to vote throughout the United States. On November 2 of that same year, more than 8 million women across the U.S. voted in elections for the first time. It took over 60 years for the remaining 12 states to ratify the 19th Amendment

Women’s right to vote was achieved through the national and local efforts of all the different women’s organizations. The labour shortage caused by World War I that allowed women to move into roles traditionally held by men, made it increasingly difficult for opponents to argue that women were unworthy of the vote on the grounds of physical and mental inferiority. The United Nations encouraged women’s suffrage in the years following World War II. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) identifies it as a basic right with 189 countries currently being parties to this Convention.

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ANTICANCER DRUGS IN RURAL BENGAL

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Nutraceuticals for cancer treatment are mostly phytochemicals derived from dietary or medicinal plants such as soya bean, garlic, ginger, tea as well as propolis and honey. The active constituents of these nutraceuticals may have chemo preventive activities as well as chemotherapeutics activities.

Natural products have been used for thousands of years for prevention and/or treatment of different cancers. The presence of bioactive components in plants makes them appropriate choices to be used due to their little or no toxicity, high efficacy in multiple target sites, capability of oral consumption and low cost. The herbal medication system is the oldest process which has been passed on over centuries from generation to generation to cure diseases. Nowadays, due to increasing use of herbal medicines and phytochemicals, there is immense need for increase in the cultivation of medicinal plants. Exploitation as well as conservation of natural plant resources must be therefore looked after in a proper way.

Recent phytochemical and pharmacological examinations of plant extract have revealed a huge reservoir of bioactive compounds and epidemiological studies have shown that regular intake of fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer as they possess antioxidant capacity.

In the state West Bengal, the south-western districts like West Midnapore, Purulia and Bankura are mostly covered by forests that include different types of herbal plants. From field studies to gain knowledge about local plants and extensive literature survey to know about the components present in those plants, it becomes evident that West Midnapore District is copious with those plant natural resources which contain many precious life saving molecules e.g. Curcumin, Naringenin, Kaempferol, Quercetin, Epicatechin, Ferulic acid, Caffeic acid, Catechin etc. Among them Gallic acid, Ascorbic acid, Kaempferol and Quercetin are present in Amlaki, and Curcumin and α -tocopherol are obtained from Halud (turmeric). Similarly Ascorbic acid, α -tocopherol, Ursolic acid, Apigenin and Luteolin are present in Tulsi, and Vitamin C, Gallic acid, Catechin and Epicatechin are obtained from Neem.

Ethnic peoples from Purulia district of West Bengal in India use a lot of plants for cancer treatment. A phenolic glucoside, curculigoside from the rhizome of *Curculigo orchioides* has been identified as an anticancer agent.

Table 1: Phytochemicals in different cancers

Phytochemicals	Nutraceuticals in cancers
Some flavonoids	Lung, colon, breast, prostate, stomach, brain, cervical cancer and head, neck squamous carcinoma
Carotenoids e.g. Lycopene and β -carotene	Prostate cancer and lymphoblastoma
Caffeic acid phenethyl ester, an active phenolic component extracted from honey bee propolis,	Skin cancer
Curcumin	Colon carcinoma, leukemia, prostate cancer, melanoma and breast cancer
Allyl sulfur compounds derived from garlic	Non-small cell lung cancer, prostate cancer and breast cancer

Variations in climate, diverse geographical locations and rich ethno-medicinal traditions have made the Darjeeling Himalayas an abode of invaluable repository of traditional medicinal plants. The ethanolic leaf extracts of 30 medicinal plants, obtained in this district were tested for their cytotoxicity against human breast adenocarcinoma cell line (MCF 7), human hepatocarcinoma cell line (HepG₂) and human cervix adenocarcinoma cell line (HeLa). Out of the 30 plant extracts tested, five plants, *Artemisia indica*, *Eupatorium odoratum*, *Eupatorium adenophorum*, *Maesa macrophylla* and *Phlogacanthus thyrsoformis* have shown a > 50% growth inhibition of cancer cell lines at a concentration of 50 μ g/ml. The sensitivity to different extracts varies according to the cell type under investigation. Of these plants, *Maesa macrophylla* exhibits the most potent cytotoxicity against HeLa and MCF7 cell with IC₅₀ values of 9.55 μ g/ml and 16.19 μ g/ml respectively. Phytochemical analysis revealed the presence of coumarins, flavonoids, tannins, saponins, steroids and terpenes.

Figure 1 Pictorial representation of anticancer nutraceuticals used in rural West Bengal

ANTICANCER NUTRACEUTICALS IN RURAL WEST BENGAL

Purulia



Curculigo orchoides Gaertn.
(Hypoxidaceae) kalimusli.

West midnapore



Neem



Amlaki



Ginger, Turmeric



Tulsi



Darjeeling



পাহা ফল

Maesa macrophylla



Withania somnifera

অশ্বগন্ধা



বালা নাম: হেলকা

Enhydra fluctuans

Withania somnifera L. Dunal (Solanaceae), অশ্বগন্ধা, a well-known Ayurvedic medicinal plant, has been traditionally used to cure various ailments for centuries. The numerous therapeutic applications of *W. somnifera* are related to the presence of alkaloids and lactones, which can be found at different levels in plant parts like roots, stems, and leaves and are together responsible for the pharmacological versatility applied to it. A number of withanolides have been obtained and characterized over the past 45 years. The development of metastases during cancer therapy is also an important factor in the survival of treated patients. *W. somnifera* is suggested as an alternative long-term therapy to prevent the spread of cancer cells. In this case, the root extracts were tested against vimentin pro-metastatic protein. Vital phyto constituents of plant *W. somnifera* are withanolides, withaferin and its derivatives e.g. withanoside IV, VI, withanone etc.

Flavonoids obtained from *Enhydra fluctuans* (FEF) হেলকা শাক /Helancha were screened for anticancer activity against Ehrlich's ascites carcinoma (EAC). Extract of *Enhydra*

fluctuans has significant anticancer effects against Ehrlich's ascites carcinoma cells due to the presence of baicalein 7-*O* glucoside and baicalein 7-*O* diglucoside.

Plants have been used from ancient time as a source of medicine. Nowadays herbal plants and ethno medicinal plants have revived in importance in new areas of medicine due to their low costs, ease of accessibility and lesser side effects. These are not only used for primary healthcare but also used in malignant diseases like oral, colon and breast cancer. Recent studies have shown the mechanisms of chemopreventive potential of phytochemicals due to their biological activities of anti-oxidation, induction of apoptosis, anti-inflammation, anti-hormonal effect, immune enhancing effect, arrest on cell cycle and cell differentiation, suppression of proliferation and angiogenesis as well as their capacity to inhibit secondary modification and development of neoplastic cells.

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PRIMITIVISM IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S HEART OF DARKNESS

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G.W.F. Hegel wrote in the essay *The African Character* that the African or the Negro 'exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state.' There is 'nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in their character, i.e. they are inhuman and animalistic.' The black native African has no comprehension of the Higher Being, and so he indulges in a total contempt for humanity. For him tyranny is not wrong, he has to be subjected to brute force and even cannibalism is for him 'customary and proper'.¹

In this context if we look at Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* we realise that it is a novella which projects the African character, especially those living along the Congo as totally primitive and animalistic. For that matter, the River Congo, the Congo Basin and the native Africans are all represented as belonging to the beginning of civilisation. So much derogatory is the projection of Africa, that the renowned Nigerian writer; Chinua Achebe; in his essay *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness* pronounced Conrad as a thoroughgoing racist. Achebe contests Conrad's vision of Africa by saying that Conrad in this book presents 'Africa as a setting and background which completely eliminates the African as human factor'. He says Africa is presented 'as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity'.² Achebe calls this novella 'offensive and deplorable' because it 'parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold and agonies and atrocities in the past' and secondly Achebe challenges the experiences of Conrad when he had sailed down the Congo in 1890. He refuses to accept any traveller's tale simply on the ground that he did not undertake the travel himself.

In this paper, I intend to argue that there are definite portrayals of primitivism in the novella *The Heart of Darkness*, but that apart there is also a portrayal of European primitivism in the sheer greed for power and wealth that the European figure is made to show in the story. *The Heart of Darkness* centres around Marlow, an introspective sailor, and his journey up the Congo River to meet Kurtz, reputed to be an idealistic man of great abilities. Marlow takes a job as a riverboat captain with the Company, a Belgian concern organized to trade in the Congo.

Marlow has a bond with the sea. He is a born explorer. He sets out on his journey on The Nellie, a cruising yawl down the River Thames towards River Congo. As he follows the

sea, he finds death skulking in the air around Thames, with its fog, tempests, diseases, exile and death. Marlow's main objective was to find the quite unknown land of Africa and also meet Kurtz, the European who had been sent to Africa on an imperialistic mission. Thus as Marlow travels down the Thames, Conrad presents one sort of primitive existence of death, disease and hunger. Even the crewmen of Marlow are black Africans who had become black shadows of disease and starvation due to the long journey.

It is these black Africans, the boatmen who under the captainship of Marlow; take us to the interiors of the Congo Basin. As soon as Marlow enters Africa, the description changes rapidly and we are plunged into darkness associated with a total loss of civilisation. First, the cruise is confronted with a shower of arrows that kills one of the boatmen. Then there are images of camping within the long stretches of grass that gives a sign of the nomadic life of the Africans. There is a stray picture of an African kid being beaten. Then comes a horde of "niggers" with black rags wound round their loins, in a file they come; about six black men, chained with iron collar round their neck. They were the 'criminals', their very sight rouses horror; and Marlow calls them 'unhappy savages'.

As Marlow and his crewmen wander deeply into the heart of darkness, searching for the Inner Station of Kurtz, the horrified sedimentation of Marlow's feelings fill the readers too with shock and horror. He says: 'We were wanderers on a pre-historic earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil.' ³ The realization that settles upon Marlow is that on entering the Congo Basin they have entered a lost civilization; a cursed boon of acquisitive British imperialism.

Then follows an account of the "niggers" who suddenly appeared from nowhere as the protectors of Kurtz. They went up in a burst of yells, 'a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage', (p-35). The impression that arises with the readers is that they are meeting an entirely savage race, not even humans, devoid of humanity, animal like in behaviour. The earth felt unearthly, and there was a suspicion that the "niggers" were not human. They continuously howled, leaped and spun and made horrid faces. Moreover they were indescribably ugly.

Down the Congo, there were millions and millions of trees which made the darkness impenetrable. There was no sign of humanity or civilization in the path down the Congo. 'Paths, paths, everywhere; a stamped-in-network of paths spreading over an empty land, through long grass, through burnt grass, through thickets, down and up chilly ravines, up and

down stony hills ablaze with heat; and a solitude, a solitude, nobody, not a hut' (p-20). The only sign of civilisation in the web of darkness was found at a hut they came upon before entering the Inner Station. In this hut, some fifty miles below the Inner Station, they found a book titled "*An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship*" by a man named Tower or Towson, obviously the book was in a desiccated condition. But this gives us an insight into the mind of the reader of the book, Kurtz, and the ideals with which he had come for the civilising mission, (p-37).

In the essay '*Congo under Leopold II 1885-1908*', it has been said 'Today the Congo Free State is notorious not so much for its crushing regime. Along with the turbulent years before and after 1960, the year of independence, and the decade between 1996 and 2006, that period is seen as the bloodiest in the nation's history'. However, before that in the mid-nineteenth century, Europeans were engaged in relatively peaceful trading in Congo Basin, primarily in ivory.⁴ In Roger Casement's *The Congo Report*, given in 1904, it is described how the population of Lower Congo had been gradually reduced by unchecked ravages of diseases and how hospitals were established by the Europeans to treat them for this supposedly incurable disease, which some felt was 'sleeping sickness'.⁵

Finally we meet Kurtz; and it seems to be even more horrific. The portrayal of Kurtz is not just primitive, but savage. When Kurtz, the European had come to Africa, he had lofty ideas in his mind. Now they were all centred upon Ivory. 'Ivory' had become his "Intended", his Station, his career and his ideas. Kurtz was an embodiment of human greed in the name of the Imperialistic Mission. Kurtz had turned himself into a demi-God for the natives. His objective had been to get himself 'adored'. Outside Kurtz's Inner Station were several posts which were mounted with skulls of rebels. Kurtz had made examples of these men to command obeisance. Marlow describes 'there it was, black dried, sunken with closed eyelids – a head that seemed to sleep at the top of the pole'. Instead of civilising the native Africans, Kurtz had internalized their demonism, animalism, and primitivism. He had descended to the level of cannibalism. The description of the death of Kurtz is equally gruesome. Marlow finds Kurtz, crawling on all fours; just before his death. He had even lost the ability to walk, like an animal he had crawled out of his camp in a mad search for ivory. Before his death 'his expression was set with sombre pride, ruthless power, craven terror and intense and hopeless despair'. The words he said just before his death 'The horror, the horror' summarises his situation of greed, tyranny, power and animalism.

Hegel says in *The African Character* that the African race is unaware of any such idea as 'political constitution'. There are no laws to unite the community. Universality does not exist. Nothing but external force can hold together the State. So, a ruler stands at the Head, as

sensuous barbarism can only be restrained by despotic power. Since the subjects are of equally violent temper as their masters, they have to be kept in check. This is what Kurtz had done. Kurtz had adopted the African method of governance; and set himself up as a demi-God to be worshipped as an idol. Thus Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* projects a world of primitivism that does not remain confined to the African native but charts the descent of the European civilising mission too.

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THE SELF & THE OTHER: GENERIC, GENERATIONAL AND SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS OF BLACK MOTHERHOOD IN THE MEMOIRS OF MAYA ANGELOU

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As Angelou had once opined: "Listen carefully to what country people call mother wit. In these homely sayings are couched the collective wisdom of generations." The ties that bind together women of all generations across all cultures and nations are mediated through common experiences of pain and pleasure; hope and despair; rise and fall, all of which surround the idea and concept of Motherhood. As a concept and phenomenon, in transit from the African communities to the African American familial and societal structures of contemporary times, Motherhood has remained as a potent symbol of empowerment among women who resisted the onslaught of male dominance within every sphere of individual and societal existence. Cultural and critical dialectics reveal that considerations of motherhood whether out of choice or under force or threat had remained steadfastly matrilineal. The figure of the Black Mother was subjected to a complex multi-dimensional study, and she came to be accepted as a 'Superhuman' – a figure denied the 'luxuries of failure, nervous breakdowns, leisured existences...." This image was further strengthened by the visual representations of the mother-figure in traditional African documented history and art as is represented in African American literature. Even before the Atlantic Slave trade, the Africans had extensive relations with other parts of the world. Their exodus to the other parts whether voluntary or enforced was one of the constitutive elements of African literary and cultural history. The symbol and concept of the strong black mother, the fender of her family within the community -"The Matriarch'- gradually evolved as a phenomenal idea. It identified the coalescence of the masculine and feminine role-playing traits in the black woman. She fulfilled both roles of the breadwinner and homemaker within her family. The convergence of opposing forces – termed as phallic fecundity can be well related to the figure of the trickster God Esu-Elegbara. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. recounts, Esu of the Yoruba myth is the indigenous black metaphor for who travelled to the New World - The Western Hemisphere, as an integral part of the culture and civilization that was brought forward by the survivors of the dreaded Middle Passage. As an emblem of unity of opposed forces, Esu embodied the contrary qualities of disruption and reconciliation, betrayal and loyalty, closure and disclosure, encasement and rapture. Each set of binaries define the evolution of the African woman and her journey from enslavement to emancipation.

Subjected to the most extreme conditions of survival, these women were not just child-bearers but also nurturers who ensured and stabilized the continuity of life. The prevalence of the gynocentric system across generations can be studied as a necessary method of self-preservation.

As an integral part of cultural and identity studies, literary criticism on race and ethnicity demarcate a methodological shift from a general to a generational perspective. African American studies categorically returned to the history of slavery and the ensuing cultural challenges following emancipation and the immensely creative output that flowed from the Harlem Renaissance at the start of the twentieth century, to preconceived notions of race and resistance to the dominant white culture. Amidst these literary forays into the domain of race and identity, the involvement of gender also becomes crucially important, the primary agenda being to break free from the Eurocentric mind-set and tradition.

The body of the Black woman came to be studied as a focal point of strength, embodying the aggression of her race. The pride and prominence enjoyed by the mother within the inner fold of her family and the greater fold of her community is replicated through literature, art and a plethora of creative output in the African American literary scenario. The image of the Black mother working in the ante-bellum south, her breasts full of milk, nursing her child over her shoulder, exhibits a picture of resolute strength. The transition from breeders, mammies and matriarchs to the contemporary proactive mother involved centuries of resistance to the andro-centric system. For the Black woman subjected to the dual bind, it was a curious position indeed, which made them equal in gender but divided in race and class from their white counterparts.

With regard to motherhood, several ideologies like Blood Motherhood, Other Motherhood and Single Motherhood have been the locus of critical studies. As a versatile author of contemporary African American literary interface, Maya Angelou communicates the idea of Resistance through her prolific writings on the women's cause. Angelou's autobiographical narratives showcase the problems of motherhood as a signifier for Black Womanhood. Her memoirs prioritize the diverse roles of a mother and how the very concept of Motherhood stands problematized as the woman and the mother comes vis-à-vis one another.

An acclaimed poet, story teller, activist and autobiographer, Maya Angelou was born Marguerite Johnson in St. Louis, Missouri. A prolific writer, editor, essayist, playwright and poet, over the decades, she remains as a cult figure of African American literary studies of contemporary times. Her name Maya connects her to the magical power by which the Universe becomes manifest. It is the illusion or appearance of the phenomenal world. In Latin the name

means ‘great’ or ‘larger’. Maya also means ‘origin’ and ‘popularity’ and is also a variation of the English name ‘May’. In all its import the name Maya does refer to the illusion of magic that is created endlessly through the canonical writings of Maya Angelou. Through a series of autobiographical writings, she is able to transform an individual experience of pain to a universal realization and expression of the same. The first of her memoirs, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* showcases the early years of her life in Long Beach and Stamps in Arkansas, with her brother and paternal grandmother. In the course of the narration, Angelou quite subtly introduces the functional image and role of ‘other mothers’ within an African American family structure. As per this concept prevalent in African American community, ‘other mothers’ stand distinguished from blood or biological mothers but share mothering responsibilities with them. This hints at the gynocentric culture in practice within such familial set-ups, which help to maintain the centrality of women within the domestic space. Theorist, Patricia Hill Collins argues – “Organised, resilient, women-centred networks of blood mothers and other mothers are key in understanding this centrality. Grandmothers, sisters, aunts or cousins act as other mothers by taking on child-care responsibilities for one mother’s children.”

In this respect, Collins refers to scholar Andrea Hunter’s research on Black grandmothers stating how Black parents rely on grandmothers for parenting support.

Angelou’s autobiographical account, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* begins with the acknowledgement of her grandmother’s immeasurable contributions in bringing up her brother and her from when she was barely three years old. Grandmother Annie Henderson’s influence therefore remained primary for Angelou and her brother Bailey in their formative years in Stamps. As the ‘other mother’ in her life, she was the only mother Angelou knew and loved. Ironically her own mother was not only remote from her growing consciousness, but also was the means of the sexual devastation she underwent when she was barely eight. The trauma of sexual violation that she experienced from a quarter where she should have received utmost protection, benumbs her into years of silence. The incident had such a debilitating effect upon her psyche that she returned to Stamps, to the grandmother, her ‘Mamma’, her haven of comfort, numb and mute with pain. For the next five years, Angelou suffered in silence, till she was brought back to mainstream life by the patient and incessant efforts of her grandmother and her friend Mrs. Bertha Flowers. In this first volume of her memoirs Angelou records an explicit account of the first sixteen years of her life, when, after her recovery, she found a meaning in life through her growing interest in literature and fine arts.

The agony of separation from her mother is quite explicit through the lines, “... I couldn’t believe that our mother would laugh and eat oranges in the sunshine without her children.” And at Christmas upon receiving gifts from her parents she recounts – “I sat down

and cried and I looked up and Bailey was coming from the outhouse, wiping his eyes. He had been crying too... the gifts opened the door to questions that neither of us wanted to ask – ‘Why did they send us away? And what did we do wrong? So wrong? Why, at three and four, did we have tags put on our arms to be sent by train alone from Long Beach, California to Stamps, Arkansas..?’ ”

Then again, stupefied by the aura her mother exuded, she concludes – “She was too beautiful to have children. I have never seen a woman as pretty as she who was called ‘Mother’.”

Since autobiography conventionally is a genre which is the medium for self-revelation, Angelou remains absorbed in personal, familial relationships with those who mattered most to her. The metaphoric comparison she makes between her ‘Momma’ and her mother is interesting. While her mother’s presence had always been like a shimmering shadow, casting a strange aura about her, an elusive reality, her Momma had been her real mother, nurturing and tending to her growing self.

Caught up in a whirlpool of academic and cultural activities, Maya begins to enjoy the first flush of youth, and becomes a mother at sixteen. It is her son and he parenting of him, in other words her experiences of mother hood which forms the central focus of her account in the subsequent volumes of her autobiographical narratives. The narrative moves forward with Angelou stepping into motherhood with great anxiety and trepidation. She records this transition in the next volume titled, *Gather Together in My Name*, she writes: “I was seventeen, very old, embarrassingly young, with a son of two months....” With an extreme sense of righteousness which she terms as ‘textured guilt’, Angelou offers a rationale as to why she could not leave her son in the care of her mother while going out for work. Her reasoning is infused with a deep sense of integrity to her notion of motherhood. She writes – “I considered that although I was mother’s child, she had left me with others until I was thirteen and why should she feel more responsibility for my child than she had felt for her own. Those were the pieces that made up the spin of my refusal, but the core was more painful, more solid, truer.”

From the start of this volume, Angelou problematizes the position of a single, working mother in the Black community. Feminist theorist Bell Hooks examines the concept of single motherhood and writes in *Rock My Soul* “... it has been wrongly assumed that single Black mothers repudiate patriarchal values.” However, Angelou tackles her single motherhood by flouting every conventional norm. Her grit and determination is explicit through her words: “I would quit the house, take a job and show the whole world... that I was equal to my pride and greater than my pretensions.”

The fact that she was a mother, and that was reason enough for her to live, operates as a bulwark, supporting her fragile self all through the maze of her life. Her motherhood teaches her to react, resist and reinvent herself in the face of all adversities and she emerges brimming with self-confidence and control on the verge of the third volume of her memoir, *Singin' and Swingin' and Getting' Merry like Christmas*. This volume opens with her preoccupation with music to ease away the pain of emptiness deep within her. Her emotional dependence upon her child is best expressed in the lines – “I picked up my son from the babysitter’s every evening. He was five years old and so beautiful his smile could break the back of a brute.”

As a daughter, Maya’s equation with her mother takes a fresh dimension in this volume. However, she did not want her son Guy to go through the childhood she had experienced herself. This anxiety helps Angelou move towards the consummation of herself as a mother.

The fourth volume of her autobiography, *The Heart of a Woman*, explores her journey towards this consummation. The more she moves towards self-reliance, the more progressive is her inward movement towards the core, the sense of her being a woman, her motherhood. The fourth volume is entirely devoted to Guy’s years of growing up. Their relationship goes through several complex sequences. Critic Mary Jane Lupton finds that in this volume, “Angelou has accumulated a multi-layered memory that affects not only what she remembers but what readers who have followed her previous books remember. As a serial autobiographer, she must continuously look backward unveiling the various layers hidden in earlier volumes, remembering what she has already written without being repetitious.” Lupton further records that autobiographer Lillian Hellman named this process “pentimento”, a term used in painting to indicate the reappearance of a design that has been covered over by layers of paint.”

There are several instances in this narrative which highlights this “layered point of view” technique adopted by Angelou. There are familiar echoes from the past in her defiant motherhood and mothering of her son. These echoes are the layers which help to connect each segment of her life together. In those traumatic times of bringing up her son single-handedly, of refusing to hold him guilty for misconduct in school till she heard him out, the rush of emotions that surge within her are put together in the lines: “How could the two women understand the black mother who had nothing to give her son except a contrived arrogance?... If he was headstrong, I had made him so....” This fourth segment of her memoirs is interspersed with her addressing the complications which problematize Black motherhood. She records:

“The Black mother perceives destruction at every door, ruination at each window, and even she herself is not beyond her own suspicion.”

The most potent deviation we come across in this volume is Angelou’s self-conflict with her motherhood. It charts her progress from a guilt-ridden mother to an assertive, intrepid individual who “affirms the achievement of a personal and public maturity.”

Despite her induction into the professional and personal spheres of hedonistic experiences, Angelou staunchly honoured the trust that Guy had in their mutual relationship. Their mother/son relationship was fraught with a greater friction and perplexity than is normally expected; heightened especially in the emotionally charged episode in which Maya tells her son about her decision of marriage. As she throws herself into the vortex of black activism in the next phase of her life, she lives to the full potential and stature of individual existence as a Black woman. Also as a daughter to her mother, she graciously acknowledges the role of the older woman in shaping her response to life. Angelou writes, “My mother raised me, then freed me.” This idea of emancipation as a release into her womanhood and full potential of motherhood is brilliantly recorded in this volume.

In the fifth volume of her autobiography, *All God’s Children Need Travelling Shoes*, Angelou explores the connection between her African and African American identities. Along with it she continues to delve into the essence of her motherhood through her innate bonding with her son. The extreme emotional connect she shared with her son is recounted in the words: “... save for one year when I was touring, we had been each other’s home and centre for seventeen years. He could die if he wanted to and go off to wherever dead folks go, but I, would be left without a home.” Gradually she grows aware that she would have to accept Guy’s choices, the decisions he would take as an adult. As Lupton defines, the mother/son equation goes through a series of active/counter-active rhythms. With a series of binaries, Angelou shows how imperative it becomes for the mother to extricate herself from her erstwhile absolute involvement with her son. The emotional complicacy between mother and son has been brilliantly depicted in episodes where Maya confronts her son realizing full well that he had moved far beyond the fear of her disapproval. When he seeks desperately his own independent space, Maya falters and thinks – “How could his life be separate from my life? I have been a mother of a child so long I had no preparation for life on any other level.... I looked up at the young golden brown giant towering above my head.... His existence had defined my own....”

The concept of motherhood remains her most consistent theme in tandem with her search for African identity. Racial and gender concerns pertaining to these themes find

considerable space in her memoirs. As Maya and Guy draw apart, each creating a space of their own, the moment comes for Maya to bid both Africa and her son farewell. She records: “a sadness descended on me, simultaneously sombre and wonderful. I had not consciously come to Ghana to find the roots of my beginning, but I had continually and accidentally tripped over them or fallen over them in my everyday life. With each step she took away, she knew she was leaving a part of herself in Guy, in Africa.

Hence the issue of motherhood becomes integrally linked to the core of one’s own culture and identity. It is an intrinsic reflection of selfhood, assertion of one’s own identity within the larger map of human existence. There is an infinite sense of contentment with which she pens the last three volumes of her memoirs.

In *A Song Flung Upto Heaven*, her account opens with a celebration of selfhood which embraces considerations of race and gender quite candidly as she promotes her African identity in America. However the question of guilt as an inevitable part of parenting looms large when Guy is hospitalized after her accident. Angelou writes, “Suddenly I felt guilty.... When something goes wrong with offspring inevitably the parent feels guilty. As if some stone that needed turning had been left unturned. In the case of a physical handicap, the mother feels that when her body was building the infant, it shirked its responsibility somewhere. I stood looking at my son, wondering where I had failed.” The account moves ahead with a flourish till she abruptly faces the reality that her son was capable of taking his own decisions and was no longer the child she had carried on her hip all over the world. The memoir closes with a potent reference to the first volume, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, which she relates to a childhood poem which said – “however low you perceive me now, I am headed for higher ground.” Considering the account with her characteristic dry humour, Angelou moves to pen the next volume of her life-story – *Mom & Me & Mom*. Study of this volume ought to begin with the dedication Angelou makes to her own mother. She writes – “I give particular thanks to Vivian Baxter, who generously taught me how to be a mother, allowing me to dedicate this book to one of the most courageous and generous men I know, my son, Guy Bailly Johnson.” This tribute that she pays to her mother is time and again reiterated in this account. The potion she recommends is love. She writes – “Love heals, Heals and liberates. I use the word love, not meaning sentimentality, but a condition so strong that it maybe that which holds the stars in their heavenly positions and that which causes the blood to flow orderly in our veins.” The memoir begins with an account of her mother and is largely a tribute to her womanhood. It’s interesting to note that in this last volume of her memoir, she is once again narrating from the perspective of a daughter, as she had in the first volume. The back story resumes once again with Maya going far back in time to re-capture her equation with her mother. This volume reads like that missing piece of a puzzle that Angelou finds later. It records incidents and experiences of her relation with her own mother and how she discovers her true self through the strong and determined presence of her mother in her life past adolescence. About the

connect she shared with Vivian, she writes – “My mother said her friends told her that I had once been seen jumping on the street with my son and playing as if I were a child. She said, ‘No she was not playing. She was just being a good mother’.” Later in the narrative she puts together her blessings, which creates a deep sense of contentment within her and from that welled up the spirit to continue to be, Angelou recalls, “... whether my days are stormy or sunny and if my nights are glorious or lonely, I maintain an attitude of gratitude.... I remember there is always tomorrow. Today I am blessed.” Towards the close, she writes – “My mother’s gifts of courage to me were both large and small. The latter are woven so subtly into the fabric of my psyche that I can hardly distinguish where she stops and I begin.” Indeed it is their experience of motherhood that binds them together as one common entity, liberated and free.

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THE HISTORY OF THE PILL

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Steroids are found in all the corners of the living world, from plants and fungi to human beings. Within our bodies, steroids serve a host of vital functions, with some acting as hormones. They are produced by a specific cell or tissue, and cause a physiological change, or initiate a new activity, within a cell or tissue, located elsewhere within the organism. Following their discovery and characterization during the 1930s, the steroids hormones provided an opportunity for the development of medicines that can modulate the chemistry of the body.

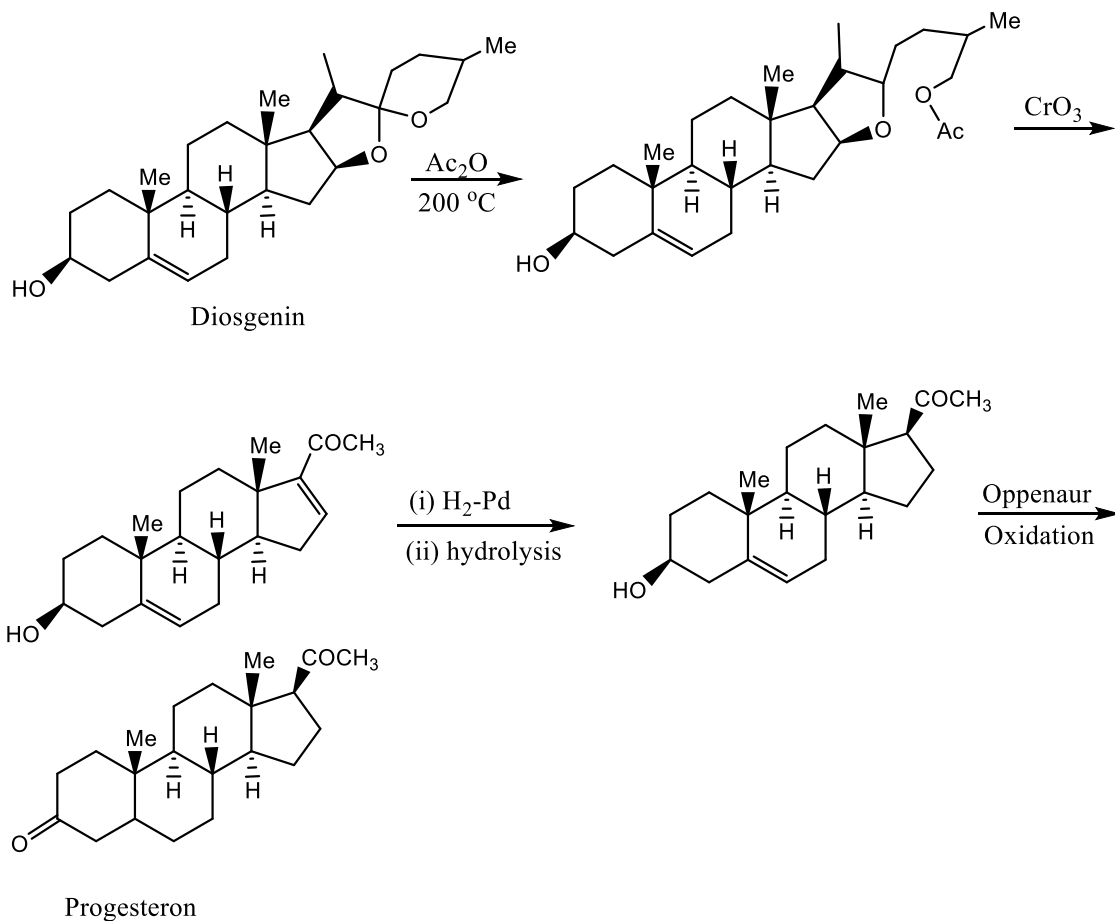
The veteran birth control campaigner Margaret Sanger, who had trained as a nurse in New York, was introduced to Gregory Pincus at a dinner party. Pincus was a physiologist who was working on the fertilization of rabbits. Sanger described to him her lifelong dream of a “magic pill” which would prevent unwanted pregnancies and give the poor working-class women some relief. Pincus told her of recent investigations into fertility that had suggested the use of steroid hormones may result in just such a treatment. Sanger decided there and then to fund Pincus, through the auspices of her charitable foundation, to build on the work already done in this area.

In the 1930s and 1940s, scientist had established that a woman cannot become pregnant for a second time during a pregnancy because her ovaries secrete estrogen and progesterone. The estrogen acts on the pituitary gland so that it withholds the hormones necessary to promote ovulation, and the progesterone reinforces this message by suppressing the production of leutenizing hormone.

It was clear from these findings that manipulation of steroids might allow artificial control of a woman’s fertility. A German pharmaceutical company showed early interest in commercial applications of this emerging science, isolated 20 mg of natural progesterone from 625 kg of ovaries. Then progesterone sold for around \$80 per gram, which was economically unfeasible.

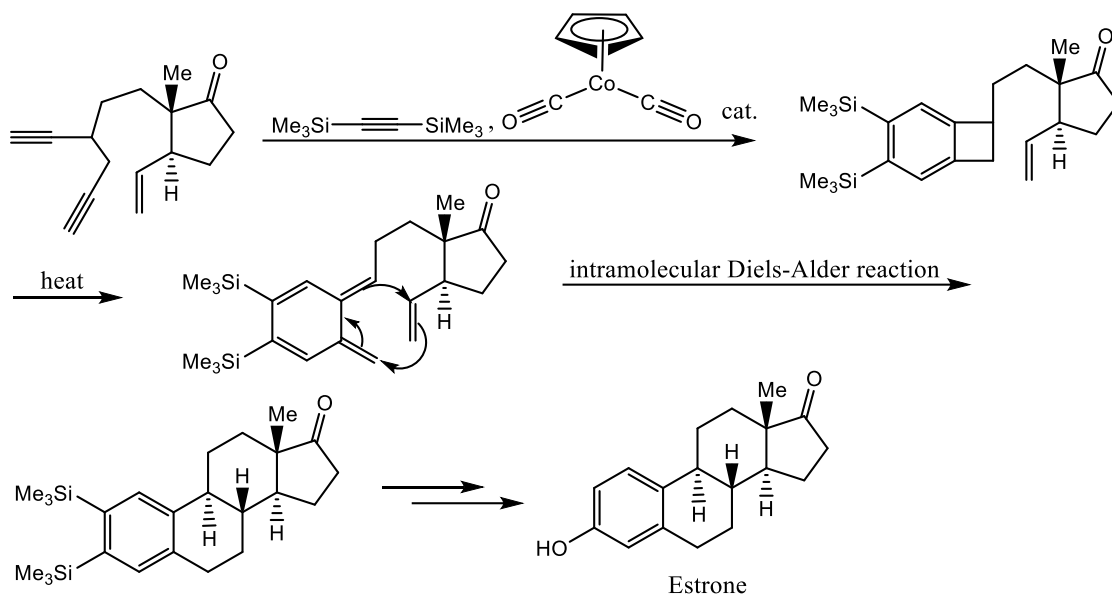
In 1941, chemist Russel E. Marker devised a solution to this urgent supply problem. He found a way to synthesize progesterone from a substance called diosgenin, which could be extracted from a plant. His persistent investigations also led to the discovery of a new and more plentiful source of diosgenin, the Mexican yam.

The Marker partial synthesis of progesterone from diosgenin



Estrone is the first known member of the sex hormones which controls the uterine cycle. Butenandt and Doisy independently isolated the active substance estrone from the urine of pregnant women in 1929. K. Peterson C. Volhardt synthesized estrone in 1977, in which an imaginative cobalt-catalyzed strategy was enlisted to obtain this highly prized natural substance.

Vollhardt's cobalt-catalyzed total synthesis of estrone



Conclusion

The study of these compounds has continued from both a chemical and biological perspective, leading to new medicines and the development of elegant chemical synthetic strategies and tactics. Today there are a large number of steroid-based drugs on the market with uses ranging from birth control to management of conditions such as asthma and skin disorders.

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INFLUENZA: FROM DISEASE TO VACCINE

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Overview of Influenza

Influenza is a highly contagious viral disease of the respiratory tract affecting the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. People affected with influenza virus can spread it to a healthy person even before they know that they are sick. This further person infected with influenza virus can have sudden fever, running nose, cough headache and sore throat. The general incubation period of influenza is 1 to 3 days. Most people recover from influenza on their own; however influenza can develop complications which can turn fatal. The vulnerable population includes young children below 5 years of age, especially those under 12 months. Adults above 65 years, residents of hospitals and other long-term health care facilities, pregnant women and women till two weeks postpartum, immune-compromised individuals, those with chronic illnesses like hypoglycaemia, heart ailments, kidney disease, liver problems and lungs diseases are also vulnerable. Influenza also becomes life threatening in obese individuals with a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or higher.

The virus

Influenza viruses belong to the members of the Orthomyxoviridae family and contain segmented negative-sense single-stranded RNA genomes. There are 3 major groups of influenza viruses viz. type A, B and C, which are differentiated based on the viral nucleoprotein and the matrix protein. Every year type A and B cause epidemics with almost 5 million infections and half a million deaths around the world [1]. Influenza A viruses having zoonotic origin sometimes result in pandemics and four such pandemics have been recorded in the past 100 years [2].

The virus genome of influenza A and B comprises of 8 gene segments. Influenza A viruses are subdivided into 16 hemagglutinin (HA) and 9 neuraminidase (NA) subtypes according to the antigenic properties of the surface glycoproteins. Only a single subset of these causes human influenza disease, although all have been isolated from their natural hosts - waterfowl and shorebirds [3]. Two additional subtypes of the genome viz. HA and NA have been recently sequenced from bats [4, 5]. Additionally two subtypes of influenza A (H1N1 and H3N2) and two antigenically dissimilar lineages of influenza B viruses are also found in humans [6].

The vaccine

The best bet for mankind against influenza is a vaccine (WHO, 2014). Vaccination has the potential to reduce the illness and severity of the affected individual. It has come as a boon for millions who are susceptible to virus exposure and develop complications, especially children and elderly. There are three classes of vaccines which are licensed for commercial use. They include inactivated, live attenuated and recombinant HA vaccines [6]. All three vaccine types are multivalent, having components of influenza A and B viruses.

The inactivated influenza vaccine (IIV) is a subunit or split virion vaccine. It contains 15 µg of purified HA protein and is administered through the intramuscular route. The IIV's can be administered intradermally at a dose of 9 µg of purified HA protein [6]. IIVs are administered at a higher dose of 60 µg of HA to protect the elderly population of 65 years and above to provide acceptable immunogenicity against influenza. The trivalent inactivated vaccine (TIV) comprises of the H1N1 and H3N2 subtypes of influenza A virus and the predicted dominant lineage of influenza B subtype. The quadrivalent influenza vaccine (QIV) has lineages from influenza B and from influenza A, the H1N1 and H3N2 subtypes.

The second type of influenza vaccine is the live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV). The LAIVs contain similar influenza strains which are present in QIV but is intranasally administered as spray. The LAIV comprises of live viruses having temperature sensitivity and attenuating mutations [7]. Because of these mutations, the vaccine virus cannot replicate at the higher temperature of the lower respiratory tract. However, it can replicate at the cooler temperature in the nasal cavity. The advantages of LAIV are the production of serum IgG and mucosal IgA, and T cell responses [7]. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, USA recommends LAIV over IIV for children between the ages two and eight years [6].

The third type of influenza vaccine FluBlok, is a recombinant HA vaccine with HA proteins that are expressed in insect cells using baculovirus vectors. FluBlok is currently used in individuals who are allergic to eggs. Due to the shorter time frame for manufacturing FluBlok can be supplied rapidly during any pandemic.

Importance of annual vaccination

The reduction of vaccine induced antibodies and the antigenic drift of influenza viruses overtime calls for annual vaccination against the respiratory tract virus. Various approaches are currently being undertaken by scientific communities to augment the duration of protection of influenza vaccines to prevent annual revaccination. Major initiatives are the use of computationally designed HA sequence, induction of antibodies specific to a conserved HA

sequence, using conserved influenza proteins which target T cell responses and adjuvant addition.

Conclusions and Forthcoming Prospects

The efficiency of TIV and LAIV is around 60% in healthy adults and 83% in children, as observed in the meta-analyses [8, 9]. However, in a mismatch between the vaccine strain and circulating epidemic strain, or during an emergence of a new pandemic virus strain, the existing vaccines fail to provide optimal immunogenicity. The existing IIV do not elicit robust immunity in the elderly while LAIV is only applicable for people up to the age of 49 years, thereby excluding the most vulnerable section of the population [6]. Influenza vaccines must provide protection to individuals from all age groups, especially in young children and the elderly. Hence the scientists and vaccine manufacturers face the uphill task of developing a new vaccine which can provide protection against the wide variety of influenza sub strains and across all age groups. In addition, the need to do away with egg-based manufacturing provides additional hurdle. Thus, the modern approach towards influenza vaccine development involves a universal vaccine protecting against all sub-strains, across all age groups, ease of delivery and doing away with annual revaccination. Numerous promising methodologies are under progress to address these issues and to obtain a universal influenza vaccine that would cater to the need of all. Having said that, there is still the need to adhere to the annual influenza vaccination programme in order to attain adequate immunogenicity in order to stave off the dreaded disease.

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#MeToo AND TESTIMONIO: CONSIDERING THE AFTERLIVES OF INDIA'S #MeToo NARRATIVES

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On a quiet day at the court of Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Samar Vishal, journalist Priya Ramani took to the stands to say,

A predator is more powerful than his prey. I used the word 'predator' to emphasise and highlight the difference in age, influence and power between Mr Akbar and myself. I was a young journalist, he was a famous Editor, 20 years older than me who called me to his bedroom in a hotel for a job interview. This is not what I expected. I thought the interview would be in the coffee shop or in the lobby. But I was 23. I didn't have the confidence to say 'no, I'll wait for you in the lobby.' (FP Staff, Web)

It was September, 2019. There was perfunctory media coverage of her testimony; but none of the media frenzy or the social media outrage that followed her initial disclosure in 2018, that her 2017 article in *Vogue* magazine titled *To the Harvey Weinsteins of the World*, was indeed about the-then Union Minister Mr. MJ Akbar. Despite the splash that Akbar's defamation suit against her later that year had caused, there was little interest in the follow up - in the lonely battle that Ramani continues to wage as she fights the defamation suit slapped against her by Akbar's battery of lawyers. Earlier in 2019, in the month of January, the actor Alok Nath - accused of rape by Vinta Nanda - received anticipatory bail at a Mumbai sessions court, wherein the judge saw it fit to comment that the complainant "did not lodge the report immediately after the alleged incident for her own benefit", and that, furthermore, "[the] possibility cannot be ruled out that the applicant [Alok Nath] has been falsely accused in the crime." (Vidya, Web) In the final months of 2019, the comedian Utsav Chakraborty - accused of sexual harassment by multiple women - sought to clear his name by posting the names of three hitherto anonymous women and screenshots of his Whatsapp/Twitter conversations with them, arguing that their #MeToo narratives from a year ago were riddled with inconsistencies. The screenshots generated considerable conversation on social media, with the prominent right-wing website opIndia among others jumping into Chakraborty's defence, even as others pointed out the inconsistency of Chakraborty's claims. (Sirur, Web).

These are but three #MeToo narratives to have emerged out of the #MeToo wave in 2018, wherein women in the media and the Mumbai-based film/television industries in particular spoke up against multiple prominent names in their respective industries. In this paper, I shall limit myself to these three for the simple reason of scope, as well as the continuing developments in these narratives that have seen the accused challenge said narratives and, on more occasion than one, receive considerable public support in the form of backlash against #MeToo. As the dust settles and the media glare turns elsewhere, what does one make of the afterlives of the #MeToo testimonies? What does one make of the lonely journeys towards justice, often leading up to dusty roads or ending nowhere, even as those named in the #MeToo testimonies return to public life?

The word '*testimonio*', drawn from the scholarship of Chicana scholars, has been a cornerstone in critical race theory over the years. It is

...[a] type of writing entails a first person oral or written account, drawing on experiential, self-conscious, narrative practice to articulate an urgent voicing of something to which one bears witness. Presented at times as memoirs, oral histories, qualitative vignettes, prose, song lyrics, or spoken word, the *testimonio* has the unique characteristic of being a political and conscientized reflection that is often spoken. To be sure, the *testimonio* does not remain in its oral state; but rather, it is often taken (as in interviewed, recorded, and transcribed) or written from the outset perhaps in diaries, letters, or journals. What is certain is that *testimonio* is not meant to be hidden, made intimate, nor kept secret. The objective of the *testimonio* is to bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or an urgent call for action. (Reyes and Rodriguez, 525)

Not only does the *testimonio* seek to affirm and empower, but it also “allows the narrator to show an experience that is not only liberating in the process of telling but also political in its production of awareness to listeners and readers alike.” (Reyes and Rodriguez, 525) The *testimonio* demands a set of active or participatory readers/audience. Memory plays an important part in the *testimonio*,

Some scholars argue that memory may recast the experiences in less than absolute truth. The very nature of human survival enables human beings to recast their memory to accentuate their experiences as merciful vignettes allowing them redemption. Engaging in testimonial acts both empowers and destroys. For the speaker or narrator, the very act of telling is a double-edged sword. (Reyes and Rodriguez, 527)

In the Indian context, scholars such as MSS Pandian and Sharmila Rege have argued that Dalit life narratives must be deemed *testimonios*, “in which the individual life seeks affirmation in the collective mode.” (Rege, 14)

That the #MeToo narratives have changed, at least to some extent, the way we talk and think about sexual harassment and sexual violence in India is a statement that requires little explanation. This paper seeks to consider how the medium interacts with the disruptive nature of the #MeToo narrative, published on social media platforms and web-based news portals. It seeks to consider the potential of #MeToo narratives as *testimonio*, and to what extent it makes possible broader solidarity and justice for survivors of sexual harassment and violence in India.

Priya Ramani was only the first of the female journalists to have made an allegation against the former Union Minister/journalist - MJ Akbar. Ramani’s tweet on Oct 8, 2018 - from her now-deleted twitter account - alleged inappropriate conduct on the part of Akbar, “I began this piece with my MJ Akbar story. Never named him because he didn’t “do” anything. Lots of women have worse stories about this predator - maybe they’ll share. #ultihttps://t.co/5jVU5WHHo7.” (Johari, Web) True to the character limits set by Twitter, the Ramani #MeToo allegation is succinct, three sentences long, albeit linking back to another longer piece that she had written earlier for reference. The sheer *disruptive* nature of the tweet might be gauged by the fact that it set off a tsunami of further allegations against Akbar (at one count, the allegations were up to 11).

The producer/director Vinta Nanda’s #MeToo narrative, posted on the same day, was a long Facebook post - which, on the date of writing this paper had 11,000 reactions, 3700 comments, and 4100 shares, as per Facebook’s metrics. Unlike Twitter, Facebook’s character limits are much larger - 63,206 characters - allowing for much lengthier narratives. Nanda’s narrative, therefore, is far more graphic, alleging rape; it is also structured, with a beginning, middle, and an end; with considerable context, and a stirring ending that exhorts other women to speak,

I have waited for this moment to come for 19 years.

I shout out to each one of you who have suffered at the hands of predators to come out and say it aloud.

Don’t hold yourselves back.

This is a moment for change so your silence will only hold barriers to its evolution.

Speak out. (Nanda, Web)

Nanda's #MeToo narrative is a clarion call to victims of sexual violence, an attempt to break the culture of shame and silence that exists around sexual harassment and violence in India. Nanda is careful to mention the significance of support networks, including that of her late friend, the actress Nutan, for survivors of assault. It is as though the narrative is not merely an attempt to name her abuser, but to reaffirm her kinship with women who have known sexual violence in one form or the other.

Stand-up comedian Mahima Kukreja's #MeToo allegations against Utsav Chakraborty had appeared four days earlier, also on Twitter, accusing him of having sent unsolicited lewd photographs; "... was creepy, then cried saying I'll ruin his career if I tell others. I told two of the most influential men in comedy in India. Nothing happened. Let me tell you what else he has done with others." Kukreja went to post a series of tweets in what is called a Twitter thread, sharing screenshots of conversations with other unnamed women who accused Chakraborty of inappropriate conduct. (India Today Web Desk, Web) Kukreja's tweets, like Ramani's, now stand deleted, even though records of them remain online. What is of note in Kukreja's #MeToo narrative is the attempt, yet again, to bring together the narratives of multiple women in a claim to justice: "I want everyone to know" (India Today Web Desk, Web) she stated in her first tweet, since her attempts to discuss the matter with Chakraborty's then-associates, the comedy group All India Bakchod, did not lead up to any conclusion. It is, then, a *failed* attempt at seeking justice that prompts Kukreja's statement, again through the disruptive medium of Twitter and the hashtag #MeToo.

The common trend of all three narratives: an attempt to break through the culture of silence and shame; a sense of injustice; an attempt to forge broader solidarity, among women in particular, and among victims of sexual violence and harassment of all genders. The *testimonio*, as I stated earlier, is "not meant to be hidden, made intimate, nor kept secret. The objective of the *testimonio* is to bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or an urgent call for action." (Reyes and Rodriguez 525) The three narratives we have examined so far, operate with the aforementioned impulse of the *testimonio*, bringing to light that which was secret, making an urgent call for action. As Reyes and Rodriguez (528) have pointed out,

Once introduced to testimonios, both the narrator and the listener experience cathartic epiphanies that open their eyes to the power of individual accounts that ensure that social and political events become part of the greater human consciousness. Although a *testimonio* is technically an account made by one person, it represents the voice of many whose lives have been affected by particular social events, such as totalitarian governments, war violence, displacement, or

other types of broad social affronts on humanity. Testimonios often serve as awakenings for tellers and readers alike.

Marissa K. Wood (Web), in their analysis of linguistic usage in the #MeToo hashtag following the #MeToo wave in the US in 2017, pointed to the ‘performative’ qualities of the same. Wood identified a broad set of trends in these tweets, and grouped them in clusters: that of tweets seeking solidarity; tweets marking narration and sharing of stories; tweets with assertions; tweets with meta-activism; tweets that object to the use of the hashtag. The three #MeToo narratives I have discussed above share the ‘performative’ qualities of the larger #MeToo hashtag; as *testimonio*, they collectively mark a call for action that is meant to be an “awakening for tellers and readers alike” (Reyes and Rodriguez, 525), prompting further participation. That this call for action of the #MeToo narratives as *testimonio* was not merely a matter of academic discussion or debate is made visible by a Google trends map of the hashtag #MeToo in India; on a piece on QZ on October 16, roughly two weeks into the #MeToo wave, Aria Thaker wrote, “... India currently shines far brighter than any other country or region on Me Too Rising. Surprisingly, the ‘top searching’ cities and towns are tiny by Indian standards. For instance, early in the morning on Oct. 16, they are Goa’s Chicalim, Maharashtra’s Bhusawal, Punjab’s Zirakpur, and Chattisgarh’s Bhanwreli and Rajnandgaon.” (Thaker, Web)

The sheer force of the #MeToo narratives could not have been made possible in the absence of the social media hashtag. Indeed, one might argue that the *testimonio* character of the Indian #MeToo narrative is constituted, among other elements, by the medium itself - present day social media, with its fast-moving hashtags that become news.

There are, however, major limitations to the cathartic, galvanizing force of the narratives from India’s #MeToo wave as *testimonio*. As has been pointed out by multiple commentators - Asha Kowtal (2019), Jyotsna Siddharth (2019), Mimi Mondal (2018), Christina Thomas Dhanraj (2018), Divya Kandukuri (FP Staff, 2018) - the #MeToo narratives that have emerged in 2018 contain almost no voices of Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi (DBA) women, despite the long history of sexual violence against DBA women, perpetrated as caste violence. The history of this violence ranges from Bhanwari Devi, whose rapists have not been punished, to that of Phoolan Devi. As I pointed out in the very beginning of this paper, the *testimonio* is a form that has been traditionally employed by Dalit writers in particular to address the historical injustices meted out against the so-called lower castes of India; in 2017, a Dalit law student called Raya Sarkar compiled a ‘list’ of academics that kicked off something akin to #MeToo in Indian academia, and garnered a heated debate on ‘due process’ among feminists on social media platforms. The #MeToo narratives of 2018, after all, highlighted the absence of a functional system of justice, and attempted to rally women together demanding justice. There

were heart-warming instances of women standing by each other, supporting each other, and listening to one another. Dalit feminists, therefore, have rightly asked why this sense of solidarity and sisterhood is lacking when DBA women are victims of sexual violence or harassment, often in the hands of Savarnamen.

The hashtag-driven #MeToo movement in India followed a global trend, but in the process, it failed to centre the people most vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment in India. Under the circumstances, therefore, it would not be incorrect to state that the force of #MeToo narratives coming out of India as *testimonio* could only be a truncated force, wherein the call to support 'women' does not consciously acknowledge the struggles of *all* women, despite the universal claims of the same. Under these existing contradictions, the possibility of broader solidarity among all those who identify as women against sexual violence, will require the adoption of far more imaginative and inclusive strategies of resistance.

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MUMBAI: RURAL-URBAN LINKAGES OF A GLOBAL CITY

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Migration from one area to another in search of improved livelihood is a key feature of human history. People migrate to certain areas to access the emerging opportunities, as migration has become a universal phenomenon in modern times. India is undergoing complete alteration in demographic patterns as streams of people migrate to regions which offer better opportunities than their homes. Most of the movement is from rural areas to the urban, with mega cities tempting people with the assurance of better lives. Hence, the increasing concentration of population in cities has been the striking feature of India's urbanization from the last century. A large proportion is concentrated in six developed states, namely Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Punjab, West Bengal and of course Maharashtra, which accounts for about half of the country's urban population.

Since colonial times, Mumbai has remained an important economic and commercial centre of India and has attracted labour migrants from all over the country. As the financial capital and the most globally connected city of India, Mumbai presents a landscape in which better paid employment in the textile manufacturing sector has been replaced by the service sector economy.

Despite the closure of the textiles and other manufacturing industries, 'Galas' have continued to remain an important point of entry for the present generation of rural-labour migrants. Migrant labour can be found in many spheres, especially textiles, construction, stone-quarries, mines, brick-kilns, diamond cutting, leather accessories, food-processing, domestic work, security services, hotels, roadside restaurants, tea-shops among other things.

Rural distress is fuelling migration on a large scale no doubt, but we also have to keep in mind the gender question, which continues to remain a neglected area. The neglect of gender dimension, particularly the patterns of female labour migration has resulted in the 'invisibilisation of gender'.

This point is illustrated well in Vikram Chandra's novel *Love and Longing in Bombay* (2010). In the short story entitled 'Shakti', the protagonist Ganga was a migrant who had arrived in Mumbai with her husband in search of employment. After her husband's death, she had to shift base again, highlighting the question of 'female labour migration':

Ganga had arrived in Bombay eleven years before with her husband.... Ramesh, the husband had been a millworker in the days before the labour disputes and the big lockouts. He was a Marxist and he was killed, stabbed in a quarrel with another union....But now the mills were closed and the years had passed. Now it seemed that Ganga was going to move, and this was the news she had to give to her neighbours (*Love and Longing in Bombay*, 44).

Migrant workers are in such demand because they provide the ultimate flexible workforce to employers who can hire and fire without any obligations whatsoever, and extract cheap labour from them for very little in return. There are labour laws in place but failure to implement them is rampant. This is true not only for Mumbai, but every other major city in India. However, it is unfortunate that they are forced into living in sordid conditions, while being denied basic amenities. Sometimes, due to extreme poverty and deprivation, their habitat becomes the fertile ground for crime, impacting the security of the locals in the vicinity. On the other hand, the indiscriminate flow of migrant labour needs to be checked so that they do not become a burden on a city's infrastructure.

The migrant worker is essential to manufacturing and service sectors, but ironically, they are unwelcome in terms of occupying physical, social, political and cultural spaces in the city. Even though they constitute the informal economy in Mumbai city, they usually fall into the category of transit labour. For instance, Ganga in the above mentioned story represents one of the thousands who constitute the 'transit labour force' of the city:

Ganga worked...in another dozen houses up and down the hill and she sped from one to another without a pause the entire day, after which she stood in a local train for an hour and fifteen minutes to get out to Andheri where she lived. (42).

Migration is an inseparable part of urbanization and industrialization, but it causes lots of problems because the civic amenities and services are limited. They are victims of bottomless living conditions, inferior sanitation, suffocating transport system, inadequate health, education and other social infrastructure. In fact, the ever-increasing population in large cities like Mumbai has been one of the sinking features of the country.

Migration from rural to urban areas places in danger the physical guarantee of the workers and affects their quality of life and potential for physical as well as emotional growth. When the region of origin lacks opportunities, migration becomes inevitable. Most of them have agricultural land in their native places, but in due course of time, the employment

elasticity drops down to near zero. Jobless growth, regional absence of opportunity, rural poverty, pressure of debts and the need to improve lifestyles has collectively spurred migration.

The poor growth of manufacturing sector in native states forces the semi-educated youth to migrate to bigger cities, aspiring for a better life. Hence, there is a vertical shift in the labour force from the rural agricultural sector to the urbanized industrial sector, which can take place either on a permanent or temporary basis.

While considering the temporary aspect of migration, a defining moment in urban life is the daily commuter journey. According to Jim Masselos in his essay 'Defining Moments/Defining Events: Commonalities of Urban Life' in *Bombay and Mumbai: The City in Transition* (2003):

Every morning Mumbai redefines itself in an immense collective awakening. In a great pulsing movement, people rise, prepare for the day ahead and then move out from where they live to where they work, joining others in streams which become a massive flow; a vast river of people.... The common journey highlights the notion of shared activity and shared experience which is a means of understanding the changing city (pp 31-32).

According to Masselos, this kind of shared activity not only helps in creating an urban identity, but also "fills in the form and space of the city" (33). In doing so, it delineates the physical totality of the urban configuration. These common experiences foster notions of a coherent entity and identification of the inhabitants within the city space. This city is being rediscovered as a microcosm of the emerging Indian economy. A study of migrant workers serves as an indicator to assess the transition of the metropolis into a postmodern global city. The urban identity has been created due to a conglomeration of its historical, social, political and economic factors.

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GENDERING MEDIA FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: THE WEST BENGAL SCENARIO

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Media and media-based communication has become the lifeline of modern communication. Modern technology based communication is defined as e-communication or paperless communication and the latest development paradigm focuses on the development of skills in the self. The critical mind of contemporary society views (i) media to be influenced by corporate value behind news selection and news analysis and (ii) development to be influenced by patriarchal mentality. Can the media play a bigger social role than its stereotypical role of communicating and sensitizing? Can development transgress patriarchal designs? With this dual inquiry, grounded in West Bengal experience, the present paper makes a strong case for 'gendering' the media space. West Bengal is known for offering new histories in India. The politics of the state have been 'gendered' since 2011 with a women politician controlling the affairs. As a consequence, development has also become 'gendered' to a large extent as reflected in the international accolades for Kanyasree programme. Now it is the time for media space, both electronic and e-media to be gendered, meaning being prone to back women efforts and women conditions with an aim to strengthen the women empowerment process. As a qualitative study, the paper concludes by arguing with suitable illustrations, that neutrality of media must not be seen only from the perspective of designing input of news-flow but also from the perspective of designing the output of news-effect in society, particularly for the all-round development of women self in India in general and in West Bengal in particular.

Keywords

Media, Gender, Empowerment, West Bengal, News Design

Introduction

Gender is a word we hear in everyday conversation. It is commonly used to describe an individual's identity as male or female. However, the term "gender" is actually more complicated, and needs to be distinguished from one's sex (male/female). Media creates meanings about gender, and plays an important role in the way we understand it as part of our identity, our history, our social institutions, and our everyday lives.

The media is an important factor in the promotion of gender equality, both within the working environment (in terms of employment and promotion of female staff at all levels) and in the representation of women and men (in terms of fair gender portrayal and the use of neutral and non-gender specific language). The level of participation and influence of women in the media also has implications for media content: female media professionals are more likely to reflect other women's needs and perspectives than their male colleagues. It is important to acknowledge, however, that not all women working in the media will be gender aware and prone to cover women's needs and perspectives; and it is not impossible for men to effectively cover gender issues. Gender roles, as an example, exist solely because society as a whole chooses to accept them, but they are perpetuated by the media.

In the words of Julia T. Wood, "three themes describe how media represent gender. First, women are underrepresented, which falsely implies that men are the cultural standard and women are unimportant or invisible. Second, men and women are portrayed in stereotypical ways that reflect and sustain socially endorsed views of gender. Third, depictions of relationships between men and women emphasize traditional roles and normalize violence against women."¹

According to Kalpana Sharma, a veteran women journalist in India, "gendered media is media that is conscious of gender....I do not know whether there is an academic definition but as a practitioner if someone says that we need a gendered media then I would take it positively....for every event there is a gendered impact which the media fails to understand... What is still continuously missing in the media is that there are many issues which have an impact on women, but there is no effort made to assess that impact in routine reporting."²

The present paper elaborates the concerns of established media scholarship on the role of media in addressing gender issues. As a result the call of the present paper is 'gendering media' which is a concept to circumscribe the media establishments with women issues not as a mere representation of fact but as a problem solving mechanism. The paper is divided into three sections, section I addresses the global and Indian picture relating to the theme of the paper, section II talks about the West Bengal experience and section III analyses the theme with the practical experience of West Bengal. The paper is based on agenda-setting theory and with a case-study method qualitatively brings together the essence of media coverage of women issues in West Bengal. The fundamental research question of the paper is about the potential of electronic media of 24x7 genres to solve the problems associated with women development and empowerment. The paper concludes by suggesting that like federalising of centre in the era of coalition politics in India where West Bengal's present dispensation plays a critical role, gendering of media in the era of women empowerment can effectively solve many

of women related social problems and West Bengal's vibrant media space can make the first stride forward.

Section I

Media have created two images of women: good women and bad ones. These polar opposites are often juxtaposed against each other to dramatize differences in the consequences that befall good and bad women. Good women are pretty, deferential, and focused on home, family and caring for others. Subordinate to men, they are usually cast as victims, angels, martyrs, and loyal wives and helpmates. Occasionally, women who depart from traditional roles are portrayed positively, but this is done either by making their career lives invisible, or by softening and feminizing working women to make them more consistent with traditional views of femininity.

Advertisers support media, and they exert a powerful influence on what is presented. To understand the prevalence of traditional gender roles in programming, magazine copy, and other media, we need only ask what is in the best interests of advertisers. They want to sponsor shows that create or expand markets for their products. Media images of women as sex objects, devoted homemakers, and mothers buttress the very roles in which the majority of consuming takes place. To live up to these images, women have to buy cosmetics and other personal care products, diet aids, food, household cleaners, utensils and appliances, clothes and toys for children, and so on. In short, it is in advertisers' interests to support programming and copy that feature women in traditional roles. Individually and in combination these images sustain and reinforce socially constructed views of the genders, views that have restricted both men and women and that appear to legitimize destructive behaviours ranging from anorexia to battering.³

According to Steve Derne, the new imaginations introduced by cultural globalization are also layering new meanings on top of the existing gender arrangements. As transnational movement is increasingly valued, Hindi films contribute to a process that makes transnational movement a distinctively male prerogative. Films today emphasize that the dangers women face in public spaces are *intensified* in the transnational arena. Thus, films contribute to a process of reserving increasingly valued transnational terrain for men. Globalization has not changed structural realities in ways that improve women's position: Job opportunities have not much expanded for non élite women and men's authority in the home remains the norm. Non élite men whose limited economic opportunities prevent them from aspiring to celebrated cosmopolitan lifestyles by hitching their dreams to the global economy continue to emphasize male privilege as one of the few privileges available to them.⁴

Section II

West Bengal as a state in the Indian federation has been known for its progressive nature thanks to the rule of the Left Front government for more than three decades at a stretch. The idea of promoting values of the oppressive and the downtrodden was the main value orientation of the Left Front government. However the position of women during the Left Front regime, socially, culturally and politically was limited to a certain point. It was a largely a patriarchal and male-dominated set-up both in organisation with incidents like Marichjhapi, Birati rape case, Manisha kidnapping case and Tapasi Mallick incident. As a result the sense among all opposing quarters was that the lack of women prominent leadership was the cause for such neglect. Even the media space was reflecting the incidents with much intensity with the end result that media became the champion of the cause of change in political space and as such the TMC government came into being in 2011.

West Bengal entered so to say a new era with the Mamata Banerjee led TMC government. The expectation from the new dispensation was huge in the field of women empowerment because the leader had a history of women centric initiatives like initiation of ladies special train as the former railway minister of the centre. As the Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee made a historic initiative of making women self-dependent through a gendered programme like Kanyasree, included more and more women candidates in electoral space and party organisation. As a result it was expected that violence against women will take a back seat in the new West Bengal. On the contrary, from Park Street rape case to Kamduni rape case, there have been a series of violence against women recorded in the tenure of the TMC government. This paper tries to understand the role of media in the context of this contraposition – a popular government and continuation of hated incidents taking place side by side. How do the media balance between these binaries?

The conditional cash transfer scheme of the Government of West Bengal, Kanyashree Prakalpa, has been hailed as a much-needed intervention to combat the high rate of child marriage in the state, and has received numerous awards since its inception. The scheme incentivises girls to continue education, while simultaneously delaying early marriages. However, an examination of the working of the scheme highlights the fact that rather than promoting higher education of women, the scheme has ended up entangled in the marriage economy of rural Bengal.⁵ The analysis of this programme amply demonstrated that media space has failed doubly in the new West Bengal to promote gender issues relating to empowerment. On the first count, media has denounced gender empowerment by criticising politically the leadership of Mamata Banerjee to keep up the TRP which is sensed to increase in media parlance to keep up the anti-incumbency factor. On the second count, the media has only highlighted the programmes like Kanyasree with pointing out the underside or the

negative impact of such programmes as reflected in the above mentioned analysis. As a result the cause of women is being sacrificed in the media space in this new West Bengal. Even in this new situation, the media is reflecting on negative age-old issues like divorce, dowry death, female infanticide, female foeticide, kidnapping/abduction, maintenance, domestic violence, matrimonial dispute, rape, police harassment, property, murder, attempt to murder, molestation/eve teasing, sexual harassment, acid attack and miscellaneous issues. The result being that media has remained within the prevalent social and political 'system' which is inherently patriarchal.

Such stereotype is not exclusive of West Bengal media but a feature prominent in Indian media space as reflected in a report of International Federation of Journalists- "Women seem to be represented in all the subject areas defined, but their numbers are mostly found (starting from the highest) in gender issues, health and human rights (equal), child rights, arts/culture, politics, urban/civic issues and rural development. They are barely represented in sports and marginally more in agriculture and international relations. Labour and crime followed at a slightly higher rate. Men were most represented (from the highest) politics, rural development, economics/business, agriculture, health, human rights and education."⁶

In West Bengal even after 2011, media space has been feeling at ease to cover gendered issues in normal way, to show repeatedly the women issues of neglect, to politically represent the news on gender issues, to highlight the negative news of women more than that of positive information on women like women athleticism, women corporatisation and others. This paper tries to suggest some ways through which media space be converted indeed in a revolutionary way to come with coverage of women issues in the next section.

Section III

Gender inequality is a serious concern and a great challenge for a developing country like India which wants to emerge as one of the super powers in the new world order. Keeping in view of the gravity of the issue at stake, the United Nations has given much emphasis on gender equality in its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Individuals, organisations, and institutions must come forward and contribute their due share in ameliorating the menace of gender inequality towards establishing a better, just and equitable society where everyone will get equal opportunity and freedom. In this respect the role of mass media as a powerful institution in the contemporary society cannot be underestimated.⁷

In contemporary West Bengal electronic media space can be revolutionised by gendering the media. This is a process whereby media has to play the role of both the agent as well as structure of women related issues. On the one hand media must explore positive news

about women transgressing the patriarchal barrier. On the other hand media must try to solve the problem of women related issues by two ways – (i) highlighting and discussing the issue threadbare to trace its source and then fix the problem through creating local level gender sensitising campaigns. In this respect media must keep the particular issue in news till the problem gets fixed and justice is delivered, (ii) promoting a political space that is truly respectful and interested in women related by not falling into the trap of political criticisms to raise the TRP through anti-incumbency. This two way process can make the media act as an agent of women empowerment (by airing women related issues till the issue gets solved) and as a structure of women empowerment (by trying to vanguard the interest of women in analysing and exploring political situations during elections).

Women empowerment at the highest political level in West Bengal, the active presence of women self help groups (SHGs) and the achievements of women sportsmen like Jhulan Goswami (cricket), Dola Bandopadhyay (archery) and others make the state one of the most prominent gendered state in the country. Sadly, on the basis of law and order situation reflected through crime against women this state is also coming to the top slot in India. In this context media, as the fourth pillar of democracy, can play an effective role in promoting and protecting the cause of women empowerment.

Conclusion

On the basis of agenda setting theory, this paper argues that media must take help of the prevailing political situation to promote the cause of women in every possible way by becoming the agent and structure of women cause – a process refereed in this paper as gendering media. On the basis of qualitative analysis of the content of news aired in media space during the TMC government in West Bengal it can be concluded that media treats women issues in normal ways like any other news item although women issue is the major area of societal concern in the state. On the basis of the research question posed in this paper, the findings suffice that media in contemporary West Bengal have not been aware about its historical and pivotal role in promoting women causes and therefore have not understood the ways and means to tackle the binary situation in the state at present – a popular women leader managing a state with unpopular incidents against women. The paper finally concludes with the argument that only by gendering media, can West Bengal media space revolutionise women cause in the country. The ingredients for such a role is ready only the internal role-awareness is necessary for the media in West Bengal.

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করোনা ,বিবেক ও মনুষ্যত্ব

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সময় বড়ো নিষ্ঠুর। রোগটি থেকে যাবে বহুদিন।

তারপর বনেবাদাড়ে পা দুলিয়ে হাসবে।

মাঝে মাঝে বেয়াড়া ঘরগুলো ধরে শিথিয়ে যাবে

এভাবে হিসেবের দরকার ছিল কি।

দরকার ছিল কি টাকা-যশ-খ্যাতির জন্য প্রতারণা, ঘুষ, তোলা তোলা।

ভালোই হলো একদিক থেকে, আমরা ভুলেই গেছিলাম খিদে বলে কিছু আছে।

ভুলেই গেছিলাম মন বলে কিছু হয়। ভুলেই গেছিলাম তোমাকে।

যেন চারপাশে উৎসব ও অসন্তোষ, আর ওপর দিকে ঈশ্বর বা আল্লার দোহাই দিয়ে

হুৎপিণ্ড বার করে চেটে নিচ্ছিল হায়নার মতো,

একদিক থেকে ভালোই হল

এই কেমন কেমন ভাব

যাকে পাবি তাকে ছো

ঘরবন্দী গোপ্লাছুট।

এসব মন্দ নয়।

বরং চলুক না তামাশা

এই অমুকের ঘাড়ে কটা মাথা

কটা ভোটবাক্সে কাটা হাত, এসব গনৎকারের হিসেব।

অনেক উন্নতি হয়েছে

অনেক বাড়ি ও গাড়ি

এবং যা যা হবার নয় তাও,

এবং মানুষের পায়ে পা, মাথায় মাথা ছিল না,

সবাই সবাইকে ছিঁড়ে খেয়ে ফেলতে চেয়েছিল ও কতক পেরেছিল।

এমনকি মৃত্যু যেন আপদ বিদায়ের উৎসব, মদের বোতলে বন্দী।
এখন যেন হিসেবের খাতায় নিজের নাম লেখা হতে পারে,
তাই কেউ আর কারো গলা টিপে ধরছে না,
কেউ যেন ভুল কথা ও বেফাঁস বাণী ঝাড়ছে না।
সবাই শান্ত হয়ে
যে কোনদিন আমাকে মানুষ মনে করেনি
সেও বলছে দূর থেকে
ঘরেই থাকুন, সাবধানে থাকুন।
দরকারে হাক ছাড়বেন ছুটে আসবো।
ভালোই তো হল, এমন পা নাচানো বাবু
বাবু অদৃশ্য নেতার ওপরে নেতা, যে
চালিয়ে নিচ্ছে, আদেশ দিচ্ছে না,
এমন ভাইরাস বা বীজানুকে গালপাড়তে পারি।
ও থাকুক না, ভদ্রপল্লী বা অভদ্র পল্লী এমন বিচার করে নয় ,
থাকুক মানুষের ঘর ছেড়ে অমানুষের বনে।
গাছের থেকে অন্ধকার নিয়ে দিনের আলোর মধ্যেই আসুক,
এই ভয় , একটু আশঙ্কা, অজানা অনুভূতি।
যাতে বিবেক ,জীবন বেঁচে থাকতে পারে।

লবঙ্গলতিকা

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আমাকে খুঁজিতে এলো ঘুমঘোর চোখে লবঙ্গলতিকা
চোখে তার বেদনার ঢেউ স্বপনের গন্ধে মেঠো ঘ্রাণ
গায়ে তার এলাচ বীজের মতো গন্ধ ছড়িয়ে দিয়েছে
প্রাণ, এই এলোমেলো শূন্যতার আগমনী চারপাশে
যখন, হয়েছে বোবা ব্যাকুল ভাষাহীন, তখন চুলের
মধ্যে, ভেসে থাকে চম্পকফুলের ঘ্রাণ সে এক রাতের
রাত, গাঢ় তার জীবনের ঘুটঘুটে পিপাসার স্বর টানিল
মোরে, সেই সব ছেড়ে আসা শোকের অশ্রুর দিনে
যেখানে, বসিয়া মোরা খেলেছি গুজবে প্রমিত ব্যর্থতা
নিয়ে, তোমারে হারায়ে ফেলে রেখে প্রভঞ্জন সমুদ্র
সাঁতারের, ব্যর্থতার রক্তস্রোতে ভেসে ডুবেগেছি আমি
আমি, তখন চলেছি সেই ঘুমঘোর অন্ধকারের নদী পার
করে, বৈতরণী তীরে ফেলেছি আমার শেষের শুভাশুভ
ফল, তুমি এসে দাঁড়ালে দুহাত মেলি গণৎকার জ্যামিতি রেখে
জল্প, ছড়ায়ে দিলে যে তুমি লবঙ্গলতিকা
রাশি, বাহুতে তোমার ছিল শিয়াল হায়না
ঘেরা, এই সব সমাজের নারী-পুরুষের ক্রান্তি, ঘিরে
দিলে, জ্যোৎস্নায় স্নাত করে, দূরে ঠেলে যত কঠিন কোটাল
তবু, ফিরে এলে নাকো আর আমার বাসায়
তাই, মৃত্যুর ঘ্রাণেও ব্যথারা নিবিড় ভাবে অশ্রু ফেলে
অর্চে, অরুন্তদ অযোধ্যর কথা, অরিষ্ট হৃদয়ে তুমি
চল, আজ সেই সব দিন আর নেই, ধুলায় মলিন মুখ

তবু, তোমারে চেয়েছি আমি ঘুমের ওষুধ যেন সুরাসার
রাতে, আসো নাই ফিরে আর, দিনে দিনে ফুরায়েছ তুমি
আমি, ফুরায়েছি মৃতসব নদীর জলের মতো
আজ, ওড়পুষ্প সম ফুটেছি ওদনে, গুঁচাদের মতো শুধু
থাকি, তুমি ছাড়া আলোহীন এই গোবশা জীবনে গোট
সেতো, তোমাকে জানায়ে পাইনিতো কোন ডাঙ্গর ডহর
ডাঙা, জীবনের ডেকে আর একবার আমন ধানের
গন্ধে, কিন্তু পাকা আম দাঁড়কাকে খেয়েগেছে
কবে, আমগন্ধি সমাজে আমক-শ্মশান মানুষের নামে
কারা, যারা খুবলে নিয়েছে রূপসী-রূপবানের চোখ-মুখ
তারা, কুবাসনাকে কুবাস করে, কুবাক্যে আইন কুমকুম
করে, পায়েতে খেলায় নটী কুবের পুরুষ নাচে
খেলে, এমত সময়ে জীবন-আকাশগাঙে নেমেছে বয়স
ঝুড়ি, বট ঠিক খুঁজে নেয় সৌধ-শীলা ভেদ করে
জল, নেমেছে মরেছে সব হৃদয়ের বারান্দায় থুরথুরে
বুড়ো, ঘুরে ঘুরে ডাকে সেই সব গত আত্মীয়র নাম
ধরে, বনমালী বলাই কানাই দুর্গা কালী নিতাই গৌরাঙ্গ
যত, হয়, চারপাশে জামরুল, জাম, কাঠাল, লিচুর ফল
কত, তারাও একদিন এই উঠানের পরতে পরতে দঙ্গলদঙ্গলীদের
কুতূহলে, দিয়েছে ছায়ার ঘ্রাণ আর জীবনের সাধ
তারা, আজ মরেগেছে আকাশে আকাশে তারা
আজ, বুড়ো একা পড়ে আছে সহস্র বছরে জমা
এই, আঁশটে গুমোট জীবন কি পেয়েছে শেষে
নীতি, হৃদয়ের কথা বলা ঘর করা সমাজে বারন
তাই, লবঙ্গলতিকা আসে নাকো কথাশুনি বাতাসের গায়
তবু, ডাকি আমি বন্ধু বলে, রাগে মানে অভিমানে
জলে, অশ্রু মুছি, ফিরি খাদ্য খুঁটে বাঁচি, মরণেও মরণ নাই
তাই, যদি ভাবি খুরলী বাঁশির সুরে, যদি জাগে প্রৌঢ়া

এক বার, প্রোষ্ঠ পদ চরণ ধরেযে তার রাখি মাথার ওপরে
প্রৈতি, এমত ব্যথিত হৃদে পঙ্খু শক্তি নিয়ে
তাকে, লবঙ্গলতিকা এসে দাঁড়ায় আমার ঘরে, সেও ঘুম
চোখে, আমিও তন্দ্রা মাথা আবেশে জড়িয়ে ধরে আজ
তুমি, নেউটিয়া নেওটা নীলাম্বরী ললিত লবঙ্গলতিকা
মোর, মুছেগেছে এই সব সেই সব অন্ধকার সব ক্ষত
মেনে, আমরা দুজনে উঠছি ফুটে নতুন ফুলের নেত্র
নিয়ে, ঘুমায়ে রয়েছি দোহে শুধু উৎপ্রাসে অর্ধনারীশ্বর।

150TH YEAR OF PERIODIC TABLE: A LONG JOURNEY TOWARDS CLASSIFICATION OF ELEMENTS

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Introduction

All of us are supposedly more or less familiar with the Periodic Table. The UNESCO has taken the initiative of celebrating the year 2019 as the 150th year of actual formation of a Periodic Table by Mendeleev in 1869. Initially the numbers of known elements were very few. With the progress of civilization many more elements came into our knowledge. The discovery of unknown elements was very enchanting, but their classification and systematic arrangement was even more thrilling. We shall confine our attention to the inception and history of the periodic table here.

Inception and Evolution

It was long back, when the inception of periodic table came into the field. In 1789, French scientist *Antoine Lavoisier* published a list of 33 chemical elements, grouping them into gases, metals, non-metals and earths. Decades were needed for them to be classified more systematically. In 1817, *Johann Wolfgang Dobereiner* observed that atomic weights of the chemically similar elements vary in a regular manner, viz., if a set of three chemically similar elements are arranged, then the average of the sum of the atomic weights of the two extreme elements would nearly be the atomic weight of the middle element. This is called the Dobereiner's famous '*Law of Triads*'. This is shown in the following table⁴:

Cl	35.5	Ca	40.0	S	32.0	Li	6.9
Br	80.0	Sr	88.0	Se	79.0	Na	23.0
I	127.0	Ba	137.0	Te	128.0	K	39.0

German chemist *Leopold Gmelin* was able to find ten such triads by 1843. Among them, there were three groups of four elements and one group of five elements besides the group of three elements. Scientist *Jean-Baptiste Dumas* in 1857 described various relationships between metals. In the mean time, *Kekule* proposed the concept of 'Valency' which describes the number of atoms to which an element would be bonded. In 1863, the French geologist *Alexandre-Émile Béguyer de Chancourtois* arranged the elements according to their increasing atomic weights along a helix or a spiral around a cylinder and found the recurring

nature of the properties of the elements. In 1864, British chemist *John Alexander Reina Newlands* first stated that if the elements were arranged in the order of their increasing atomic weights, the eighth element from a given one would be the repetition of the first one as far as their physical and chemical properties were concerned and this resembled the eighth note in an octave of music. This phenomenon came to be called the '*Law of Octave*'. Several such types of proposal about the classification of elements came but none actually withstood.

The Father of Periodic Table – Mendeleev

The father of the periodic table was none other than Russian Scientist *Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev*. In 1869, Mendeleev stated that "*there must be some bond of union between mass and chemical elements and as the mass of a substance is ultimately expressed in the atom, a functional dependence should exist and be discoverable between individual properties of elements and their atomic weights*"¹⁰. According to him "*the properties of chemical elements and their compounds are periodic functions of the atomic weights of the elements*" and this is known as '*Periodic Law of Elements*'.

This law encouraged other chemists while dealing with elements and observing their properties in a more favourable fashion. Mendeleev arranged the then known elements in rows and columns which are called periods and groups respectively. While placing the elements he had to leave some vacancies as there was no appropriate element to place, which were filled in by elements with apt properties discovered later. It was an early triumph for him to predict some till then undiscovered elements through the periodic table. His contemporary scientist *Lothar Meyer* gave his idea of 'atomic volumes' (= gram atomic weight/density) which also showed some periodic patterns, but was rejected later with the advent of the atomic number concept. The concept and implementation of periodicity of elements and their compounds, thus, had a good start.



Modification of Mendeleev's Table – Modern or Long Form of Periodic Table

Mendeleev's periodic law was superseded by the discovery of atomic numbers as the basic property of any element by *Henry Gwyn Jeffreys Moseley's* X-ray studies (1913) and the atomic weights in the earlier law were replaced by atomic numbers. The new law hence stated that "*the properties of chemical elements and their compounds are periodic functions of the atomic numbers of the elements*". This new periodic law solved the problems that arose due to filling of the periodic table based on atomic weights of the elements rather than their atomic numbers. For example, according to their respective atomic weights, Cobalt (Co, 58.9 amu) should be placed after Nickel (Ni, 58.7 amu). However, Moseley's studies showed that according to their atomic numbers, Co (27) should be placed before Ni (28). Later on, this arrangement of elements according to their increasing atomic numbers instead of their atomic

Chemists of post-periodic table discovery era were not satisfied with the then known elements, and some of them dedicated their whole attention towards discovering the missing elements. In most of the cases they succeeded. Some trans-actinide elements were discovered and named as $_{104}\text{Rf}$ (Rutherfordium), $_{105}\text{Db}$ (Dubnium), $_{106}\text{Sg}$ (Seaborgium), $_{117}\text{Ts}$ (Tennesine) and $_{118}\text{Og}$ (Oganesson). It is now expected that, more elements will be discovered later with their specific properties which then would become phenomenal in enriching the world of chemistry.



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The chemical and physical properties of most of the elements show similarity (or uniformity in decreasing or increasing fashion) after arranging them systematically in periods and groups. From the periodic table we are able to determine or at least predict the atomic radii, ionic radii, electro-negativities, electron affinities, ionization potentials etc. of different elements and their compounds, which are very useful and reliable sources of many chemical and physical properties.

Conclusion

The widely diverse physical and chemical properties of various elements have been characterized and explained most logically following a reasonably systematic arrangement of the concerned elements into several groups and periods forming the periodic table. Once the trend of the elements are comprehended via periodic table, the micro properties could be assumed even before the actual discovery of the elements, and the chemistry of several batches of elements would seem no longer a messy and random collection of unrelated facts and reactions.

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“THE POOR, BLACK GIRL” : AN INTRODUCTION TO BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT

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The word “Feminism” has been quite problematic since long. Words like *feminism* or *feminist* seem to build up the general expectation that the *feminists* are people who talk about “equal rights of women.” They do that no doubt, which was how it had initially begun in the West, giving women an opportunity to speak up in the arena of politics, with the suffrage movement, along with the fight against women’s oppressions. The questions, however, that arise from such general speculations are: RIGHTS, EQUAL TO WHOM? Is it equality between women and men in the domain of politics that the feminists seek? Or, is it equality of all women, irrespective of age, race, class, caste and creed in each and every field of life? Did the movement, popular as “Feminism,” try to fight for the equality of women belonging to both the white and the non-white worlds? These questions arising out of the fissures further complicate the apparently “simple” terms.

The Feminist Movement which had begun in Britain in the 1890s and had taken over large quarters of the United States of America by 1910 actually spoke of women and their rights which were totally restricted to the white woman in a white man’s world. The First and the Second Wave Feminisms, generally speaking, were dominated by the white, middle-class women who were theorizing and fighting from their own perspectives of oppression, suppression, exclusion and experiences in the various fields of the society. But while raising their voices against oppression and suppression they ignored the “sorrow” of the black woman in a white man’s world, and of course, the oppressions faced by them in the hands of their male counterparts, who are black, thus marginalizing them from the main stream feminism and the movements related to it. As a classic example of such exclusion the case of Sarah Baartman may be cited. She was brought to England from South Africa as a slave, under a false hope of taking part in “shows” in the first quarter of the 19th century. A patient of “steatopygia,” Baartman developed “extremely protuberant buttocks due to a build-up fat” (Parkinson). This anomalous body was flaunted publicly in “freak shows” in London and Paris. “On stage she wore skin-tight, flesh-coloured clothing, as well as beads and feathers, and smoked a pipe. Wealthy customers could pay for private demonstrations in their homes, with their guests allowed to touch her” (Parkinson).

Simultaneous to the Feminist waves in the socio-political avenues, were budding two major literary theories in the academia: the Feminist literary theory and the Afro-Americanist literary theory. In “Black Feminist Theory and the Representation of the ‘Other’”, Valerie Smith traced that both “arose out of reactive, polemical modes of criticism” (Smith 19). Literature in the academic curriculum till then, was “referred to as a body of texts written by and in the interest of a white male elite” (39). Hence, “feminist critics (mostly white) and Afro-Americanist critics (mostly male) undertook the archeological work of locating and/or reinterpreting overlooked and misread women and black writers” (39). Both the white feminists and the Afro-Americanist critics undertook archeological projects to revive their “own” respective voices in literature, which had been kept “unheard” no doubt, but, when the project/s came into practice, they were retrieving their respective voices: the white feminists were working on the revival of the works of white, female writers; and the Afro-Americanists concentrated on the black, male writers! There was no place for the black woman in the milieu of white feminist criticism because of her colour. Critics like Patricia Meyer Spacks and Phyllis Chesler justified the exclusion by declaring that “black women experience a unique form of oppression” (Smith 317) which is different from theirs. Unfortunately, these women did not get any “space” in the Afro-Americanist critical thought either. Barabra Smith’s contention that they are “victims at once of sexism, racism and by extension classism” (17) becomes relevant. Whereas Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*¹ (1852), Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and Harriet Wilson’s autobiographical novel, *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North*² (1859), to name a few, had already arrived on the literary scene,³ Mary Helen Washington rightly calls attention to the fact that the Afro-American literary tradition basically promoted the “privileged [,] solitary, literate adventures found in texts by male authors” (Smith 39) like Fredrick Douglas and Richard Wright.

So, the archeological projects which rose out of the need to reconstruct the muted voices by the white patriarchal colonialists, were basically, white gynae-centric and black andro-centric, reducing the black women writers to nothing more than the “poor, black girl[s]” (Wall, 3) who were re-framing the clichéd image of the Black woman, as opposed to the “western” standards – created and popularized through the “display” of Sarah Baartman – through their creative non-fictions, fictions and poetry. In reality, the Black woman was “triply colonized” – by the white male, the black male; and the white female.

By the late 1970s, a huge number of black women writers had already set a strong foothold in the literária – Toni Cade Bambara, Audre Lorde, Gwendolyn Brooks, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, the list continues – yet, “little commentary on [them or] their works could be found in ‘feminist’ journals” (Christian, 9) or even the journals that

claimed to represent the works of Afro-American writers circulating then. “Black feminist criticism” originated from these critical acts of severe omission/s of the black women in literary criticism. Interesting to note, however, is the fact that the “articulation of the possibility of a tradition of Afro-American women writers occurred not in a fancy academic journal but in two magazines: *Ms.*, a new popular magazine that came out of the woman’s movement, and *Black World*, a long-standing journal unknown to most academics and possibly scorned by some” (Christian, 60). The publication of the *Black World* in August 1974 and Alice Walker’s “In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens” published in May 1974, “signalled a shift in position among those interested in Afro-American literature about women’s creativity” (59). This ushered in the era of black feminist thought and the most concrete of all was Alice Walker’s ideology of *womanism*⁴ which was not something similar to what *feminism* was popularly and traditionally believed to be. Though there has been much disagreement among critics of using the term *womanism* synonymously with “Black feminism,” but they both “are concerned with struggles against sexism and racism by black women who are themselves part of the black community’s efforts to achieve equality and liberty” (Omolande, quoted in Collins10).

Walker’s *womanist* ideology was far from being similar to the white *feminists*, who spoke from their bourgeois perspectives about only the white female; or the Afro-Americanists who dealt mostly with the male experiences in the hands of the white colonial masters. Rather, her ideology embraced not only women, but also men which, bell hooks would spell out later in “Feminism – it’s a black thang,” that, the black community is in dire need of a “feminist movement that addresses the needs of Black women, men and children can strengthen our bonds with one another, deepen our sense of community and further Black liberation” (hooks, 124).

The term *womanist*, Walker claimed was etymologically inspired by the term *womanish* as something opposed to “‘girlish,’ i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious” (Walker, xi). A *womanist* for her was/is a “black feminist or feminist of color” (xi). In fact, she forecasts hook’s summation in calling her ideology of *womanism* or being a *womanist* as one who “loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually [,] appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength [,] sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually [...and is] committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female” (xi). Her concept of black feminist thought is firmly based on the black matrilineal culture and it embraces a huge number of issues related to marginalization: the issues of race, gender as well as the grain of lesbian/gay criticism and liberation through a sense of universal sisterhood, issues that remained unknown and unseen generally in feminist and Afro-American critical thoughts.

Moving away from the preceding thoughts, and inspired by the Civil Rights, Walker refers to the black people as a “community” and proposed to uplift them from the clutches of all forms of “slavery”: physical or metaphorical, without singling out women and men. Thus her *womanism* apparently gave the black feminists a way to address issues of class, gender and race based oppressions “without attacking black men” (Collins, 11). Her thought on black feminism was concretized when she wrote, “womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender” (Walker ii). By likening the ideology to “purple,” she metaphorically hits at “white bourgeois feminism” which “literary pales in comparison to the more wide-ranging, nonexclusive womanist concerns represented by the rich and undilutes color purple” (Montelaro, 14) – a theory which can even be used to analyze texts from any of the colored nations of the world, including India.

Notes

¹“The most influential American novel ever written appeared first in weekly instalments between June 1851 and April 1852 in the *National Era*, a Washington DC periodical with an anti-slavery slant.” Cavendish, Richard. “Publication of Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” in *History Today* Vol. 51 Issue 6: 2001. www.historytoday.com.

²This is the first novel “published by [a] black [American] in the United States.” Bell, Bernard W. *The Contemporary African American Novel: Its Folk Roots and Modern Literary Branches*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004. p.95.

³Mary Helen Washington, “Introduction,” in Mary Helen Washington, ed., *Black-Eyed Susans: Classic Stories by and about Black Women* (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books, 1975) x-xxxii.

⁴A term coined by Alice Walker in her collection of essays under the title *In Search of our Mother’s Garden*, published in 1983. (Walker, Alice, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*. Orlando, New York: A Harvest Book Harcourt, INC., 1983). p. xi.

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CROSS CULTURAL IDEAS OF ‘UTOPIAS’ AMONG THE VARIOUS ETHNIC GROUPS OF DARJEELING AND SIKKIM HIMALAYAS

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Layman Tower Sergeant says “The expression of utopianism seems to be among the basic strata of human experience”¹. He argues that utopianism is in many ways what he calls ‘social dreaming’², a dreaming for a better life. The initiation to concepts of Utopia for me, having received primary education in a Christian minority school, was with the idea of the Garden of Eden or with the children’s rendition of the story of Pandora and her box of troubles. The ideas of a utopia from the silenced histories of the various communities that live in the Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas was ominously absent in our conceptions of utopia. Where was the evidence then for what is arguably the human propensity to dream for a better life? There are numerous linguistic and ethnic identities that make up the Gorkha people and with various socio-political, historical and economic factors that caused Nepali language to become the lingua franca and also due to the oral nature of the ethnic languages various histories, stories and folk-lore are in danger or have been forgotten altogether.

Literacy is a relatively recent advent in the hills and more recent are the endeavours that are being taken to preserve these ethnic histories in written form. The repository of these literatures is largely oral without any fixed author or authorial identity. My paper will mostly focus on some folk stories of the Lepcha community, their story of *Nye Mayel Kyong* which has been described as the Lepcha Paradise on Earth by L. Tamsang who has compiled, edited and translated the book *Lepcha Folklore and Folk Songs*. It is important to note here that folklore and folk songs are embodiments of culture of the community and the recent writings are viewed to move fluidly between fiction and non-fiction. In his introduction to the compilation Tamsang states (and these are his opening lines) that “The Lepchas are the one and only indigenous race of the Darjeeling district, Sikkim and the Illam Himalayas” however other ethnic groups have also made similar claims and these claims are given importance depending

¹Layman Tower Sergeant, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” *Utopian studies* 5, no.1 (Pen State University press, 1994): 28, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20719246>

²Sergeant, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” 3.

on the political scenarios. They even call themselves, ‘*Mutanchi rong kup rum kup*’ meaning the beloved Children of Mother nature and God.’

The story of *Nye Mayel Kyong* or paradise on earth is also one that resonates the relationship or rather dependence of the people on Nature. Some scholars have described this place as the country of the ancestors while others say that this is a mythical Lepcha Village.

Located somewhere near Mt. Kanchenjunga, in the Sikkim Himalayas is a place called *Nye Mayel Kyaong*, literally meaning hidden eternal village. Seven Lepcha couples live in this village in seven traditional Lepcha houses. They wear traditional Lepcha attire woven from nettle fibre and hats made of bamboo and canes. They have all the food they want as the crops in *Mayel* grow a hundred times bigger than normal. The people are immortal. They have a biological cycle that is directly connected to the temporal phenomenon of day and night.

“In the morning they became children, at midday they became youths and in the evening old men and women.”³

This eternal village was once accessible to the mortals and they even had interactions with these immortal Lepchas. It is believed that the cuckoo birds which is called ‘*Mayel-fo*’⁴ in Lepcha were sent out by these seven immortal families to indicate seasons and times for agricultural work.

Some writings suggest that the path to this village is now forever closed while others suggest that only a ‘pure’ Lepcha one who has Lepcha ancestry and speaks the language and follows Lepcha tradition is given access to the place. There are also versions which say that if anyone reaches there by accident, as soon as he or she leaves the village the path disappears and cannot be found again. While one version talks about a hunter who was ‘pelted with hailstones’⁵ when he accidentally entered the village another tells the story of a hunter who stumbled into the village’s path and was allowed to stay as a guest for the night by one of the

³Lyangsong Tamsang, “Nye Mayel Kyong, a Paradise on Earth,” *Lepcha Folklore and Folk Songs* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2018), 18.

⁴ Tamsang, “Nye Mayel Kyong, a Paradise on Earth,” 18.

⁵Charisma Lepcha, this has been taken for a submitted PhD thesis of Charisma Lepcha available in Sodhganga, <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/67279>

couples of the seven immortal families. When he left the village he was given different types of grains, fruits, and vegetable seeds to take home and distribute among the Lepchas. The

Lepchas have ceremony *Sakyoo Rum Fat* which is observed each year after harvest as a thanksgiving ceremony to the immortal Lepcha couples who gave them grains. There is also a prediction where in case of a major famine drought or natural calamity the Lepcha couples of *Mayel* would save the Lepcha people.

There is also a concept of a heaven which is the country of the Gods called *Rumlyang* which is above the sky 'where gods live with fairies.'⁶ What is interesting is that this is a place where one can go, when in need of refuge. What is believed to be one of the oldest traditional account of Lepcha history is one where the ancient Lepchas, who were skilled in clay pottery, built a tower of earthen pots in order to escape the terror of *Laso Moong Pano* who is like the devil or a demonic figure. It is said that fragments of this tower is still found in west Sikkim.

Lepchas as an ethnic group have been a subject of study and they have also been described as basically, nature lovers and worshippers with intimate knowledge of the flora and fauna found in the Darjeeling and surrounding hills. One must keep in mind that this kind of description can be romantic and simplistic and may be proof of internal orientalism.

In recent times there has been a prominent increase in the study and research of the culture traditions and identities of the ethnic communities, earlier anthropologists might have made Lepchas as a subject of studies but with the revival of research Lepchas themselves have become ethnographers and are reaffirming their ethnic identities. According Charisma Lepcha a scholar at the University of North Bengal, recently a man from Kalimpong recounted his travels in search of the immortal Lepcha village of *Mayel*. He says that he reached a pass where he could place his palm on a rock to enter. However, an overpowering rush of emotions stopped him from entering as he knew he could not return. He says that although he did not know of folk traditions he came back after this trip well versed in Lepcha folk tales, was more knowledgeable of folk tradition and could now officiate in certain rituals as a *Boongthing*⁷. The varying and multiple versions of the same tale are characteristic due to the lack of a fixed authorial identity and we cannot forget the intrusion and interplay other politics and other religions. For example, many claim that the Lepcha cosmology includes an Adam, eve and Noah figures which could be amalgamation of folk traditions and Christian ideas that came

⁶Charisma Lepcha, <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/67279>

⁷*Boongthing* is a Lepcha Shaman who conducts rites and rituals.

after conversion to Christianity. Also, in cases of competing narratives some versions have been chosen over others by political governments in power.

It can be argued that the idea of Gorkhaland can be read to be an envisioning of a different (perhaps even a radical) society which is a vision of emancipation. Layman Tower Sergeant says that ‘there were social dreams before any word was invented to describe them...early examples of utopianism provide a basic stratum of utopian social theory’⁸. These utopias that exist in myth, oral tradition and folk songs that are embodiments of the ‘religions’ cultures and traditions can also be looked at as a reaching back to a past in efforts of finding a better way of life perhaps before the advent of the British. The traditions of the Lepchas have numerous similarities with that of other ethnic tribes such as the Tamangs and Gurungs. For example, after death, the soul does not go to a heaven of the gods but is sent back to the ancestral land in the folklore of all three communities. Rai and Tamang, who have different languages and are different ethnic groups, when they invoke their indigenous gods, they invoke the same forest god, *Sime bhume* and *nag nageni*⁸, the god under the earth. The recent revival of ethnic identities have roots in socio-political changes in the region and such revivals are being looked at in different ways and are even seen as a way of division or a fragmented Gorkha Identity. It is a hope that reaching back into the ‘archives’ of similar histories, cultures and traditions will perhaps allow people to find elements that bind them together rather than those that create differences.

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⁸*Sime bhume*, *Nag nageni*, refer to all the ancestors, household deities, the village gods .