

# **Perspectives on Human Rights in the Select Indian English Novels**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English**



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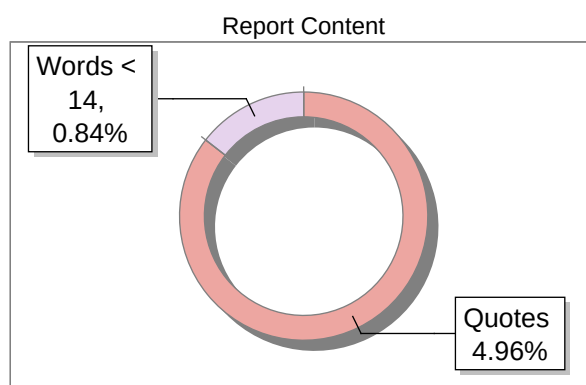
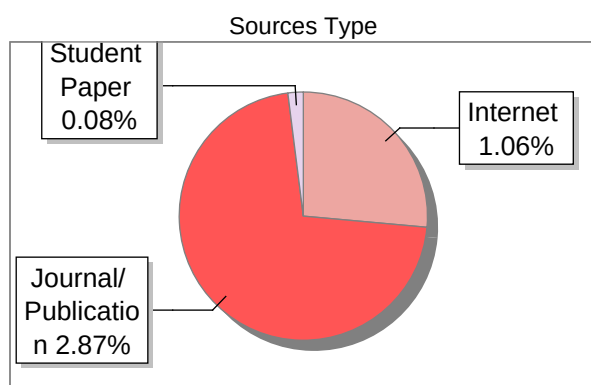
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## PREFACE

Human rights represent the fundamental freedoms and protections inherent to all individuals, irrespective of race, gender, nationality, or social status. They serve as the cornerstone of justice, equality, and dignity, ensuring that every individual is treated fairly and with respect. The idea of human rights has evolved significantly over time, beginning with the natural rights philosophy of the Enlightenment period to modern international frameworks like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These rights are universal, inalienable, and indivisible, aiming to protect individuals from injustice, oppression, and discrimination in various aspects of life. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, human rights are defined as “basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled, often upheld by law.” The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines human rights as “the rights that are believed to belong justifiably to every person.”

Literature has always been a powerful medium for the exploration of human rights issues. By portraying the struggles of individuals and communities against societal injustices, literature brings human rights into sharp focus. Writers use stories to give voice to the marginalized, oppressed, and disenfranchised, making abstract human rights issues more relatable and emotionally impactful. Through character development, plot, and narrative structure, literature fosters empathy and sheds light on the complex socio-political dimensions of human rights violations and struggles for justice.

Indian English literature, particularly novels, has played a pivotal role in highlighting the human condition in the context of socio-political realities in India. Writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Amitav Ghosh, Kamala Markandaya, and Namita Gokhale have addressed critical human rights concerns in their works. Bhabani Bhattacharya explores poverty and social injustices, while Amitav Ghosh delves into issues of displacement and environmental rights. Kamala Markandaya focuses on the exploitation of rural farmers, and Namita Gokhale sheds light on the intersection of gender and societal expectations. These authors use their narratives to examine the realities of marginalized individuals and challenge the status quo of societal power structures.

In Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger*, the protagonist's quest for dignity in a society marked by rigid caste systems and economic disparity directly addresses human rights issues such as equality and social justice. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* portrays the conflict between environmental conservation and the rights of displaced people, emphasizing the often-overlooked human right to livelihood. Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* highlights the crushing poverty and exploitation of rural Indian farmers, underscoring the right to economic security and dignity. Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* examines the rights of women within patriarchal structures, focusing on autonomy, gender equality, and the human right to self-expression and individuality.

Despite the richness of the selected novels in addressing human rights themes, there is relatively limited scholarly work that specifically focuses on the intersection of human rights and Indian English literature. While there have been some studies on individual novels, there is a clear gap in research that comprehensively examines how Indian English writers have treated human rights through multiple literary works. This thesis aims to fill this gap, providing a critical analysis of how these authors use their novels to represent human rights issues.

The selected novels by Bhabani Bhattacharya, Amitav Ghosh, Kamala Markandaya, and Namita Gokhale are exemplary in their treatment of human rights themes. Through carefully crafted characters, intricate plots, and compelling narratives, these works depict the struggles for equality, justice, and dignity. Whether addressing social exploitation, environmental displacement, or gender inequality, these novels are powerful vehicles for exploring the nuanced dimensions of human rights and demonstrate how literature can reflect and challenge societal injustices.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is introductory, covering the concept and definitions of human rights, the origin, growth, and development of human rights over time, and a review of the relevant literature. This chapter provides the theoretical foundation for understanding how human rights issues are reflected in literature. The second chapter explores the portrayal of marginalized individuals in the selected novels, focusing on the exploitation of the subaltern, acts of protest, societal unrest, and the emergence of a new social order. It examines how the characters resist oppressive structures and seek justice. The chapter three focuses on the socio-cultural

dimensions present in the novels. It discusses social norms, values, the cultural construction of society, and the role of beliefs and traditions in shaping individual experiences and collective behaviour. The chapter four deals with the complex relationship between man and nature. It explores the interplay of man, nature, and society, highlighting themes such as environmental consciousness, the psychological impact of nature on humans, and the broader social implications of environmental degradation. The chapter five delves into the theme of freedom and individuality. It discusses the characters' quest for self-identity, the identity crises they face, and their struggles for social equality and justice within oppressive systems. The final chapter of the thesis provides a conclusion, summarizing the key findings from the previous chapters. It offers an overview of the major themes and issues discussed, the social relevance of the research, and outlines future research possibilities in the field of human rights in literature.

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# **CHAPTER - 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Concept and Definitions of Human Rights
  - 1.2 Origin Growth and Development of Human Rights
  - 1.3 Review of Literature
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# **Chapter-1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Concept and Definitions**

Human rights and literature are two key concepts entrenched in the development and idea of society and culture. Both components can exist independently and be interconnected. To decode and understand the definition of human rights and literature, it is necessary to understand the development of the notion of culture and society because these two concepts are the settings where human rights and literature take shape. Culture and society are the product of centuries of evolving human interaction of shared experiences, opinions, beliefs, and knowledge traditions. Therefore, they play major roles in producing and influencing the notion of human rights.

Hence, initially, the chapter attempts to understand and constitute a concept of Human Rights by analysing the definitions associated with it, proposed by popular theorists in different cultural and theoretical frameworks and discourses. Further, it focuses on the development, origin, and growth of the notion of human rights through several cultural histories. By reviewing the literature associated with selected text and human rights, this chapter highlights the literary gaps, tries to create an interface between human rights and literature and sets the objectives of the research.

Society and culture were formed due to the practice of humans to live collaboratively and cooperatively. Society and culture are not superficial concepts but a complicated web of associations and human behaviour. Many social, cultural and community elements are involved in forming this web, which defines human relations and behaviour and gives them dynamism. Culture plays an important role as a dynamic dimension in human life, but it is complex to establish any static definition of it because, along with sociocultural dynamism, its meaning and the perspective of understanding it also changes.

“In the mid-19th century, culture came to be understood as a generalised definition, that is, culture is a complex set of elements such as knowledge, opinions, beliefs, language, arts, laws, habits, and abilities, which interact and some extent,

interconnected with each other. All these elements are rooted in the appearance or practices of a group of individuals, which can be regulated by internal rules and laws. Collectively, this set of elements form a collective identity in individuals, called cultural identity”<sup>1</sup>. However, in the 20th century, challenging this understanding, it was uncovered that the elements of culture can be exploited or changed, due to which the originality of the culture reshapes itself and creates a new cultural identity.

This manipulation or change can happen politically, educationally, and socially, that is, the creation of culture has a mutual relationship with the elements of culture, and they can influence each other. After this, from the middle of the 20th century onwards, efforts were made to describe the culture in different ways based on its elements and affecting factors, in which power structure, individuals’ rights and duties in culture were studied from the perspective of politics; while in anthropology, human relationships and individual behaviour were observed under culture; based on language, meaning creation and sign-symbol was defined in the context of culture; Literary Studies attempted to develop an understanding of culture by analysing folk tales, folk songs, idioms and expressions and; by analysing local rules and laws, an attempt was made to understand the socio-cultural values and moral thoughts in the developing tradition of human. Similarly, by the end of the 20th century, culture started to be seen through stratification, which creates levels like local culture, national culture, and global culture.

In these discussions, along with culture, the concept of ‘society’ was also associated therefore, it became necessary to differentiate between ‘society’ and ‘culture’. “In the context of culture, the concept of ‘shared’ is essential because shared beliefs, values, ritual, conducts and knowledge systems together create culture, whereas society is created collectively by individuals in which there are concepts like social structures, institutions, and relationships”<sup>2</sup>. In short, we can understand that culture provides elements and meaning to guide the rules of society, and society provides a structure under which culture takes its shape based on these elements and human interaction. In this mutual ecology, the meaning, interaction and perspective of the interpretation, meanings and understanding of the elements of culture keep changing.

In this change, human interaction or social interaction plays essential roles that determine the direction of human development. For this human development, the role

of its elements in cultural and social ecology is consequential because, as is already known, social and cultural changes come about when there is a change in the approach of reinterpreting and analysing these elements. Out of these elements, literature and human rights are key concepts that are present in the socio-cultural background independently, and in a connected form, that is human rights and literature have their unit and domain, along with it, this research aims to display human rights in literature as a tool.

Literature as a social and cultural resource is an essential element through which people reflect on their behaviour, practice, understanding and circumstances. In this series of depicting behaviour and practice, human rights, as a concept and an idea, can also be glimpsed in literature. Socio-cultural dynamics also impact the approach to understanding and defining human rights, which results in the creation of a contextualised definition of the concept of human rights.

### **Meaning of Human Rights**

To elucidate the definition of human rights in the context of contemporary times, it is necessary to understand its history, political and philosophical approaches, and adaptation in institutions such as the United Nations, the Indian Constitution in addition to other major sources:

### **Human Rights according to the United Nations**

The United Nations is also an international organisation dealing with human rights (HR) and its confines, and there is another mission of this body, such as general concerns within the boundaries of human rights. The topic of human rights has been part of the United Nations in a type that is called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights drafted by representatives from different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world. It is a document with thirty Articles, and it guarantees some basic Rights to every Human being. The UDHR insists on the right to life, liberty, and safety, which includes protection without discrimination of any kind or nature, as well as equality before the law - this goes hand in hand with our

struggle for freedom from torture and cruel treatment. Everyone has the right to freedom and security of person, thought, expression, conscience, and religion, to peaceful assembly and association. The same rules apply to the right to education, the Right to Work or equal pay. Article 24 - Right to rest, leisure, and reasonable limitation of working hours Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay. The UDHR equally makes sure that all humans have at their disposal the means required for an existence with dignity. Humans have basic needs that are, food, clothing, shelter, and health care etc. The Declaration is considered a foundation of human rights in the modern world, and has been translated into over 500 languages, together with recognition its' influence throughout the globe.

### **Human Rights in the Indian Constitution**

Fundamental Rights are also the Human rights of the Indian Constitution. It ought to be noted, moreover, that human rights under the Indian Constitution are not confined within any definition; however, they are shown as basic rights under Articles 14-35. Human rights as 'Fundamental Rights' of citizens in the Indian Constitution are an aggressive scrutiny that claims to guarantee all its citizens with rights and freedom from any sort of discrimination and dignity. These rights ensure justice and peace in society and provide everyone with a chance to experience freedom, equality & humanity. The Constitution reminds us that we are committed to building an inclusive society where the dignity and rights of every individual are protected. The Fundamental Rights in the Indian Constitution are mentioned as follows:

#### **Article 14-18: Law for Right to Equality**

Article 14: This Article interprets that all persons shall have equality before the law and equal protection of laws.

Article 15: This Article assures that there shall be no discrimination based on religion, gender, race, caste, sex, or birth location.

Article 16: This Article interprets that all citizens shall have equal opportunity in government jobs.

Article 17: This Article reflects the rules to remove untouchability. It shall be rescinded, and any form of it shall be punishable by law.

Article 18: This Article ensures that titles granted by the State shall be abolished, except military and academic distinctions.

### **Articles 19-22: Address the Right to liberty**

Article 19: This Article guarantees that all citizens shall have the right to liberty, freedom of speech, expression, assembly, to form associations, to move about in any part of the territory of India, and freedom to practice any profession, occupation, or trade.

Article 20: This Article addresses that no offence shall be punishable by any provision of the contrary law.

Article 21: This Article ensures the protection of life and personal liberty and explains that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except by following the constitutional provisions.

Article 21A: This Article ensures that all children between the ages of 6 and 14 years shall have the right to free and compulsory education.

Article 22: This Article addresses the right to protection against arrest and detention.

### **Article 23-24: Rules on Right against Exploitation**

Article 23: This Article assures that human trafficking and forced labour shall be prohibited.

Article 24: This Article focuses on child labour and says that children below the age of 14 years shall not be employed in hazardous employment.

### **Article 25-28: Focus on the Right to Freedom of Religion**

Article 25: This Article says that all persons shall have freedom of religion, including the right to profess, practise and propagate any religion.

Article 26: This Article confirms that individuals shall have the right to manage religious affairs.

Article 27: This Article ensures that no person shall be compelled to pay any tax which shall be used for the promotion or observance of any particular religion or religious institution.

Article 28: This Article explains that no religious education shall be imparted in any educational institution which is wholly financed by the State.

### **Article 29-30: Address to cultural and educational rights**

Article 29: This Article ensures that every citizen shall have the right to preserve its distinct language, script or culture.

Article 30: This Article gives the right to Minority communities to establish and manage their educational institutions.

Article 32: This Article assures the right to seek justice in the Supreme Court in case of violation of fundamental rights.

### **Definitions of Human Rights**

As a dynamic idea, the meaning and definition of human rights run through modifications in timespans. In academic and social discourses, the concept of human rights came as a political subject which was initially related to political science, and later, it was also included in other disciplines like sociology, anthropology, law, and humanities. Therefore, the concept of human rights is being defined in different and comprehensive ways in academic discourses. While defining the concept of human rights, Locke endeavours to define life, liberty and property as natural rights which should be protected by the government; Paine notices, "It as an inherent characteristic which should not be violated by the government"<sup>3</sup>, but Paine's arguments have been thoroughly refuted in the discourse of feminism; Rawls considers human rights essential for justice because the principles of justice ensure fundamental liberty and equal opportunity of the individual. Habermas makes attempts to decode "Human rights as power relations and social positioning within social structures in which culture plays an important role"<sup>4</sup>. Van Duzer and Arendt analyse "Statelessness and

totalitarianism and describe human rights as an understanding of '*citizenship*'. Defining or understanding the concept of human rights in the context of postmodernism is a complex task because the web of dialogues and discourses has not bound the subject of human rights within the boundaries of any discipline and its conceptual definition"<sup>5</sup>, hence attempts are being made to define this idea through interdisciplinary approaches.

According to the Collins Dictionary:

"Human rights are basic rights which many societies believe that all people should have."

"The rights of individuals to liberty, justice, etc."

"Rights, as the right to organise politically or worship freely, thought of as belonging inherently to each human being and not to be taken away or interfered with by arbitrary or repressive government action."

"Fundamental rights, esp. those believed to belong to an individual and in whose exercise a government may not interfere, as the rights to speak, associate, work, etc."

According to the Oxford Dictionary:

"The basic right that everyone has to be treated fairly and not in a cruel way, especially by their government."

According to the Cambridge Dictionary:

"The basic rights to fair and moral treatment that every person is believed to have."

Human rights are defined in the United Nations as follows: "Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination."

The concept of human rights takes shape in two directions: first is based on area, and second is on level. Based on area, the definition of human rights is constructed in the context of concepts of community and culture, while based on level, the origination of the definition can be seen at global, national, and local levels. At the global level, institutions like the United Nations underline those characteristics of human rights that are important for every citizen of the world, such as the right to life. However, the ‘right to property’ may be important for a nation or local traditions, but this right doesn’t need to be relevant for every citizen or society of the world.

## **1.2 Origin of Human Rights**

It took thousands of years for humans to develop socially and culturally. In this process of development, this species is engaged in a struggle to create, modify, and destroy its social and cultural rules and laws, which continue even today. As a result of many years of struggle and change, today, human rights are accepted and established in a systematic manner and global form as compared to the past. To understand the current form of human rights, it is necessary to shed light on its emergence and origin because human rights are not any self or auto-created rule, bylaws or right but it is the consequence of many historical events and struggles.

### **Human rights in Ancient India**

In ancient India, we can find the source of human rights in the form of teachings written in the Vedas. According to the Vedas, man has the right to life, the right to perform good deeds, the right to achieve success and the right to perform religious works and rituals. Apart from this, concepts like *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, peace and justice have been discussed in Vedic literature, which specifies the idea of human rights. The ideas of human rights have been discussed in detail in the following Vedas:

*Rigveda*: All human beings are equal. The life of every being should be full of love and respect.

*Yajurveda*: Every being has the right to long life and dignified work.

*Atharvaveda*: Every being has equal rights to natural resources like fruits and water. Every being has the right to live in peace without any fear.

Human rights are also reflected in other texts like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, as well as mythological folklore and *Puranas*. Apart from Hinduism, human rights and duties coexist as complementary to each other in the texts, Jataka tales and teachings of Buddhism and Jainism. The practical aspect of human rights contained in the teachings of Buddhism is visible in the period of Emperor Ashoka. The following forms of human rights are visible in the information obtained from Ashoka's pillar and inscriptions:

Equal justice system for all people: It shows the system of an equal judicial system without discrimination based on religion, caste, and clan.

Right to appeal: Every citizen can appeal to the judicial system against the injustice and immoral activities happening against him.

Arrangement of medical facilities and treatment for the benefit of the human race: It emphasises ensuring the right to health and the right to life.

Protecting the religious freedom of people: It ensures that every citizen can follow his religious teachings and perform religious activities.

After World War II, a unit under the United Nations, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), was formed, whose main objective was to identify and recognise the global ideals and values for the determination of human rights at the global level. UNCHR formed a wing headed by Eleanor Roosevelt, whose objective was to determine universal values by studying various geographical and religious sources and extracting the ideal ideas, practices, values, and philosophical perspectives contained in them. Therefore, UNESCO, through questionnaires, sought opinions and interpretations from intellectuals, thinkers, religious scholars, and activists of the world on the ideas, values, ideals, and practices related to their respective regions. Shinde (2001) has analysed "The views of S.V. Puntambekar given in response to this questionnaire in his thesis 'Human Rights and Literature A Study of Dalit Autobiographical Narratives'"<sup>6</sup>. The relevance of universal values contained in Hinduism and Buddhism. Buddha and Manu spoke of five main human freedoms and virtues: freedom from violence, poverty, exploitation, early death, and disease; and absence of intolerance, compassion, wisdom, fear, and despair. He emphasised the concept of Dharma, in which rights are earned through moral actions. Hence, from this point of view, there must be a mutual coordination between rights

and duties. All religions protect rights in some form or another, but this protection has been done as a duty by the followers of religion.

### **Human Rights in Other Ancient Civilizations**

The earliest form of human rights was developed by the Babylonian civilisation and associated with King Hammurabi. King Hammurabi created the first set of public rules for justice that were carved in stone, particularly known as the Code of Hammurabi (1795-1750 BC). It included rules, like safeguarding the weak from stronger, respecting human dignity and freedom of choice - and how we treat prisoners should refrain from being inhumanely harassed.

The name of Cyrus, the king who succeeded Hammurabi after its downfall as a kingdom, is familiar to even inhuman rights enthusiasts. Cyrus ruled over 25 countries and three continents. The reign of Cyrus is among the few where humanity was treated with respect and well ahead from all accounts, when one sees for most invasions that were pre-planned, those trials had taken place long before. King Cyrus' judicial rules, the Cyrus Cylinder (c. 539 BC) These are conceptions such as religious freedom and the right to property or life. In the human rights context, King Cyrus is best known as a man who set free the slaves. In addition, the Cyrus Cylinder has also ruled against unpaid and forced labour, which gives us an idea of how much they regard the job of workers.

With the above sources, historically, an understanding of the Magna Carta is an important step in determining the development of human rights. It was a political agreement between the English King John and the Barons, which was brought due to conflicting ideas regarding tax; it was the initial written document that protected human rights. They agreed on who would be king and how he/she would work, and they deleted the sovereign's papers.

So, currently, where people all over the globe are still fighting for their rights to be recognized as entitled citizens of our Earth; or not even quite that yet – but just brothers on a planet without borders, we have The Great Charter – some aspirations written at around 800 years ago getting closer to being law. The agreement – that free people would get justice according to the law before any punishment by the king - guaranteed this right but restricted it almost solely to the noble class and land-owning

elites. Thus, it was not integrated at all into the political backcloth of human rights but has become a stake or only subject for elites.<sup>7</sup> Even with this word, the term ‘liberty’ is recurrent in one whole article of Magna Carta and shows an important principle that there are laws within the nation-state which relate to everyone (residents or subjects) having rights protected through it against their king.

### **Human Rights in the United Nations**

Before the discussion on human rights in the United Nations, attempts were made to determine and define this subject from the perspective of many new discourses in the medieval and modern periods. The Reformation movement under the European Renaissance brought about many major religious and social changes, which included the secularisation of education, less interference of the church in judicial, administrative, and social matters, and the rise of nationalism and capitalism. The role of the ‘Right to Men’ document in the development of human rights during the Dutch Declaration of Independence 1581 was important. In this declaration, the suppression of the rights of the people of one country by another was opposed. This led to the establishment of the Dutch Republic.

This declaration inspired the Puritan Revolution, the American War of Independence and the French Revolution. Over time, attempts were made to define and interpret human rights in the framework of discourses such as liberal theory, sociological theory, cultural theory, Marxist theory and feminist theory. Each discourse had its theoretical perspectives to view and understand human rights, which expanded the definition of human rights and enabled it to be established globally.

Given the horrific scenes during the Second World War, it became an important necessity to define and implement human rights globally. Thus, the institutionalisation of human rights began. When the concept of the United Nations was being formed, intense discussions on human rights had already begun. The US promoted the internationalisation of political and economic freedom for peace. The US did not have overseas colonies, so its economic liberalism required the end of colonial rules. This led to the demand for political independence from colonised countries.

As the UN Charter was taking shape, the internationalisation of human rights was in conflict at two levels: first, as the rights were spreading globally, the decolonised

countries were building nationalism, national security, and culture. Second, the US, France, England, and the Soviet Union wanted a system along the lines of the League of Nations to maintain their economic interests (Shinde, 2021). However, intimidation from many NGOs and smaller countries led to bringing human rights to the centre of the new establishment. This led to the UN Charter emphasising “the dignity and worth of the human person and equality of rights” and recognising sovereign states as the final authority in human rights matters. Following a positive resolution of the international ideological conflict, the Human Rights Commission was formed, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt. The Commission made human rights the centre of the UN’s activities.

The Committee involved philosophers from different countries to determine the framework, definition, and parameters of human rights so that the principles of human rights are comprehensive and universal. These included Chinese, Islamic, Hindu, American and European perspectives. From India, the views of Mahatma Gandhi, thinkers, and philosophers such as Humayun Kabir and social scientist S.V. Punatambaker were included. During the discussions in the meetings of the Committee, it was discovered that two types of principles of human rights were evolving: first, as civil and political rights, and second, as social and economic rights.

To give legal recognition to these rights, two agreements, the ‘International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights’ and the ‘International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’, were approved in the United Nations General Assembly. These agreements ensured the duty of nations to recognise and implement these human rights. Despite all the contradictory political and social conflicts, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 remained important. This declaration has been important in the decisions of Indian and world courts. Article 1 of the UDHR says that all humans are born free and equal and should treat each other with fraternity.

### **1.3 Review of Literature**

In this research work, major research papers, books and articles related to human rights and literature published between the years 2010 and 2023 have been studied for literature review. The selected literary materials have been separated into three parts.

In the first part, literary resources based on the definition, understanding, historical and theoretical development and implications of human rights have been classified. In this category, research works of literature analysing the views of various theorists, nations, institutions, organisations, and political ideologies towards human rights have been carried out. In the second part, literary materials referring to selected novels for research have been included in which sub-topics such as marginalisation, discrimination, oppression, violence and new social or world order related to human rights have already been studied. In the third part, research works published to demonstrate the relationship between human rights and literature have been comprised as resource material which attempts to create an interface between these two concepts. Apart from this, an attempt has also been made in this part to review the works available on the relevance of human rights and methods of viewing and understanding human rights in literary discourses.

**Bennett (2016)** has tried to highlight “The connection between human dignity and political arrangement. Bennett has examined the politics behind the creation of UDHR and looked at how it was meant to be a statement of political will for making human rights ‘universal’ today. This Article examined the normative and practical manifestation of human dignity considering reformation challenges within a legal-political framework, mainly from the lens cast by an embodied jurisprudence. The beginning of the article is devoted to viewing history as a concept, and UDHR - is seen through his lens. UNDRR is trying to make sense of a difficult concept — producing an international standard that every country can sign up for and then put in place as they see fit to adhere to their national policy-making frameworks. Central to that was how to square this idea of human dignity, which is universalistic within the state with sovereignty. Adding to the complexity of this challenge are differing interpretations and views on how human dignity may be defined or what it entails, as well as whether (or not), it can also serve as a principle to protect or even promote”<sup>8</sup>.

**Schuppert (2021)**, analysed “Human rights are not only something juridical, Schuppert stresses; they were conceived as a political instrument which makes change happen. He writes of human rights that they are, obviously, law but not in any straightforward way non-political. They steer the course of social revolution through universally agreed compass points - human dignity and liberty for all. To demonstrate

the political character of human rights, Schuppert uses these three key researchers. Human rights are, according to Golder, the moral principles that constitute both ontological foundations of and normative constraints on political practice. He considers it the finest political dogma of our time. Despite being across-the-board adopted, Makau Wa Mutua maintains that human rights are very political ideology. This model explains how diverse groups mobilize under the banner of human rights. As Samuel Moyn explains, human rights embody a perfectibilism in which individual dignity is enforced through international institutions according to standards that are universal and arguably encroach on state sovereignty. It does so by showing us how human rights occasionally merge with ethics and law”<sup>9</sup>. Human rights reflect a commonality of moral precepts, legal normative structures, and political ambitions according to Schuppert.

**Killmister (2016)** discussed “Why so many questions about it or suspicions were given voice. In its essence, the question driving this paper is — how can dignity be both a core feature of human rights and an individual harm; i.e., one that precise actions like torture directly violate? For this doubt of dignity, the author proposes a sophisticated theory to decipher. Fundamental dignity, states Killmister, figures in two ways within human rights texts: It is seen as a property which distinguishes and justifies all other types of rights. This view is also enshrined in UDHR which states that human rights are based on the ‘dignity of man’. A comparable view is taken in the philosophies of Griffin and Nussbaum too, with an emphasis on connecting protection of normative agency and human capabilities to dignity. Dignity, on the other hand, has also been said to be an overstepped concept. Instead, it meant -- especially in the case of torture. Torture is considered one of the most serious violations of human dignity. This slimmed-down version of dignity centres on the very personal, individual injury that results from these violations. This implies that these acts can detract from and damage dignity. When it comes to combining these two fragments of dignity in his identity, the author patterns a divided concept of dignity. This theory of dignity allows for two different types of dignities, personal dignity human dignity. Personal dignity means the standards that individuals ought to set for themselves. The inherent dignity of the human person can be made sense only in relation to a community and its normative standards. Both are the simplest elements of human rights and it can be considered as a basic component in the meaning that

this means merely dignity is like a piece particle or atom for enhancing understanding of human right. Two of the roles for dignity that permit this dual role without contradiction enable Killmister to provide an account which locates his theory in between these two, thereby serving as a seamless bridge. Likewise, dignity is a phenomenological experience both as an individual and collectively in society”<sup>10</sup>.

**Toivanen and Cambou (2021)** highlighted “The importance of human rights in the ‘sustainability’ framework. As demonstrated by authors, human rights are a basic element for achieving sustainable well-being. The basic acquaintance of human rights for the people is that individuals or groups are entitled to justice. This concept ensures that no state can unilaterally determine the fate of people within its territory. Human rights perform as a ubiquitous discourse of emancipation. This universal discourse provides space to address a extensive issues and concerns. The authors appreciate the integration of human rights with sustainable development goals (SDGs) and suggest their arguments. The sustainable development goals to accomplish by the year 2030 are based on human rights. However, there exists a stress between the ongoing programs, initiatives and implementation to achieve the SDGs and the security of human rights. The effects of this tension can be seen in the relation of Indigenous peoples. To logically presented this claim, the research presents a report of the Indigenous population, Sámi people living in Finland”<sup>11</sup>.

**Jain (2017)** remarked that it is difficult to define “Political associations between India and the European Union due to incompatible mean wisdom of the human rights landscape with diligent proficiencies vs nonchalance respect for hierocratic forts at international forums respectively were demonstrated by dominant member countries. Both at one level seem to be committed to democratic values, and yet depending on the historical cultural and socio-political context approach human rights in significantly diverging ways. The EU often angers India by flexing its muscles on human rights. The EU has no nuanced understanding of India’s own highly structured and plural cultural organisation. It seems that the EU has its own understanding of human rights, which is Euro-centric and often becomes unrealistic in expecting from a vast country like India. This gap is reflected in trade talks as well as human rights dialogue. Free trade agreements with the EU and India also pose special challenges; calls from critics to sew in rules on labour concerns, sustainable development or

reciprocity are especially common but hard to reconcile with Indian demands and interests”<sup>12</sup>. India is a vocal critic of the selective application of international organisation and major powers’ prowess in human rights norms as an interference in domestic jurisdictions.

**Bhattacharjee (2022)** explained the “Relationship of human rights with fundamental rights which exists under Indian law i.e., the Constitution of India. Rights are central to the impactful holistic development of individuals and groupings as discussed in this paper. The author says that these rights are not just part of the Indian Constitution but have been an intrinsic aspect of ‘Indianness’, something which you found in ancient times. Besides, international human rights have been recognized through different international declarations and conventions. B. Conceptualisation of India as a Vast Area for Human Rights Protection This research paper conceptualises India will become one of the world’s biggest democratic nations and hence, it covers considerable space in terms of human rights protection”<sup>13</sup>.

This has been reflected in the Indian constitution too; we kept fundamental rights at par with human rights included it, yet even today human rights infringements prevail in India in the form of forced labour, forced prostitution, immoral trafficking, low wages and gender discrimination. Human Rights Act – 1993 by way of example mentioning the enactment that was aimed at protecting potential victims against violation of their human rights. It aims to condemn and prevent serious human rights violations. This would have re-established the duties of states in protecting and defending both honour and freedom as well as the rights of their citizens.

**Vaja and Shaikh (2020)** explored “The issues related to exploitation, caste- system or bad religious practices. This study project is a thematic analysis of the novel written by Bhabani Bhattacharya. The basic argument in the work is how Bhattacharya challenges social standards that uphold injustice and misery via his narrative. It tells the story of blacksmith Kalo and his daughter Chandralekha who try very hard to stand amidst an exploitative society woven around with social prejudice. It also points to the dishonesty of the rich and powerful in using people’s religious beliefs for their benefit as well. But it so strongly critiques how Bhattacharya’s story pulls at the societal institutions keeping marginalized othered. With the stories of

Kalo and Chandralekha, he lays bare systemic injustices that prevail while showcasing the extent to which people are prepared to go against them”<sup>14</sup>.

**Jahan (2016)** reviewed that “In ‘*Nectar in a Sieve*’ of Kamala Markandaya through observation of the representation of the characters, emphasizing that the book details an actual depiction of rural South Indian life and how one’s hunger is suffered. The story is about Rukmani, a woman who must endure poverty and misery throughout her whole life. It takes place in an unnamed Tamil Nadu village. It efficiently represents different kinds of social injustice through the themes of economic disruption, social exploitation etc. imposed by industrialisation on agrarian cultures. Rukmani goes through several struggles with her family, from malnutrition and bad luck in farming to personal tragedies such as the prostitution of a daughter or the infidelity of the husband. Even so, the perseverance and determination of spirit that Rukmani displays in overcoming these hurdles, epitomizes what is arguably one of the central themes on which *Nectar in a Sieve* hinges, the transcending human endurance and hope”<sup>15</sup>. Humanity and exceptional raw candour are what come throughout the story of Markandaya, providing an emotional insight into life for India’s impoverished outcasts. Without trying to romanticise rural life, the book tells that even if it is for the better or worse, modernisation indeed creates changes in traditional society. *Nectar in a Sieve* provides humanity’s perspective of how we cope with inevitable dynamic changes, at both an individual and societal level. It confirms the ideals of strength, positivism and continual struggle to remain alive for another day in an exceedingly hostile circumstance.

**Kumar and Femina (2023)**, analysed Markandaya’s works, specifically ‘*Nectar in a Sieve*’ in context of colonial and post-colonial socio-cultural setting. It highlights “The contrast between Eastern fatalism and Western liberalism depicted in the novel. The dynamic interaction between Eastern and Western world serves as microcosm of the wider East-West socio-cultural clashes. These clashes are in terms of cultural appearances, movements of cultural elements and power dynamics. The work further explores the psychological impact of these cultural shifts on individual consciousness. Researchers focus that the real power of this novel is how it can mirror the inner struggles and outer movements that its characters are encountering in their societal conformities — creating a tender space between identity evolutions”<sup>16</sup>. The authors

comment that *Nectar in a Sieve* is not only the story of one woman's experiences; it is also an incisive commentary on larger changes taking place across post-colonial India as well. Markandaya's representation of the encounter between East and West, coupled with her emphasis on interior transformations defines her as an important Indo-Anglian writer.

**T. G. and Dangwal (2023)** tried to analyse "The formation of female identity by employing psychoanalytical theory. The researchers have studied the character development in the novel by critically analysing the image of the protagonist as a 'woman identity' through her religious, social and cultural worlds. Identity, the authors argue, is a function of birth and maturation through social interactions with family units, localities as well as cultural settings. This research, by applying Margaret Mead's theories, argues that the formation of a child's identity significantly depends on the mother's behaviours. In the case of masculine identities, boys move towards norm-based targets, while on the feminine side, we have two identity processes: first as children and then - in motherhood. This relationship changes, however, as the child grows older. This paper shapes discourses where female characters resist cultural principles and expose stereotypes of Indian women. A story of rebellious bravado in defiance of societal and moral import is reflected as a quest for individuation in the character of Paro. The novel satirically critiques the shallow urban elite lifestyle by introducing Paro as a liberal woman who doesn't fit into stereotypical notions of femininity. Researchers noted that, in general, Gokhale's dramas give depth to a female perspective with its focus on some psychological and cultural factors leading towards one family identity as of an Indian woman"<sup>17</sup>.

**Pilia (2020)** Examined "how environmental motifs unsettle with the socio-political statuses of marginal communities, the refugees as evinced from Sundarbans, in *The Hungry Tides*. The author refers to the concept of 'Slow Violence' by Rob Nixon to describe incremental, invisible kinds of environmental damage that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. By analyzing the character of Nirmal, the paper illustrates how it intertwines fiction and history as narrative to draw attention to dispossessed condition of people by contextualising Morichjhāpi Massacre in a historical paradigm. The review of Ghosh's work is remarkable for the fact that it describes the ecological crisis faced by Sundarban itself and critiques how a post-

colonial state continues to be a contributor of ecological imperialism. The author very effectively links social history with environmental history arguing that justice cannot be served in one without the other and more need to unite these fields for effective solutions. While the paper offers a rich analysis of its characters Nirmal and Kusum, it would do well to consider in more depth what climate change does today as well as literature's stands towards political reforms for socio-environmental justice"<sup>18</sup>.

**Sarode (2021)** examined "Women's images as projected through the selected novel. This is an intriguing analysis of Markandaya's position in Indo-Anglian literature as a popular realism and the successful post-independence female novelists post-independence. This paper tries to defamiliarise the realizations of Markandaya considering how women's identities and responsibilities are represented by their roles played within Indian society from a post-colonial as well as feminist perspective. It explains how women are being displayed in history and currently, their problems faced by them & efforts towards seeking rather than depending. The research also mentions that women used to be only objects and are now stepping forward with their own personalities and rights. In the novels, Markandaya presents through her women characters as spiritually rejuvenated with forces of reason and conscience and otherwise practical in their functional role towards living because though traditionalist such a paradigm of existence calls for tolerance to modernity. Sarode in this critical study gives a recapitulated review of women's consciousness and seeks for equality throughout Markandaya's work. Her books, most notably 'A Handful of Rice', set an erudite narrative framework around the nuances in a woman's life and her tribulations to pave the way for respectability and emancipation. Markandaya has left an indelible mark on Indian literature and it is about time we reassessed how she has altered our perceptions of the spinsters"<sup>19</sup>.

**Nigam and Tandon (2019)**, explained that "How the works of Gokhle progress feminist politics within the narratives that feature assertive and resourceful female protagonists challenging the patriarchal environments. The author, further argues that Gokhle's literature not only captures the complexity of femininity but instead with a critical gaze also subverts social norms and traditional gender norms. As for the characters, Gokhale's works would manifest against personal and societal odds that women face on a broader level. Gokhle's storytelling style encapsulates what feminist

consciousness can look like, which is ultimately about women being transformed from victims to agents of social change. The analysis illustrates Gokhle's construction of her multifaceted, well-rounded female characters that refuse to accept subordination and endorse individuality by providing examples from within the novels. Nigam and Tandon also talk about the intersectionality of Gokhle's work, covering all from caste bantering to class exploitation and cultural identity"<sup>20</sup>. It creates a more comprehensive understanding of the various experiences of women in Indian culture. Aside from that, the chapter denounces social and political structures which perpetuate gender inequality and demonstrates how important it is to have this sort of literature for a change to develop within society. This book chapter shows how Namita Gokhle's works contribute to the area of feminist studies and recast her as a prime mover in post-modern feminist discourse. Her writings are appreciated because she is concerned about gender justice and portrays women in her works with ease. The researcher opines that other than being revelatory of various thoughts as part of feminist consciousness Gokhle's writing gets across to readers an image of a fairer future.

The relationship between human rights and literature is interconnected. The literature serves as a tool to reflect the human rights issues in addition to a vehicle for advocacy and social change.

**Singh, Pramod Kumar (2014)** stated that "human rights, being the birthright, are inherent in all individuals irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, sex, and nationality. These rights are essential for all individuals as they are consonant with their freedom and dignity and are conducive to physical, moral, social, and spiritual welfare. They are also necessary as they provide suitable conditions for the material and moral uplift of the people, given this immense significance to human beings. Human rights are also sometimes called 'fundamental rights', 'basic rights', 'inherent rights', 'natural rights and birthrights'"<sup>21</sup>.

**Wanjari, Anita P. (2015)** asserted that "Violence against Women in the family occurs in every state or every country. It has long been private, but it has become the tragedy of public matters. In many countries, women fall victim to traditional practices that violate their human rights. There are many harmful customs deeply

rooted in the tradition and culture of the society. Indian women are often considered as appendixes of their male relatives or husbands.”<sup>22</sup>

**Rahuman, M. Kalieel (2016)**, explained that “for many years, women have been prevented from having justice in social, economic, political, and constitutional spheres and largely ignored as the ‘Weaker Sex’. The twentieth century has seen a new awareness about women’s marginalised status resulting in the birth of the women’s Liberation Movement. Literature, being the mirror of society, does not reflect the pathetic condition of women but explores the woman’s questions extensively and vociferously”<sup>23</sup>.

**Sahoo, Subrata (2018)** unfolded that “In India, Dalits have hitherto been designated an inferior position; they are granted the lowest place on the Hindu hierarchical social ladder; they are distanced from the mainstream of the so-called purity and cleanliness of the upper caste Hindus, both spatially and culturally. The upper-caste Hindus have deprived the Dalits of their ‘right to life, liberty, and safty of person’. Here, it must be remembered what The United Nations Organization (UNO) inscribed to secure human rights.”<sup>24</sup> Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) reads: ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.’

**Sinha, Babli (2020)** said that in “the aftermath of the Bengal famine, Bhattacharya, like other Bengali artists, approached trauma with a realist aesthetic and an eye to how existing systems of signification were in crisis. This crisis was both a cause of the famine in terms of speculative financial schemes and exploitative social structures and an opportunity to reorder society to consider the inner lives of those at the lowest of the social hierarchy. Realism was necessary to bring an understanding of structures of oppression but perhaps no longer sufficient for representing a traumatised society.”<sup>25</sup> Bhattacharya integrates realism with deterritorialised forms of expression to express horrific suffering and offer a vision of reform.

**Sharma, Rajesh (2017)** stated that “in ancient times, women have been restricted to the responsibility of a homemaker, i.e. of a mother and wife, regardless of notable changes that have come to mind in the position of women in some regions in the world in current decades. The rules that limit women to the home are still influential

in India. Indian women are entirely devoted to their families. They are preached in the names of Goddess Saraswati, Durga, Parvati & Kali. Although India is fast developing, but women in India are still differentiated. Women face problems in every area of life, whether employment, access to physical condition care or home rights.”<sup>26</sup>

**Kamruzzaman and Das (2016)** highlighted that the term human rights was used post World War, especially in 1945 with the establishment of the United Nations. It changed natural rights because it became the subject of much controversy, and the subsequent phrases did not understand human rights, universally including women’s rights. “It is understood between political philosophy and scholars that the history of contemporary rights and freedoms is of ancient origin. Today, the world has accepted the belief that all humans are entitled, and it is a common occurrence that humans are empowered for a respectable existence.”<sup>27</sup>.

### **Literature Gap**

By thoroughly analysing the works of literature selected to review, the following gaps are essential to mention:

- The reviews reflect that Bhattacharya’s *He Who Rides a Tiger* and Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* deal with the subject of the socio-economic struggles of marginalised characters, however, there exists a lack of research works addressing how these narratives frame postcolonial human rights discourses. Understanding these texts in terms of their marginalisation would enhance when they are analysed through a critical postcolonial lens, which could take into account the wider global human rights frameworks.
- The reviewed literature offers an understanding of the socio-cultural dimensions surrounding selected texts without connecting them directly to human rights. For example, *He Who Rides a Tiger* and *Nectar in a Sieve* both illustrate the atrocities of normative casteism and social hierarchies, yet this connection is unexplored in terms of human rights.

- Through the text, Ghosh puts up the battle waged between Man and Nature, most effectively narrated through the tales of refugees in *The Hungry Tide*. There is, however, a literature gap in connecting this struggle to the wider human rights challenges like access of land and resources for indigenous and marginalized communities amidst environment related uncertainties.
- *Paro: Dreams of Passion* by Gokhale seeks to explore individuality and freedom within societal norms. However, there is a lack of examinations probing into how these themes intersect with human rights, particularly concerning the rights to freedom of expression and self-identity in oppressive socio-cultural settings.
- The selected texts highlight the intersectionality of casteism, racism, poverty, identity, and freedom. These themes are essential to explore to understand the multi-layered fabrics of human rights violations. Yet, the reviews lack a comprehensive reflection on how these related themes of structural violence intersect to create cycles of reprisals and violence, which in turn continue human rights abuses.

This research study attempts to address the highlighted literary gaps in literature and human rights discourse by analysing the selected text through multiple theoretical frameworks. These frameworks are elaborated and explained separately in the preceding chapters.

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## **CHAPTER - 2**

### **THE PORTRAYAL OF MARGINALISED IN THE SELECT NOVELS**

2.1 Exploitation of Subaltern

2.2 Protest and Unrest

2.3 The New Society

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## **Chapter-2**

### **The Portrayal of Marginalised in the Select Novels**

Some groups are marginalised, they are pushed to the margins of society and denied participation in social, economic, and political life. They are also forbidden from the resources and opportunities. It is when they don't fit into the social norm due to race, caste, gender, sexuality, and economic status that systematic discrimination is sustained over some time by a society. This concept of marginalisation is a powerful force in drawing attention to the voices and experiences of groups which are less frequently heard from literary and academic discourses. It shows how intricately structured social inequities are and how people and communities experience exclusion. Literature has always been an effective and powerful way to both demonstrate and reflect social injustices throughout history.

It gives voice to the marginalised and accompanies that have never been depicted in mainstream narratives. Literature is one of the powerful mediums through which authors can challenge existing taboos and power structures in society, which may be viewed as literary expressions of activism. Through literature, readers can understand the struggles but also see and respect the difficulties, resilience and capabilities of marginalised people. Following that, readers may begin to reflect on their complicit role in these systems and enhance their understanding of the concept of marginalisation.

The impact of marginalisation in literature is not just limited to its historical background but spans far into current issues. Contemporary writers are going to keep on analysing the experience of being pushed out from dominant positions, commenting on current social problems and injustices.<sup>1</sup> That could be true in the case of Indian authors like Bhabani Bhattacharya and Amitav Ghosh, who explored caste, essentialisation or economic exploitation as an offence to human dignity. In this respect, they engage in the ongoing debate around human rights and social justice by giving a voice to unspoken.

Literature allows people to learn to see humanity in others. Diversity in literary voices ensures a complete understanding of world views; the acknowledgement of the experiences makes audiences feel seen as members of society who equally participate

with their counterparts towards an equitable society. This representation is especially critical within fiction, as it has the power to shape how readers identify and understand their own identity in this world.

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to study marginalisation through the select novels. All the texts are powerful explorations of the lives of the marginalised. Their stories evoke empathy for these characters as they deal with adversity, draw upon resilience and struggle against forces beyond their control that alienate them from mainstream society.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger* follows the life of an impoverished famine-stricken blacksmith called Kalo and his desperate plight to overcome entrapment within dogged patriarchal caste restrictions. Thus, this novel provides a careful representation of the hyper-economic exploitation prevalent in lower castes and presents the all-pervasive nature of caste-based discrimination in India.<sup>2</sup> Through the literary journey of Kalo, Bhattacharya has used his struggle to critique the irrational social hierarchies and how bitter survival tastes in stratified times.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, too, offers a microcosmic vision of the people of Sundarbans. It is here depicted as a place where refugee settlers struggle to protect whatever they can manage to get displaced and dispossessed. A historical event the Morichjhāpi massacre, where the government evicts settlers. By intertwining the lives of Piya, a cetologist and Fokir, a local fisherman, Ghosh narrates the intersectionality of the environment with human rights dilemmas by revealing events from perspectives that are impacted yet left behind in all political and ecological conflicts.<sup>3</sup>

In the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya, the author vividly details experiences of subaltern exploitation and protest as well as represents their impact on new society through the lives of Rukmani and Nathan, rural farmers in India. The subaltern, or the underclass of peasants in the text, who are oppressed by the cruelty of powerful landowners and capitalists, is one aspect portrayed in the novel, especially when a tannery comes that takes away their villages. They are no longer allowed to receive their basic human rights and have access to food, shelter, etc and therefore remain trapped in cycles of poverty. However, the villagers repeatedly protested against the tannery and pursued to save their living stand, but nobody took

notice of what they said-rays of their struggles confirmed how powerless poor people are in such an economic structure.

Set in this place of exploitation of the subaltern and protest, Namita Gokhale in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* traces the emergence of a new social order through some characters like Paro. The story is about the sexual exploitation of women based on their gender and the consequences it has on women in a patriarchal society where men are the power holders. While Paro is better situated within the family and political world, she also suffers from the exploitation of both her political and personal life by men, indicative of a broader practice for privileged women subjected to sexism as a class. Paro resists social norms and challenges her roles as wife and mistress in protest against her captivity. Her public defiance and Priya's inner turmoil illustrate the disconnect between burgeoning freedoms in modern India and centuries-old traditions.

Drawing on the narratives of *He Who Rides a Tiger*, *The Hungry Tide*, *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, this chapter seeks to illustrate that voices of marginalisation are more than relevant today, and it also maintains literature's indispensable right in advocating for oppressed rights and recognition. This chapter brings out the complexities of marginalisation as portrayed in these novels with a close critique and contextual reading and provides an insight into how marginalised are depicted similarly or differently while they struggle against all odds to speak up their stories when it comes to representation.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger* by Bhattacharya, Kalo represents the socio-cultural consequences of contemporary caste-based exploitation where people are shown and made to do extreme things while trying to transgress these rigid hierarchical walls. His journey encapsulates the greater struggle of an oppressed caste, pitted against a centuries-old system dehumanising the marginalised individual over decades for political gains.<sup>4</sup>

Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* features a representation of the marginalised communities in Sundarbans, specifically through the story of Fokir, a fisherman whose life reflects environmental and governmental challenges to which the indigenous population is subjected. Focuses on the lives of characters, whose existence is most unsettled

because it is chronically unstable and shows through their narratives how they fight to belong where society often wants them not to be present at all.<sup>5</sup> Both of these novels are crucial for giving context to the larger socio-political discourse on human rights and social justice as they revive back themes of resilience, agency and resistance against all odds. Through the inner and outer conflicts of these characters, Bhattacharya & Ghosh foregrounds voices that have long been silenced whilst asking readers to examine their preconceptions.

## **2.1 Exploitation of Subaltern**

The term Subaltern, initially used by Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, denotes groups in society, such as the working class, that are subjected to the hegemony of power-possessing elites. These groups are oppressed, discriminated against, and excluded from the society of socio-economic and political majority. Gramsci used the term specify to the working class and other lower classes that are denied access to mechanisms of power. He argued that the inferior classes were not only oppressed economically but also lacked room for expression about their interests and needs in the dominant social-cultural-political set-up.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak expands the theory of the subaltern into naturalised cultural domination in postcolonial research and argues that most people are Indigenous working class, especially in the global South. In her essay *Can The Subaltern Speak?*, she explains how the subalterns, especially women, are oppressed not only through colonial power structures but also by patriarchy. Their voices are filtered and often warped by these hegemonic structures, which is why they cannot speak in a manner that can be heard or understood by the dominant groups:

“Certain varieties of the Indian elite are, at best, native informants for first-world intellectuals interested in the voice of the Other. But one must nevertheless insist that the colonised subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Spivak, in colonial as well as post-colonial discourse, the subaltern class or group cannot voice their experiences and knowledge because this process, too, would be co-opted by elites themselves. This silence also seeps into literary and academic discourse in the form of absence or representation through dominant voices.

In integrating the subaltern studies framework into literature, Spivak underscores the need to recognise and grapple with agency in marginalised communities. This demands a re-evaluation of the construction of history and narrative and to whom those stories belong. Authors such as Bhattacharya and Ghosh seem to respond directly here with their portrayal of subaltern characters in lively descriptions, which echoes Spivak's plea for more accurate representations of the underprivileged experience.<sup>7</sup> They serve as foundational narratives, allowing unheard voices to finally be heard and the invisible to be made visible by representing the presence of those historically left outside of socio-political discourse.<sup>8</sup>

An academic community, who came together to contest dominant interpretations were Eurocentric and elitist, the intellectual movement intended to include marginalised voices in history or raise voices for those who are underprivileged, the theory of 'subaltern' itself was an idea taken from Antonio Gramsci who used it to refer to social groups that are dominated by ruling classes and not given access to any state organs of power.

The socio-political matrix of which subaltern studies is a direct manifestation emerges from the colonial as well post-colonial experiences in South Asia. Colonial administrations, working in conjunction with local elitist intellectuals, monopolised the production of history and often presented colonised peoples as passive recipients of historical experience rather than active participants and contributors.<sup>9</sup> Such a historiographical approach not only strengthened the colonial paradigms of understanding but also marginalised large sections such as peasants, workers, women, and lower-caste groups. Even in the post-independence historiography, there were few attempts to resurrect the neglected struggles of the subaltern classes as nationalist narratives continued largely prattling about elite fates at major junctures.

Subaltern studies endeavoured to correct this imbalance, asserting that it would write history from, emphasizing the freedom, resistance and experiences of those who went unread in ordinary histories.<sup>10</sup> Historians, in this field, used a range of sources such as oral histories, folklore and local records to reveal the intricate pasts of subaltern people.<sup>11</sup> This emphasises the active participation of subalterns in historical events and contests a colonialist view of history as something bestowed upon them by 'elite' intellectuals and colonial rulers. This movement was socially and politically

significant as it dovetailed with broader struggles for social justice and equity in postcolonial societies.<sup>12</sup> Subaltern studies also helped to focus on the stories and perspectives of marginalized groups, thus a more comprehensive understanding became possible. It helped to change the trajectory of historical narrative and create space for legitimizing unheard voices, hence leading towards a more equitable discourse.

On the contrary, the subaltern discourse extended to fields such as literature, anthropology, and cultural studies in terms of critical and inclusive knowledge. This movement has been reflected in post-independent Indian literature, such as in the select texts in this chapter, where an attempt is made to project marginalised figures with physical proximity as well as in psychological depth. The narratives of these authors further highlight the questions of subalternity and function as a literary space by which the social-political phenomenology that has become prevalent in shaping lives at the margins can be explored.

### **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Theory of Subaltern**

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' is an essential writing in postcolonial theory that criticises both the colonial and post-colonial power structure in terms of social-cultural-political representation. Spivak highlights the capabilities of oppressed groups, especially the subalterns, to voice their concerns in dominant discourses. The word, Subaltern, here means populations that are socially, politically, and geographically marginalised by the hegemonic power structures. Spivak states that the subaltern, more notably Subaltern women are further marginalized, once under colonial domination and by Indigenous social hierarchies.

In her essay, Spivak criticises the attempts of Western academics to speak as a representative of the subaltern. She considers their efforts as a position that often serves only to further silence and misrepresent these oppressed groups. To demonstrate her point, Spivak gives the example of *Sati* practice, the ritual immolation of widows. It also looks at how *sati* was interpreted both by British colonizers and by Indian nationalists, each using the act of self-immolation to their ends but without accurately reflecting what women themselves thought:

“The gravity of sati was that it was ideologically cathected as ‘reward’, just as the gravity of imperialism was that it was ideologically cathected as ‘social mission’.”<sup>13</sup>

The British saw *sati* practice as an excuse to say that their colonial rule helped to make people civilised who were "barbaric" in native socio-cultural performances. For Indian nationalists, it was about saving ancient cultural rituals from colonial intrusion. The point that seemingly validates Spivak's argument about subaltern silence under dominant conditions is that in each of these instances, the victimised women who were burned to death as Indian widows by native laws never got a full voice in public debate:

“Of course, the self-immolation of widows was not invariable ritual prescription. If, however, the widow does decide thus to exceed the letter of ritual, to turn back is a transgression for which a particular type of penance is prescribed.”<sup>14</sup>

Spivak also stresses the importance for intellectuals to be critically self-aware when studying subaltern patterns. She also argues a need for representation that does not merely reinforce power dynamics but rather deconstructs how it is visualised, presented, and undermined, particularly in the case of subaltern groups.

“Subaltern historiography raises questions of method that would prevent it from using such a ruse. For the ‘figure’ of woman, the relationship between woman and silence can be plotted by women themselves; race and class differences are subsumed under that charge. Subaltern historiography must confront the impossibility of such gestures. The narrow epistemic violence of imperialism gives us an imperfect allegory of the general violence that is the possibility of an episteme.”<sup>15</sup>

Spivak encourages readers to rethink how knowledge is made and by whom it is being produced. Her interrogation of the veracity and validity of subaltern representations helps to create a more inclusive pitch for the treatment of subaltern voices rather than being marginalised. Her work has significant repercussions on both postcolonial studies and wider debates concerning power, representation, and the politics of knowledge production.

Engaging the theories of Spivak on Subaltern with the novels *He Who Rides a Tiger* by Bhabani Bhattacharya and *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh, these novels are concerned with the voices and challenges, essentially from the marginalised sections. The aspect of the 'Subaltern Silence' is explicitly portrayed in both novels which illustrates how subaltern voices find it difficult to place their narrative within dominant structures with characters from subordinated backgrounds. Bhattacharya exemplifies the obstacles faced by subaltern speech and agency, that Spivak proposed, through his portrayal of Kalo, a blacksmith from what would be considered lower caste in *He Who Rides a Tiger*. Kalo pretends to be a Brahmin to escape, showing the desperation of marginalised sections to transcend the caste barrier and gain social relevance. His journey highlights the nuances of subaltern identity, as Kalo treads upon a world that conspires to keep him in silence and push down his attempts. Kalo is always silenced by the structured way of society over him to show that subalterns often remain silent or distorted in main discourses.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh attempts to reflect the representation of the oppressed group living in Sundarbans, especially through the character of Fokir, who is a fisherman. Fokir, being a part of the invisible and voiceless community, is directly affected by social structures; his life and stories are all inside these 'structured' walls. The novel follows the journey of subaltern characters in their attempts to claim space, voice, and existence amidst an environment that disadvantages them. Fokir's encounters with Piya, an outsider and scientist, demonstrate this complexity of representation as well as the power dynamics that are inherent to speaking on behalf of or talking about subalterns. The novel reveals the problems that subalterns have voices in a hegemonic framework dominated by more privileged audiences.

This critique of the representation of subaltern even appears in both novels in a way that is aligned with Spivak's idea about intellectual meddling. In *He Who Rides a Tiger* Kalo's acts and decisions draw out of contradictions and injustices found in the caste system. Again, *The Hungry Tide* has multiple narratives in which the perspective of the underprivileged is not overshadowed by those of more powerful characters. Spivak represented the subaltern voices which properly recognises the nuance of those considered socially inferior.<sup>16</sup> In addition, these novels demand

readers to critically read the subaltern voices and develop a better sense of how their lives are shaped within socio-political particularities.

On the other hand, *Nectar in a Sieve* illuminates how the subaltern especially the peasants are exploited. Rukmani and Nathan tenant farmers represent oppressed poor who are exploited by powerful. In the novel, Nathan works for the tannery owners who take his land; these scenes portray how economic deprivation meets systemic oppression. The tannery, a symbol of modernisation and foreign exports, changes the village's social order by driving farmers even further into misery.

Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, focuses on the experiences of marginalisation and subaltern exploitation. This novel brings an insight into the rich and complex web of hierarchical power structures, centered around class, constitutional privilege. Characters like Paro and Lenin are some of the many that Gokhale uses to generate a vivid image of how economic, sexual and intellectual exploitation are seen through the lens of interlocked systems which prioritise wealth, patriarchy and social standing.

The contemporary hegemonic discourse around human rights, and social justice seek to correct these discrepancies with stories which are spoken under the theoretical frameworks of Subaltern as proposed by Spivak. Their novels are examples of literature creating space for the voiceless and its potential to help readers connect with them, as well as rethink their own place in patriarchal dynamism.

### **Exploitation of Subaltern in *He Who Rides a Tiger***

Bhabani Bhattacharya, in the novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* lays down investigations of systemic impediments to the journey and challenges faced by Kalo, a representing individual from lower castes, struggling against caste-ridden efforts being made historically. Kalo is a blacksmith and a member of the lower caste, living in poverty with no access to opportunity:

“Kalo walked for hours looking for work. There was no work. In the afternoon he stood by a palatial cinema house where long queues of people waited to reach the box-office windows.”<sup>17</sup>

His struggle is a sorrowful testimony to how the caste system functions in India, which has become systemic and brutal, pushing people to extreme extents from dignity and recognition. Right from the beginning, Kalo finds himself in a vicious cycle of exploitation and discrimination. He is skilled and works hard, yet finds himself bound by the socio-economic limitations of his identity as a lower caste:

“Kalo received a half-rupee for the day’s work. When he claimed the other half, the municipal man said, ‘The rate has been cut. Understand? There are scores of hands willing to work at this new rate. Why should we pay more?’”<sup>18</sup>

Having lost all, he possessed to the famine devastating Bengal, this situation forces him, and his daughter Chandra Lekha to the brink of starvation. This dire circumstance acts as a catalyst for Kalo’s evolution, leading him to question the oppressive social order that has trapped both him and countless others.

Kalo’s strategy is pretending to be a Brahmin of high caste, with no resources or social privileges at his disposal:

“Kalo had transcended the station that birth and blood had assigned him. Exhilaration and new courage filled him.”<sup>19</sup>

The act of defiance is a symbolic protest the caste system as well as a fight for survival.<sup>20</sup> Thus Kalo, being a Brahmin, shows the absurd and hypocritical nature of caste distinctions. Success in this deception shows that caste attributes are socially constructed and can be fabricated which make the entire hierarchy questionable about the legitimacy of these systems.

Yet Kalo’s path is obstructed by structural impediments pointing to the institutionalised form of caste discrimination. When he eventually found out, the repercussion that demonstrates that societies are not immune to change and strict regulation of these borders. The community’s response to Kalo’s deception is a form of punishment designed to enforce the status quo and recreate caste distinctions. It is a social response that ultimately reaffirms an existing power structure to the advantage of upper castes and as such it serves as both punishment for breaking caste norms, while also warning others who would dare to question these dynamics.

In addition, the personal transformation of Kalo also strips away many internal battles within him. His actions are constantly tipping towards the fine line between survival and deception that ultimately putting him in moral and ethical dilemmas:

“Kalo, gazing down at the excited faces, did not even feel angry. He felt stronger than all of them together. His passion had subsided, and a great calm was in him. His face was sad and his eyes softened strangely with pity.”<sup>21</sup>

Bhattacharya reflects the complexity of Kalo’s psychological reactions by portraying his struggle with guilt, fear, and the expectations for a better life for his daughter. The internal war brought an element of humanity to Kalo, making him more of a common man whose journey resonates with an inherent desire for self-respect and human dignity.

The journey of Kalo also illustrates his nature and strength of agency in a context, The caste system largely restricts his life, and yet Kalo also his resourcefulness to act against this. His story functions as a reminder of the resilience, perseverance, and power of human’s ability to be changed for better socio-economic and political status. Kalo, as portrayed by Bhattacharya, is itself a critique of the caste system and an ode to the resilience of people on the margins who fight back for their identity.

*He Who Rides a Tiger* criticises the institution of caste with many examples of exploitation and discrimination against marginalised people. Through these instances readers can get to understand the social injustices that Kalo, the protagonist, and other characters go through:

“Kalo was losing his temper. He would not hear ill of Obhijit. Low-born? Kalo could have laughed. How he had fooled these creatures bloated with caste’ pridel “He is like my son.” Motichand shook his head sadly.”<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the most sensible portrayal of exploitation that appears initially in the novel is Kalo and his orphaned daughter, Chandra Lekha’s struggle to defeat hunger during drought. The famine, triggered by the greed displayed by the rich class in such situations, exposes how vulnerable a marginalised lower caste can be during a disaster.<sup>23</sup>.

*He Who Rides a Tiger* also exposes the exploitation of labour as a form of caste discrimination. Despite being a blacksmith and good character, Kalo can rarely find decent-paying work. Due to his caste, he is destined for economic exploitation, being born into a lower-caste family ensures that one never gets the opportunities of social mobility and ends up doing menial jobs without earning enough.<sup>24</sup> Bhattacharya draws from Kalo's travails to demonstrate that casteism is about more than just being socially isolated, it involves marginalizing and exploiting people into penury.

But later, when Kalo is discovered to be a lower caste who claimed to be Brahmin, his true identity becomes exposed and the privileged community turns on him with no mercy, showing just how entrenched the division in castes remains:

Kalo is not simply ashamed but subjected to public embarrassment, demonstrating how society abuse those who try to expand beyond their assigned social boundaries.

Chandra Lekha's situation also emphasises the deep-rooted oppression and discrimination based on caste. The young girl, being Kalo's daughter, is often oppressed on account of her caste when she interacts with people every day. Bhattacharya brings to light a deeper layer in the story when he unmask the societal discrimination through Chandra Lekha's character and shows how caste atrocities function about all-inclusive societal implications.

Characters such as Biten and Chandra Lekha in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, play crucial roles in presenting the of struggle of subalterns. Interwoven with Kalo, their stories weave together offer an expanded view of the intergenerational and systemic nature of caste-based oppression in addition to the resilience needed to survive these obstacles.

Biten, on the contrary struggles against economic exploitation, social marginalization and portrays the collective subaltern struggle. Whereas Kalo comes up with a plan to fight against the caste system, Biten is just going along with silent resilience. Thus, both the characters may contrast to each other. Biten's life is a story of relentless hard work and endurance, The lack of upward mobility and the struggles that lower castes must endure to survive is epitomized through his character.<sup>25</sup> Through Biten, Bhattacharya paints the sufferings and daily life of marginalised, such as poverty, lack of opportunities and societal prejudice.

Chandra Lekha's tragic journey constitutes the personal sacrifices her father made trying to leave behind his caste-imposed restrictions. She also bears the consequences of societal backlash for Kalo's lie as a Brahmin is revealed. The development of her character in the novel reflects the travails of subaltern women who are not only oppressed by virtue of caste but also on account, predominantly first and foremost as women. Through her character, Bhattacharya exposes what resilience and self-help might look like inside a system of systemic oppression. Her struggles reflect the capability of resistance in oppressed people.

The relationships between Biten and Chandra Lekha with Kalo add a new dimension to it by giving an alternative lens into their struggle. Kalo attempts to rise above his caste lines exposing himself as Brahmin. The character of Kalo shows that caste differences are arbitrary lines in social structure, but to declare himself as lower caste further proves what harsh responses society has for them. In contrast, Biten represents the 'silent' kind of oppression, and he thrives on muted suffering and quiet determination. Unlike Kalo, Biten is not an active rebel against the established order, rather he represents the quiet suffering of those who do not expand their assigned roles in society. The Life of Biten is reminiscent of a marginalised individual who is subjected to economic dominance and social discrimination.<sup>26</sup> Representing the solidarity of shared suffering among the marginalised, the character of Biten is a complement to Chandra Lekha who represents individual and familial experiences with caste-based oppression. Kalo's interactions with these characters show various forms of accommodation and resistance to oppression.

The unflinching development in the characters of Biten and Chandra Lekha throughout the novel reflects that what family, community, or neighbors, in a marginalised community, can do together to raise voice against the oppressor. By analysing closer into these characters, it becomes apparent that Bhattacharya portrays the subaltern struggle in a nuanced and human way.

### **Exploitation of Subaltern in *The Hungry Tide***

The theme of subalternity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is reflected through the ancient and deeper concerns with the marginalised groups. Representing the subaltern class that have come across in the novel, the refugees of Morichjhāpi and

the local marginal communities also illustrate an image of social or economic oppression with lineages from colonial to post-colonial dynamics.

In *The Hungry Tide*, it is the refugees from Morichjhāpi, as a subaltern group who have been forced to migrate more than once. Having originated from Bangladesh Bengali Hindu refugees have migrated to India due to persecution they faced in both religious and economic terms. As Nilima, one of the characters, explains, “They called it resettlement, but people say it was more like a concentration camp or a prison. The refugees were surrounded by security forces and forbidden to leave.”<sup>27</sup> Ghosh brings home exploitation by the government through a graphic account of the latter’s merciless evictions that kill and maim innocent lives, “Many were taken by crocodiles or estuarine sharks”<sup>28</sup>

### **Exploitation of Subaltern in *Nectar in a Sieve***

The theme of subaltern exploitation plays out subtly within the context of traditional rural Indian existence in Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*. The novel examines issues facing the rural poor, evidenced in Rukmani and Nathan’s lives as tenant farmers subject to a broader economy over which they possess no power. The helplessness of the subaltern is embedded in *Nectar in a Sieve* right from the beginning when Rukmani lacks land ownership. Nathan and Rukmani work on the land they do not own but lease from a zamindar (landlord). The relationship between the land and the identity of a farmer is emotional. Tenants like Nathan care for the land they farm, although he and his family are not obliged to because it does little to maintain their quality of life. Rukmani echoes this when she describes their small hut and simple little plot of land: “While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye... what more can a woman ask for?”<sup>29</sup> Nathan knows that his worthiness as a man lies in his connection to the land. But it is a fleeting picture as life as they knew it has begun to vanish with the arrival of industrialisation. When the tannery enters the village, life takes a huge turn for these people. The tannery, as a symbol of industrialisation and modernity, not only changes the physical landscape of the village but disrupts social and economic structures within their community. Accompanied by the lure of guaranteed jobs, but at the expense of destroying their centuries-old agricultural traditions. They pay extremely low wages to local workers who have no choice but to take up this employment in unsafe conditions with no job

security and a complete absence of social security. This displacement is among the most immediate means of exploitation of subalterns. The loss of the land for Nathan and Rukmani equated to losing their means of existing. The displacement is also deeply emotionally wounding, as the land offered both a sense of economic stability and their link to history and their bond with the community.

The tannery symbolises the outside which attacks the aged method colonialism, capitalism, industrialisation tearing at normal agricultural communities and compelling the rural poor into more profound impoverishment and reliance. The villagers are forced to become wage labourers dependent on the tannery for survival as the economy shifts from agricultural to industrial. Being a self-sufficient farmer to wage labour is an exploitation. The tannery pays low wages for the work, and the villagers soon discover that their inadequate pay is hardly enough to support themselves. Besides financial exploitation, workers of the tannery are made to do the labour work in hazardous conditions which makes their life just surviving one more day. Rukmani's sons, Arjun and Thambi who start working at tannery end up being stuck in a system which exploits and undervalues them as human.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, though the subalternity is rooted in socio-economic class struggle but it goes deeper than that; it is also gendered exploitation. The women in the book are exploited in different ways as they belong to rural poor and as well being a woman. The central character Rukmani falls victim to this exploitation. Her worth as a wife and mother is measured through her fertility, primarily her success at producing sons. Fighting with her infertility, she falls became desperate when she goes to the doctor Kenny from abroad. It also reflects the intense patriarchal pressures on women in traditional societies to present a male issue, which compromises much of their value among other people.

### **Exploitation of Subaltern in *Paro: Dream of Passion***

Paro, however, is exploited owing to the compromised socio-economic conditions she faces despite being a part of elite class. At first, she leverages her beauty and sexuality as power, but at the end, both traits inevitably become weapons used against her by men who wanted to exploit her for their own advantage. Her relationship with Mishra, a powerful politician who considers her as an object of desire, as opposed to

acknowledging her as a talented woman capable of shaping her own destiny, is one of the examples that illustrates Paro's exploitation. Mishra not only reduces Paro to her body in this relationship, he also treats her as a political pawn, a status symbol to enhance his social and political standing. A notable sequence shows Paro reacting to advances of Mishra with such intensity that it reveals her emotional submissiveness "Mishra was holding her hand and slyly stroking it; she was responding feverishly, obscenely, like a cat in heat."<sup>30</sup> This scene is symbolic of Paro's dual identity; she might seem in control of her own sexuality on the surface, but not even all that power can save her from the sexist approach Mishra employs to entrap her. Mishra symbolises the authority of patriarchy, a group of men who have exploited Paro's body image and emotions to gain strength politically and strategically.

Lenin, Paro's partner, is the intellectual subaltern man whose life and potential are destroyed by the oppression of his social circumstances and the systems around him. Even though Lenin is more educated than all the other characters, working on a rewarding thesis it never helps him escape the class from which he was associated. His thesis remains incomplete, and he takes his frustration out on those around him. Paro's association with Lenin has destroyed his academic potential. The novel symbolises Lenin's dreams and ambition deteriorating into nothing over time. His bald head and expressions of old age are evident signs of his waning dreams, and the atmosphere emphasizes his frustration when they progress into the future. His intellectual defeat as he experiences is reflected in the text as: "He and Paro would sit on the baked brick floor of their terrace...parched earth all around them, and empty broken flowerpots, withered skeletons of hibiscus and night flowers."<sup>31</sup> In the novel, Lenin is a precedent of a person who falls victim to a higher force that dominates his every day, no matter how educated, intelligent, and inspired he is.

Through the narrative of Paro and Lenin, the novel further enters the broader societal institutions that are brutal to its subaltern subjects. Individuals like Paro, who live a subaltern existence due to their caste and gender, are often used when required but discarded as soon as they become worthless. Although beautiful, and at first powerful, Paro ultimately becomes an aging woman whom society discards once she is past her years of youth and beauty. The novel puts this into words outright: "They were social debris, and there were no excuses either for them or for us."<sup>32</sup> It reflects the attitude

our society assumes towards any entity who tries to question and destabilize its established constructs, be it women or intellectual thoughts, seals who could represent more than just a seal, these are the subaltern subjects within this work. It also serves as a subtle criticism of gender oppression faced by women concerning patriarchal systems. Paro experiences show how women, of any caste or class, are reduced to being objects in for men.

## **2.2 Protest and Unrest**

### **Protest and Unrest in *He Who Rides a Tiger***

The Novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* gives an ominous look at how those social injustices, accompanied by exploitation create an equilibrium in which the people end up becoming desperate to fight against an unbothered and infirm system. Kalo, a common blacksmith first and after that a false Brahmin priest as Mangal Adhikari become the representation of protest. The sense of revolt rises slowly in him against the unfair structure when he is at the receiving end of such injustice. Imprisoned for a petty theft in the period of famine, Kalo's time in jail will mould his view on the exploitation endured by the lowest working class. Where his transition into a priest can be contemplated as a strategy for survival—is also an act of disobedience against the merciless caste: “Anger flooded Kalo's heart, a kind of bitter fury he had not known before. He raised a clenched fist in the air and shook it at the receding train.”

<sup>33</sup> This act represents his quiet resistance to the systematic oppression that continues to push him and his community down.

Biten aids the theme of protest inside the story. The more direct and extremist form of protest is shown by Biten, who convinces Kalo to fight the system. The group hesitantly agrees, and the hungry men are saved from looting a food shop when they take out their hunger on breaking down Dae-seok's door, resulting in his jail time. One can see the desperation of the poor, forced to revolt when all alternative prospects have been taken away from them: “I cried out to the people sitting around. ‘They're killing the old man. They're killing your brother’” <sup>34</sup> Biten brings this innovative principle on to his opposition of Kalo who he positions as a participant in the subjugation. Biten feels only direct action will inspire change: “We are the scum of the earth. Scorned by the boss people, who in their fear and dissonance daily

assault us. They hit us where it hurts badly—in the pit of the belly. We’ve got to hit back.”<sup>35</sup> His language shows the rising anger of the poor, many of whom are only now beginning to recognize their power when combined against a common enemy.

The novel sharply portrays the simmering masses anger, especially during the famine. The people are on the brink of starvation, and their frustration finds its outlet in riots. The depiction of a street procession in quest of food is iconic: “The procession came behind a tall banner. The words could be made out: ‘Food! Food! We demand food for the hungry!’”<sup>36</sup> Food which is one of the basic necessities, becomes a battle cry of the oppressed; injustice in all its malignant forms comes to surface. even Kalo, who learns the secret to surviving within the system appearing a false Brahmin at Durga Puja while actually getting close to the protestors. Seeing a temple servant, Viswanath join the protest Kalo feels an urge that demands to be satisfied at once: “A sudden, unaccountable yearning came upon him to rush off and take his place beside Viswanath.”<sup>37</sup> It is the moment when Kalo discovers how he really feels about holding him own, farming, to his newly found power and by extension standing in solidarity with the oppressed masses.

The novel also features corruption among the rich and powerful which only contributes to the chaos. Lekha’s outrage is laid bare in dialogue: “Who does not want food profiteers to be sent to jail, or, better still, hanged by the neck?”<sup>38</sup> In the limitless and elemental rage of the people her words resonate with a desire to see the rich not only as parasites but also as evil sinners deserving their just deserts. In the limitless and elemental rage of the people her words resonate with a desire to see the rich not only as parasites but also as evil sinners deserving their just deserts. Consequently, Biten is cynical about the temple system and society being corrupt. He criticizes how the wealthy rely on religion to eliminate their wrongdoings: “To patronize the temple and so be absolved of any sin that might have resulted from mass murder. To make an ally of the great god who would not be averse to a good bribe!”

<sup>39</sup>

The novel poses that unrest, although violent and destructive, is sometimes a crucial precursor to justice, but it is not justifiable. The riots over food, and the escalating anger against the elites. Marginalised begin to demand more than mere existence; they

want dignity and justice. *He Who Rides a Tiger* provides an important message on the immanent unrest in an unequal and exploitative society.

### **Protest and Unrest in *The Hungry Tide***

Morichjhāpi incident is a significant part of the novel *The Hungry Tide*. It is a moving historical event that stimulates themes of displacement, resistance and violence carried against a certain community because they are marginalised. The West Bengal government pushed back Bengali refugees in 1979 and perhaps killed many of them too. The refugees, mostly Dalits who came from Bangladesh immediately post Partition of 1947 planned to start a settlement on Morichjhāpi as they thought it as a safe place for rehabilitation. The refugees had long and wider experiences of poverty, hunger, and discrimination:

“The settlers were mainly of farming stock who had been drawn to Lusibari by the promise of free farmland. Hunger drove them to hunting and fishing, and the results were often disastrous. Many died of drowning, and many more were picked off by crocodiles and estuarine sharks. Nor did the mangroves offer much of immediate value to human beings — yet thousands risked death in order to collect meager quantities of honey, wax, firewood and the sour fruit of the kewra tree.”<sup>40</sup>

The novel traces the Morichjhapi incident through a narrative of the memories, narrated by an idealistic retired schoolteacher Nirmal, who narrated about the refugees and how they waged a fearless battle against eviction. Nirmal has elaborated in his diary about the refugees’ determination in tough circumstances to create a new community, even when it meant defying the government. The swampy, unlivable island was transformed by the settlers into a city because they were starving and felt terribly wronged.

Then, with the government viewing it as an illegal settlement on conservation land, it launches a brutal campaign to force the farmers from their land. They call it saving the earth. The government’s actions are one small part, hidden beneath a charade of law-abiding and environmental protection is the abandonment of those on the edge. Refugees who already had to abandon their homes due to geopolitical changes find

themselves victims of governmental manipulation. This shows that they are continuously in a vulnerable and disadvantaged position.

In *The Hungry Tide*, the Morichjhapi incident is crucial as it signifies how human rights and environmental policies are in contradiction to one another and where the government resorts to violence to enforce its rules. Even though refugees were aware that getting evicted would certainly mean death for them their resistance is a testament to how direly they want a place to belong<sup>41</sup>. Ghosh uses this real historical event to indicate how nature, politics and human pain are all interwoven with each other in a complex manner:

“The destitution of the tide country was such as to remind them of the terrible famine that had devastated Bengal in 1942 except that in Lusibari hunger and catastrophe were a way of life.”<sup>42</sup>

The resistance of residents against eviction from Morichjhāpi in the novel serves as an evocative statement of the human will for dignity and self-preservation. Among the refugees, are mainly Dalits who have already been displaced and marginalised. This resistance represents more than a struggle for territory, It is a battle for their lives as they resist the forces of imperialism that have oppressed them.

Resistance opens with the refugees’ refusal to accept Morichjhāpi as a death-trap, or an island that defies inhibition Despite the ongoing threat of being evicted, settlers clear land, and establish homes and crops that make them feel secure. The fact that they even went to the extreme extent of going on hunger strikes shows how desperate these men are to escape their plight, essentially expecting some humanity in a landscape that has historically been unmoved by its existence.

The refugees are also getting organised and more hostile in their opposition to the government’s effort to evict the settlers. So, for example, they resist, build the human barrier, and invite others to assist them. It is the real actions of a marginalised group, that all of them have adequate will and power to protest against their oppressor and bring change in the worst condition.<sup>43</sup> This resistance is physical as well as a powerful and ethical stance against their objectification which has continued for centuries.

The socio-political implications of this resistance are portrayed through the characterisation and narration, including Nirmal's documenting approach to events. Those reflections illustrate the underlying injustices at work in refugees' suffering and how it links to our overall society. Nirmal's writing highlights the consequences of this moral bankruptcy, arguing that ecological conservation and legalistic order have taken precedence over the rights and welfare of human beings who are embroiled in an industrially induced war for survival. These actions of the government are represented as a part of a larger social-political environment where every marginalised sacrifice their rights for the greater good.

There are many sociopolitical repercussions for the resistance. It reveals the tension between state policies that seem to protect human rights and those supposed to defend against environmental destruction and how these affect lives left stranded by both the plight of the refugees itself demonstrates that governments should use a more inclusive and empathetic strategy to govern all citizens, which can only be done by acknowledging the historical as well as socio-economic inequalities that foster such conflicts.

The resistance also points to how deeply colonial and post-colonial power relations are embodied in today's structures of society. The marginalisation of refugees stems from a colonial legacy in which displacement and exploitation was the norm, currently exhibiting as historically rooted violence perpetrated against these groups. Ghosh utilises the context of this narrative to examine histories and present continuities associated with colonialism along with the simulation of forms of oppression by modern states under different names.

Finally, the refugees resisting and being massacred rewrite collective memory and historical determinism. While documenting these events, Ghosh makes it impossible for readers to look away or to ignore the inconvenient truths of past and present, that question predominate narratives in national consciousness. The story of Morichjhāpi is a reminder to heed the voices and lives of subaltern, ensuring that their narrative does not disappear from history.

Nirmal and Kusum play a significant part in *The Hungry Tide* for the narrative of protests that are born around the forced eviction of refugees from Morichjhāpi. Each

of their roles offers a slightly different perspective on the battle, and together they honour it both as an intellectual struggle and in its emotional resonance.

Nirmal, a retired schoolteacher, and an idealistic romanticist is touched by the fates of these refugees, so he becomes their intellectual accomplice. The Morichjhapi scenario and resistance launched by refugees: The readers get a descriptive version of the story from his journal entries.

These incidents expose the frustration that Nirmal has with what the state is doing, and how he starts understanding Marginalised people. The despairing struggle for survival of people by diving in deep on an intellectual and emotional level to rationally dismantle the ideas that led these protesters there, readers get a complex understanding of why these people are willing to take such extreme steps.

Nirmal plays an important part as he offers a historical and philosophical context to the resistance. In this sense, the struggle of refugees is filtered through his experience as an educator and his connection to principles like justice, equality etc. Through his writing, Nirmal tries to give voice to the voiceless and tries to tell readers about their courage and the harsh realities they deal with.

However, Kusum depicts the life of refugees. Through her, readers get to know her story of displacement and struggle. She has a life of exile and tribulation. Her motivation to fight against the resistance is for having a safe future. Kusum's story is a testimony of the powerlessness and resilience among marginalised women who get caught in between disrupted societal norms.<sup>44</sup>

Kusum gives speeches and her active participation influences everyone, through her actions, she becomes an important part of the protest. She gives voice and hope to the marginalised who seek a peaceful existence with dignity in a place that they call home. Kusum epitomises the exceptional courage and leadership of women in social movements. Kusum's bond with Nirmal beautifully illustrates the blend of intellectual solidarity and ground-level struggles, it Shows how each person supports as well as strengthens one another.

The roles of Nirmal and Kusum, together, reinforce the different nature of resistance in a narrative. Nirmal provides the intellectual and historical background, and Kusum

embodies the emotional front. These personal takes and the interactions among characters contribute a compelling storyline of how challenging systemic oppression can be.

The individual stories of Nirmal and Kusum in *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh play an essential role in the larger subject of unrest, by entwining their tales with the collective resistance faced by underprivileged and marginalised communities in Morichjhāpi. These experiences paint a bigger picture of the emotional and intellectual passions which consumed individuals who were caught amidst socio-political upheaval that was fraught with conflicts in national identity.

The repercussions of the anti-eviction protests in Morichjhāpi, and the State's counter-response, detailed so vividly in *The Hungry Tide* points towards societal alienation; firmly rooted within deep socio-political chasms underlining deprivation faced by marginalised communities. The protests by the refugees whose demands are driven by a desperate sense of urgency for their basic right to safety, reflect a story of how deliberate violence continues in systemic oppressive tactics that are used to hold power.<sup>45</sup> The combined efforts of the residents of Morichjhapi to make the unwelcoming island inhabitable symbolise their solidarity and unity as a group. They work in collaborative groups of men, women, and children to construct homes or form a united community. This unity with one common cause illustrates the solidarity when adversity strikes, their collective memory falls then echoing community resistance.<sup>46</sup>

The government, however, considers the Morichjhāpī settlement as an illegal intrusion onto protected land and reacts with escalating violence. These are part of a wider socio-political framework represented by environmental politics and legal enforcement that authorises such action against people who are often at the bottom of society while promoting state-centred development without addressing historically rooted reasons for marginalisation:

“It was true that here, on the margins of the Hindu world, widows were not condemned to lifelong bereavement: they were free to remarry if they could. But in a place where men of marriageable age were few, this meant little. Here, Nilima learned, even more than on the mainland, widowhood often meant a lifetime of dependence and years of abuse and exploitation.”<sup>47</sup>

The government engages in a variety of repressive tactics from denying providing basic supplies such as electricity, water, and food until finally they violently evict families. The goals of these actions are to disperse the settlement but also to instil a chilling effect among other marginalised communities considering such challenges:

“The rumors grew more and more disturbing as the day passed; it was as if war had broken out in the quiet recesses of the tide country.”<sup>48</sup>

The narrative of Morichjhāpi in *The Hungry Tide*, however, delves into the wider socio-political backdrop behind these protests and subsequent state action. It reveals how the inherent systemic inequalities and power imbalances allow for the continued marginalisation of communities. Readers also get to know that Government measures are part of a larger plan to silence democratic and progressive voices under the name of restoring law & order. This simply reminds the reader about the ongoing battle between minorities and authority, an age-old war where oftentimes state authorities resort to extreme measures so they can stomp on any voices raised against it.

To sum it up, *The Hungry Tide* elaborately portrays the struggle of resistance and repression of Morichjhāpi refugees. Through his novel, Ghosh also captures the unending struggle of marginalised communities as they fight a corrupt and violent state. This cyclical narrative emphasises the ongoing nature of these conflicts. Thus, the novel also highlights the importance of understanding and eradicating such an intervening cycle to build an equal society.

### **Protest and Unrest in *Nectar in a Sieve***

The theme of ‘protest and unrest’ are highly applicable to the rural population in Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* as the people fight against industrialisation and economic exploitation during their time. When a tannery comes to the village, it threatens their way of life and instigates protests and movements among the villagers particularly the young, who do not want to neglect the implacable status quo. The novel presents the inside and outside battles, coming about because of the pressures between the villagers and new economic order. The impact of the tannery on the fabric of village society is made all roads by a catalyst for unrest.

As some villagers, Rukmani, and Nathan in particular, find it increasingly difficult to survive as farmers the traditional bonds of community start to break down while other villagers, such as their son Arjun and Thambi drift towards earning a wage labouring at the tannery. It resulted in wage labour at a massive industrial scale creates strains between husbands and wives, parents and children, siblings, within households and across the village.

Protest in the novel occurs as a significant event when the workers at the tannery, led by Arjun and Thambi stage a strike to demand better wages and working conditions. And this refusal is a direct assault on the economic exploitation they must endure as wage workers. At first Arjun is glad to have a job at the tannery, his chance for economic freedom as he knew it. He and the other workers know that the tannery owners, who profit enormously from the villagers' labor, will not give them a fair wage or decent working conditions. The workers' strike could be seen to assert their rights and take aim at the system that has forced them into poverty. The statement by Arjun: "We do not ask for charity, but for that which is our due"<sup>49</sup> is a summation of the workers' anger and feeling of justice and self-respect. Although the protest ultimately fails. The tannery owners replace the striking laborers easily with alternative workers, confirming that any form of resistance in a system of subalternation means nothing as those who are subordinated can quickly be substituted for other cheaper hands to exploit.

This failure further emphasizes the powerlessness of this village people in relation to industrialisation and foreign capitalistic exploitation. It also underscores the generational division within the village. The youth like Arjun and Thambi can barely wait to challenge those tannery owners but the establishment of Nathan and Rukmani from an older age is seeped into a resigned acceptance of their immutable lot. Nathan, a lifelong farmer doesn't fight the changes the tannery has brought. To him, staying alive is about outlasting and evolving — not fighting back. The generational divide showcased in their disagreement is part of larger cultural trends — the young trying to revolt against an established world order, and more senior citizens attempting to preserve values from bygone ages.

The workers' strike can be considered as one of the most crucial moments, it also shows how useless and in vain are protests when powerful structures manage to hold

them down. Dejected, Arjun complains, “The people will never learn. They will rot before they do”<sup>50</sup> Its failure additionally discloses how collective action by the subaltern is severely restricted in a social order where industrialization and capitalism have grown too strong to be meaningfully contested.

### **Protest and Unrest in *Paro: A Dream of Passion***

The themes of protest and unrest, in Namita Gokhale’s *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, are quietly intertwined within the narrative as more personal rebellions by individual characters against the societal restraints formed to define and control them. It is an unusual narrative that brings the theme of protest but not necessarily as portraying a mass movement or revolution in conventional sense; it takes place in the internal conflicts with characters like Paro, Priya and Lenin who collide against patriarchal norms, class boundaries and other expectations by male dominated society for women.

Paro explores anger through rebellion, most of the protests in the novel appears by the character of Paro, who personally rebels against gender roles in the male dominated society. In the novel, Paro often refuses to reconcile herself to prescribed roles of wife and mistress or traditional gender roles. What comes off as a social upward mobility through her marriage for Mishra, transforms into an image of life with lateral restriction that many women in the Indian context are subjected to.

But Paro never falls into the obedient wife role. She doesn’t act coy, and she isn’t ashamed of herself for wanting things so. One of his most powerful scenes has Paro confronting B.R. Mishra’s mistress Priya in a public setting; the scene captures the ironies and tensions inherent in societal roles carved out for women. When Paro confronts Priya, it is not just the attack on another woman but a metaphorical fight against a patriarchal system of women vs. women for male validation. When she does this during the confrontation, it is a raw movement of defiance against the patriarchal values that have dominated her existence: “My husband and his secretary are at it again. Only, I thought, Priya, that you were my friend.”<sup>53</sup> Her acknowledgment of the hypocrisy of her situation and how she challenges all societal norms with every personal relationship is an act of rebellion.

While Paro's rebellion is explicit and aggressive, Priya's unrest is secretive and insulated. A middle-class woman Priya is living a life full of disgruntlements striking balance with the limited access to her desirable future. Her husband Suresh personifies the traditional, conservative mores of Indian society and there is no passion or love in their marriage. Priya and B.R have an affair — romantically she is seeking refuge from her life but simultaneously it exposes the reality that playing those roles has left her unfulfilled. The complete restless nature of Priya is embodied by her jealousy and rage for Paro. She finds Paro to be beautiful and independent but is all too aware of her own shortcomings. This internal war turns into a form of rebellion, wherein Priya not only challenges the norms that have decided her worth as a woman in appearance or success, she resists juxtaposing beauty or strength as silos and the social narrative categorises them. Her rarely spoken revolt materialises as her cynical worldview along with the understanding that all the systems around her are built on non-uniformed grounds.

The novel also gives the impression that Priya finds much to be discontent within a society where the overarching societal structures contrive against women's liberty. As much less explicitly rebellious than Paro, but her own protest society's defined role for women is symbolised in her choice to still have an affair with B.R. even if she knows it will come to nothing. In her piercing silence, the novel shares glimpses of a familiar melancholy shared by women who find themselves stuck in marriages and societal expectations with little recourse for open rebellion.

Lenin's revolt in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is against the socio-economic system. Lenin has trouble navigating a world that values money and social status more than intellectual pursuits. Lenin's intellectual protest also speaks through his disappointment in the power systems that determine what happens to those living around him. He is in love with Paro, whom he loves with a desperate passion, and shares her cruel frustration of social oppression. Lenin finds himself dissatisfied, and his unrest is representative of the class struggle in general: he now understands that his education is meaningless, as the world only values material wealth.

Besides the internal insurgencies of the characters, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is an allegory quietly pointing at social mechanics retaining exploitation and malaise. Whilst such a representation of elite class, their excesses, and moral fallacies, in the

novel works as a protest against the pervasiveness of corruption and hypocrisy special to the lives of wealthy. While critiquing the manners in which the elite emotionally and economically strip those beneath them, Gokhale also demonstrates how their own kind might be something of a victim itself.

## **2.3 The New Society**

### **Emergence of New Social Order**

The characters' experiences in *He Who Rides a Tiger* and *The Hungry Tide* show the varied and complex nature of their struggles and resilience in adapting to new societies. In this way, while contrasting these experiences one may gain a deeper perspective on how individuals navigate the complications of marginalisation and struggle towards finding their place in unfavourable ecosystems.

Kalo's transition into a new societal position in *He Who Rides a Tiger* is fueled by his need for survival and recognition. Born into the socially low caste of blacksmiths, he knows his place in a marginalised world where everybody has concrete rules to follow. His adaptation to a Brahmin identity is an approach to attain social mobility, to gain the privileges that he was systematically deprived of from birth due to his belonging to a lower social caste.<sup>54</sup> It is a courageous effort to assimilate into another society that becomes challenging and complex with the desperate leading motive of seeking recognition and endowing dignity:

“It was a thick, brand-new thread with nine white strands, no simple thread but a Brahmin's holy emblem. Putting it on had involved a moral struggle. The terrible fraud of posing as high of caste, the highest when he was so far down in the scale. No man in Bengal could ever before have dared such rashness. Doubt had preyed on his mind. Where would this end? Did he remember precisely what B-io had told him? Did B-io forget to tell him something he had to know? He had sat quietly, undecided, the holy thread in his limp hands. Did B-io, hardly believing that the moment would ever come, withhold some important detail of Shiva's rising? Would that he had given a more complete picture of the way to pull off the fraud. But Kalo, listening to his strange talk, had felt more amused than convinced, for, in those days, hope had not died in him yet, the hope of making his bread by honest sweat.”<sup>55</sup>

His decision to embrace the identity of a Brahmin is indeed fearless and desperate since it was marked as anyone attempting to interfere with the established societal norms for some privileges which have been snatched away from his social and personal life. The consequences of the social transformation of Kalo into a new order outline society's unwillingness to accept such changes. Kalo's inability to become a permanent part of the higher caste speaks about what he is up against and the limitations of individual efforts to challenge systemic oppression. Bhattacharya, through the portrait of Kalo, outlines the barriers to social mobility and the resilience of societal structures that continue to inequality.

On the other hand, *The Hungry Tide* reveals more perfect forms of adjustment as the characters try to navigate and adapt to a new way of living around the Sundarbans. For Kusum and the other refugees, social adaptation is a collective effort to build a new structure from nothing. Together, the refugees clear the land partially and manage to build a house on it so they can start the journey of their new life. This adaptation is a physical, emotional, and psychological readjustment of living to escape from the trauma of displacement and loss. The experiences of the refugees reflect the strength of communal bonds and the importance of collective action against systemic and established oppressions.<sup>56</sup>

Together Kalo and the Morichjhāpi refugees exhibit phenomenal resilience, but in almost antithetical forms. Kalo finds himself lying to move forward and grow, showing an individual battle against institutional suppression. His allegory is riddled with inborn ambiguity and the never-ending trepidation of retribution from civilisation. *The Hungry Tide*, on the other hand, allows for strength, by defining adaptation through community and shared purpose. Through continued challenges from external elements like state and environmental factors, the refugees developed an opportunity for resiliency that allows them to rebuild their lives collectively. 'Collective efforts' is an important point in both novels. Kalo, at his individual level, tries to move forward in the social structure by adopting Brahmin identity but is pushed back into the lower caste category by the collective efforts of people of the upper caste. An alternative to this individual effort can be seen in *The Hungry Tide*. In this, the refugees, instead of reacting at the individual level, collectively try to acquire those elements which they cannot possibly get due to the set social norms.

*Nectar in a Sieve*, by Kamala Markandaya, examines the deep social constrictions resulting from the consequences of industrialisation and modernisation upon postcolonial India. The novel shows how these forces are at work in shaping the 'new social order' whose pattern is set against the traditional village life. It is evident by a creation of completely new strata and the conversions in time-honored ethics, and with people that are possibly welcomed or cast out, of this new created nature. The presence of the tannery in the village indicates the advent of the new social structure, a movement from "the old time" agricultural society influenced by changing times and industrialisation up to capitalism.

In the context of postcolonial India and its gradual progression into global economy, this transformation is symptomatic of a wide array reflecting societal evolutions. There had always been a small economy of subsistence farming in this village for generations. That all begins to change with the rise of the tannery though, and people start working for wages instead of growing food. Young generation particularly Rukmani's sons Arjun and Thambi take part in this new working-class world and move up the socio-economic ladder leaving behind their agrarian background. This shift represents a growing professionalisation of villagers into a capitalist economy where landownership, once essential to status and power, was ceasing to be as important. New social classes arise industrial workers and factory owners which changes the dynamics of power.

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Paro the protagonist, encounters a new order in postcolonial India, struggling to seek the traditions and values of old when modernity has shifted societal recognition and relationships, having toppled age-old power structures. She does not play the dutiful wife or mistress as tradition dictates. Instead, she proudly wields her sexuality and is an active part of the dynamics in relationships she chooses for herself so that they play to her strengths. Gokhale, through Paro shows the limits of patriarchy that determine the fate of women and are being nagged by those who want a voice, it is this very force which symbolizes phases. Paro's connections with strong men like Mishra testify to that friction between the old and new values, where wealth and social clout account for more than ever while at the same time personal autonomy and sexual passion are becoming severe compulsions in women such as herself. It also underscores the specific ways in which this burgeoning

social order harms men as well. Men like Lenin, who was Paro's intellectual companion, have become insecure in this new society where signs of achievement and power are no longer solely linked to intellect or class lineage.

### **The New Society in *He Who Rides a Tiger***

Kalo, in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, is an ambitious character who attempts to uplift his social class status by adapting the Brahmin identity, but this turns out complex because of the desperate need for acknowledgement and pride. Moreover, this acknowledgement and pride are absent elements in his social class. He lives as a blacksmith and belongs to a lower social class which restricts his growth and opportunities. Him appearing as a Brahmin is an aspect through which he challenges the established norms in society and tries to gain the privileges that have been denied to him. Kalo understands that adopting a new and elite caste identity is the only alternative to breaking the limitations caused by his caste. It needs modifications in physical appearance besides assimilation of behaviours, mannerisms, and practices associated with the upper caste to impersonate a Brahmin. Eventually, Kalo learns the ways and practices to settle in a Brahmin family. His success in such performances shows his intelligence and adaptability and the performative nature of caste distinctions in the community.

The initial success of his performance brings a taste of the respect and opportunities that he never received as a Brahmin; he has access to the resources that were denied to him previously. Ultimately, the caste equation has changed in his favour, and he experiences a sense of validation. It reveals the arbitrary nature of social hierarchies and how caste indicators can be made and adopted through Kalo's experiences. However, this adoption creates an inner conflict and tension in Kalo.:

“Out of that protest he had acted mutinously, challenging man and god. With what result? He had put on a mask to fight back as a Brahmin. With each breath, he let himself sink deeper into “sacrilege,” that sacrilege which, in Brahminic accounting, must bring about its retribution.”<sup>57</sup>

He is driven by moral dilemmas, he frets about the rightness of his deceit and its implications to Bhonti, his daughter. The internal conflict that Kalo faces highlights

the psychological damage of leading a double life and going against longstanding cultural principles.

The moment at which Kalo's journey takes a turn is when the inevitable disclosure of his true identity occurs:

“No? There was a glow of anger in Kalo's metallic face. He clutched the yellow scarf on his body, pulled it off and bared his chest. He wore no sacred thread.”<sup>58</sup>

The Brahmin community reacts violently, highlighting their insistence on adhering to the class system and not breaking boundaries. This caused Kalo to encounter public shaming, ostracism and humiliation and his constructed respectability was ruined. It highlights the continuation of caste-based discrimination and the difficulties that individuals face while moving beyond their socially sanctioned roles. Though in the short-term, his social mobility upturns caste hierarchy, more importantly, it illustrates how caste thrives because of power dynamics. Kalo does not permanently become a part of the upper caste members, critiquing how individuals cannot accomplish changes by themselves in larger systems because of their limited potential. Kalo's story outlines the formidable barriers to social mobility and resilience of societal structures that constitute inequality. Kalo's impersonation of a Brahmin and following all the practices that constitute the identity shows that the markers of caste are fluid, flexible and loose and can be manipulated. However, Kalo's rejection of the Brahmin identity shows that this manipulation is not so simple or natural as it interferes with the foundational beliefs and privileges of the elite caste. This interference challenges the foundations of predetermined and established social structures. The exposure of Kalo's true identity results in social boycott, economic blockade, and physical abuses against him. This effect reflects a collective effort by the upper caste to reassert the boundaries that define social order. The punishment meted out to Kalo outlines that by interfering with the established social structure and power dynamics, harsh consequences will be faced by the collective efforts.

### **The New Society in *The Hungry Tide***

The plight of the refugees, who make a life for themselves in Morichjhāpi, is the story within *The Hungry Tide*, and it illustrates their struggle to attain a sense of

permanence, respect, and belongingness. Almost all the refugees are Dalits who have suffered long years of statelessness and marginalisation. Benegal transforms the refugees' journey to a new homeland at Morichjhāpi, an isolated island, deep in the recesses of Sundarbans, into an allegory for one marginalised group's long walk for a home against all residual political-social odds that still refuse them security or respect. When getting to Morichjhāpi, the refugees face a tough and hostile atmosphere but through resilience and determination, they transform the land to escape from the subjugation and poverty that have defined their lives. Clearing the land, constructing homes, and sowing seeds is a form of survival an opportunity to belong again; it marks their attempt at regaining control over their lives.<sup>59</sup> This shift reflects their new aspirations and resolutions. There they dream of living worthily and independently, where home is longing for them. Yet, this journey is full of hardships. The Sundarban is a place where the dense mangrove forests, frequent flooding and dangerous wildlife make human settlement difficult. And yet, the refugees prevail by capturing their collective spirit and survivability.

Their will and drive to adjust with nature also show how even when everything is against them, all they want is a home. However, apart from the natural issues, the settlement is more challenging because of the socio-political obstacles they face. The West Bengal government calls their settlement illegal, intruding on protected land. The state reacts in the cruel way, first by imposing blockades and finally using violence to evict. The harshness of this response is indicative of a general patterned behaviour observed from the state towards its repression, especially against those who are considered weak and opposed. It is a strategy of starvation and deprivation where the blockade encircles as it strangles essential supplies such as food, water, and medicine. This highlights the systematic and structural nature of oppression where the state maintains control and authoritative decisions. Refugees demonstrate incredible resilience and solidarity through this oppression. They organise protests, build human barricades and call on the broader public to support them in their struggle for habitation:

“Then, as if to put an end to our speculations, a police speedboat came roaring down the Bagna River. Moving at great speed, it drew level with the settlers’

rowboat and began to circle around it... The people in the boat began to shout in unison, ‘Amra kara? Bastuhara.’ Who are we? We are the dispossessed.”<sup>60</sup>

Thus, these acts of resistance are the representation the collective power and courage of marginalised communities. The novel highlights the strength of common identity in battling against the state’s unethical initiatives in both India and Bangladesh:

“But in time it came to be learned that they were refugees, originally from Bangladesh. Some had come to India after Partition, while others had trickled over later. In Bangladesh they had been among the poorest of rural people, oppressed and exploited both by Muslim communalists and by Hindus of the upper castes.

“Most of them were Dalits, as we say now,” said Nilima. “Harijans, as we used to say then.”<sup>61</sup>

Two of the key characters, Kusum and Nirmal, embody the theme of acceptance and rejection at a personal level, mirroring societal tensions and discrimination. Kusum embodies this struggle in its emotional and moral complexity. Her personal history of displacement and loss contributes additional support to the narrative and illustrates the impacts of social and political marginalisation, highlighting the emotional and psychological dimensions of acceptance and rejection. The courage and leadership of Kusum become a source of inspiration for other refugees and highlight the importance of individual agency within the broader collective struggle. Her character symbolises the fortitude, and endurance of the refugees which also implies how individual willpower can be pivotal in construing a communal defiance.<sup>62</sup> Nirmal represents the intellectual and ideological aspects of these themes. Through supporting refugees and documenting their struggles, he recognised them as humans with rights. His reflections on actions by the state, and the plight of the refugees, reflect a broader failure in society to accept marginalised groups as equal members.

Acceptance and rejection are themes that run deep into the narrative of *The Hungry Tide*, especially concerning the new society Morichjhāpi which refugees look for set up. The themes bring out the complexities and contradictions of such struggles for inclusion in a social reality. The refugees’ efforts to transform Morichjhāpi into an accommodative place symbolise their quest for social and personal acceptance. Their

combined effort to build their houses, work the land and form a community is an assertion of existence despite their marginality. This shared and collective approach from the refugees reflects their hope for a systematic oppression-free future and their desire for dignity and autonomy. The theme of rejection is rooted in the state's unethical approach to extinct the marginalised population from a permanent settlement. The government's actions represent a categorical rejection of the refugees' right to self-determination. This rejection is rooted in wider. The rejection is based on macro socio-political drivers of environmental conservation over the humanitarian requirements of a marginalised sector. The state's denial of the legitimacy of refugees' settlement exemplifies how social exclusion is built into the systems that seek to maintain order and reinforce social control.

### **The New Society in *Nectar in a Sieve***

Several characters in *Nectar in a Sieve* adopt the 'new' structure as their own, viewing industrialisation as an way to escape from the poverty and loss of social mobility due to stated changes with-in society. Arjun and Thambi both seize the prospects provided by the tannery. The relay from farming to low wages is an opportunity in the minds of their family for generations mired in poverty. Arjun's attitude, the optimism for transformation right alongside discomfort with what all these new realities mean for more traditional ways of life captures his experience well. Rukmani's youngest son, Selvam could also be said to represent this acceptance of the new order but in a different way. Instead of working in the tannery, he becomes an assistant to Dr. Kenny, a British doctor working on a hospital project in the new society just starting out. This reflects adaptation to the new modern economy, just like Selvam moving away from farming. He tells his mother, "It will be a great venture. We have many plans and much hope."<sup>63</sup> The opportunities Selvam seized in the new world of industrial change are signs that, despite its often-unsettling social impact, it has thrown open fresh avenues for those prepared to embrace the challenge in a rapidly changing environment.

In contrast, in *Nectar in a Sieve*, there are characters who battle against the new social order that the younger generation embrace. Nathan, Rukmani's husband is a traditionalist at heart. But the land means more to Nathan than subsistence, his land is who he is and how his family survives. For him, the advent of the tannery and its

industrialisation signals an existential threat against everything he values in farming. Nathan symbolically rejects the new order in this by deciding to farm even though his land will bear no more. Even Rukmani cannot simply accommodate the changes that come with the tannery. On the one hand, she sees the benefits of this new social order for her children but on other hand, she feels a sense of loss because life was much simpler, and she had to rely far less on others when Nathan was around. This factory brings noise, pollution, and social unrest to the quiet village. Rukmani lamented, “We are no longer a village either, but a growing town”<sup>64</sup> expressing the loss of the old traditions in which her community was once based on. Falling to step into the new grooves is a microcosm of the age-old struggle between modernity and nostalgia.

### **The New Society in *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

Paro doesn't comply to the new social order. Her refusal to conform to the traditional roles of wife and mistress is a form of rebellion. Paro's connections particularly with Mishra are emblematic of this new social order that she negotiates to her advantage.

Priya on the other hand is more ambivalent about the new social order. While she also appreciates the boldness and independence of Paro, she still maintains strong loyalty towards respect, tradition, and modesty. The affair with B.R. parallels her inner conflict between the enticement of modern freedoms and her conservative foundation.

Lenin struggles to face the conflict between intellectual ideals and the superficial culture that surrounds him. The once prestigious world of his academic desires, through which he was to obtain that status and influence, is now meaningless in an all-powerful world singling out wealth, connections, and good looks. He suffers an intellectual and emotional decline as he is unable to adjust to the new social realities. Even men like B.R. and Mishra, who find success in the new world order, are exposed to its truth depthlessness. They go on to exploit women, deploying their wealth and power in service of predatory relational tactics yet they too are also languishing in a culture where emotional stakes remain at an all-time low. Their rejection of depths of feeling in favor of surface control resonates with a larger denial that any society premised on individuality and autonomy could ever come to terms with its negativity.

Amitav Ghosh talks about the themes such as Casteism, Racism, Poverty and Revenge in *The Hungry Tide* and gives his description of the new society being

constructed by refugees on Morichjhāpi, and it is the fight for recognition, belonging and dignity that digs deeper in the novel these themes become key to understand the socio-political structure of society:

“...His anger came welling up with an atavistic explosiveness, rising from sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master’s suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townsman’s mistrust of the rustic; the city’s antagonism toward the village.”<sup>65</sup>

Those first years of the settlement of refugees in Morichjhāpi are common foundation work, in which society is built around inclusivity and solidarity.

This is clearly shown through their collaborative effort to convert the inhabitable island into a liveable area motivated by the hope of building a safe, secure place to live in peace and tranquillity, refugees clear land for cultivation; build shelters from available materials and set fish nets into nearby bodies of water. Refugees are busy building a secure and successful future back home. This collective action is an expression of their desire to be recognised in the new society that they are building, a society that has been shaped by generations of subjugation through caste hierarchies and sociopolitical exclusion.<sup>66</sup>

Characters Kusum and Nirmal shed more light on the themes of casteism, poverty and revenge showcasing how well these themes have been intermingled together. Kusum’s strength and endurance signify the migrants’ struggle for acceptance and how much is given up by those who are considered ‘outsiders. Her role epitomises the essence of a new culture, mirrored by both the optimism and despair that come alongside their efforts. Nirmal offers his intellect and ideological support and, anywhere along with-it critical takes on the socio-political consequences of their struggle. In his reflection, he reported the injustices to which both refugees are subjected and how they have remained marginalised in society as a result.

On other hand, Bhattacharya, in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, himself reflects the theme of hunger and poverty in the novel by putting historical events which show the historical significance and existence of poverty-hunger and its effect upon marginalised communities:

“Two great hungers had struck the land of Bengal in the wake of war: the hunger of the masses of people uprooted from their old earth and turned into beggars, and the hunger of the all-owning few for pleasure and more pleasure, a raging fever of the times.”<sup>67</sup>

*He Who Rides a Tiger* is another novel that explores this division and, in Kalo’s case, his awareness of the unfair caste system which keeps him poor. Kalo is a blacksmith belonging to lower caste and has to face society rejection, but worse he gets exploited economically:

“Even a kamar would feel sick to have to accept cooked food from Untouchables. They were as far beneath him in the scale as Brahmins were above.”<sup>68</sup>

Bhima being a Dalit, dresses as a disguised Brahmin in the hope of getting acceptance and running away from the clutches of his caste identity. Though Kalo experiences the privileges of Brahmin in multiple events, such as his interactions with a *Pujari* who asks about the caste of Kalo. His conflicted psychological state leads him to adapt the identity of Brahmin and experience the privileges at the first-hand:

“What caste?” Kalo asked.

The unexpected question hit the man in the stomach, but he regained his poise quickly.

“I have not. come here to discuss my family-tree. I am here on business. Understand?”

“Son, grandson and great-grandson of low-caste folk,” Kalo observed as though to himself. “He does not know how to stand before a Brahmin and a pujari of Shiva.”<sup>69</sup>

The success Kalo enjoys the success for a short period in assimilating into the society of the higher caste illustrates both his versatility and shows how culture superficially defines any concept or perception which is materially based, on that one. But his coming out one day, and the inevitable unacceptance by society shows that everyone does not always welcome change, a stubborn community will go to enormous lengths

for things just to remain as they are. It is again a reconfirmation that Kalo, like many marginalised communities, do not fit in the ‘quest for freedom’ and serves as an example of systematic barriers to true social progress.

Kalo’s daughter, Chandralekha too faces caste-based discrimination. The way she deals with the people from her community forms a space of exclusion and bias that helps to make sense of her status in society. Her father’s caste leaves her subject to daily discrimination and excludes her from better opportunities. Chandralekha’s quest for identity and belonging is profoundly intermingled with rejection which reflects an impression of generational emotional injustice.<sup>70</sup> However, Chandralekha’s story of resistance and the ability to survive despite institutional biases shows that one can always find means and ways to resist against the system.

*He Who Rides a Tiger* and *The Hungry Tide* provide the reader with very clear views of the oppressive social constructs that maintain caste, racism and poverty:

“He sighed. The great city bulged with riches, glittered with loveliness, throbbed with life and joy, but alongside it was unspeakable misery, revolting ugliness, the creeping horror of slow death.”<sup>71</sup>

These novels tell the stories of marginalised people who resist these systems or seek revenge. Bhattacharya directly tackles the theme of revenge, while in Ghosh’s works delicately deals with themes of survival and resistance. Both of these novels together paint a disturbing picture of social injustice in India.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger* by Bhabani Bhattacharya and *The Hungry Tide* by Amitava Ghosh, the question of subalternity is subtly integrated within characters’ lives predominantly due to racism, lack of access to money and systematic exploitation.

This makes Kalo’s journey a powerful instance of subaltern experience. Kalo, a lower-caste blacksmith who seeks to cross caste barriers by performing as upper-class Brahmins further highlights the arbitrary and constructed status of castes.

His deception is a commentary on the inhuman and incredibly violent nature of the class system; it also demonstrates that the caste system is considered as the problem because it has become so deeply entrenched that violation would have committed an

even graver sin. The final rejection and the public humiliation of Kalo points to this institutionalised oppression, which punishes every time someone tries to break free from their chains.

Similarly, Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* presents various levels of resistance with a powerful statement on the Morichjhapi events when refugees are struggling between poverty and exploitation clash against brutal state policies to claim land.

The struggle is not only for land, but for identity and dignity. This narrative underline that refugees are at the crossroads of caste, race and poverty their exposure to environmental issues place them in proximity with systemic violence, exclusion. The themes of unrest and resistance in the novels emphasise their collective strength people are exploited or marginalised; manifesting resilience and fighting for their rights.

In *The Hungry Tide* where the refugees try to construct a new society in Morichjhāpi stands apart from Kalo fighting his own solitary battle as an individual in *He Who Rides a Tiger*. While Kalo's actions are ultimately met with rejection, the refugees in their violent hopelessness symbolise a more abstract idea of new social forms, ones that are inclusive and built on resistance to oppression. Embedded in the subaltern studies tradition, these narratives display nuances of marginalisation and an ongoing struggle for justice rather underscores how those who have been historically silenced and oppressed relentlessly strive to demand justice.

These novels echo the larger narrative about human rights of communities at margins. The term subaltern with a definition defined by theorists like Antonio Gramsci and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to describe any group of people who are systematically marginalised from power structures, oppressed, disempowered or denied political speech in the broader socio-political framework.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger* Kalo has been victimised by the exploitation encouraged under caste system in India where lower-castes are denied basic human rights and subjected to economic oppression, social discrimination and violence. His tragic fall demonstrates the rigidity of social circumstance and inequality that plays out in practice. Through Kalo's battle against caste-based exploitation in *He Who Rides a*

*Tiger*, we realise that basic human rights are denied to him: as lower-caste he is exploited politically and socially as he is part of the lower caste.

The Morichjhapi massacre in *The Hungry Tide* demonstrates how the drive for conservation and mobilisation of global resources can sacrifice human lives, making an entire community a lower priority than conserving wildlife habitats. The act of resistance by the refugees against eviction powerfully reinforces their right to life, land, and dignity in a direct confrontation with state authority, these deep contradictions within authority that pretend simultaneously protecting the environment while overlooking human cost.

Human rights are the core of economic survival and dignity in *Nectar in a Sieve*. The novel is a powerful depiction of the challenges faced by rural peasants such as Rukmani and Nathan, whose basic human rights food, shelter, and safety are perpetually held in sway of external domains. But as tenant farmers, they are subjected to the manipulation of the landowners and industrialists, embodied by the tannery that takes over their settlement. This indifference towards their right to livelihood has pushed them into further impoverishment as the tannery expands. This exploitation of others violates our foundational right to a life with dignity as economic systems are structured to value profit over the lives and freedom of people oppressed by poverty. The novel is about economic justice and preserving human dignity and basic rights.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* addresses to human rights, the right to personal autonomy and dignity as demonstrated in the character of Paro who strives against all sorts of pressures. Her journey is a microscopic narrative of the battle against sexism that she has been fighting in a society where one's body and relationships are policed by societal and patriarchal norms. Although she tries to use her sexuality as an empowerment mode, powerful men like Mishra exploit it which violates right to freedom of choice. This concerns women right, in which the right to bodily integrity for women must be compromised by living under a patriarchal society. The struggle of Priya shows comprehensively that the decisions have never been in her hands and often been limited from gender-based expectations. The text shows how women, even in privileged circles, are victims of a structural inequality that restrict them to exercise

their proper rights as human beings, such as live by their will and be respected, pointing out the need to redress the gender imbalance once and for all.

However, all the novels stress that socio-historical contexts and economic disparities have historically suppressed subaltern groups. The narratives thus call for a comprehensive understanding of human rights; an approach that not only addresses the experiences of the marginalised but seeks to reconcile systemic inequities that reinforce their oppression. The subaltern perspective that these works depict, demand for a re-imagination of society and the necessity to form an ideal world where marginalised voices are no longer suppressed.

These literary works are not reflections to the struggles of subaltern characters but also serve as critique that enables such marginalisation. They remind us of the continued relevance of human rights to meet the needs and dreams of those who are frequently left out, calling for an ongoing commitment to equality and justice, and highlight why one must still work to bring equal opportunities to all.

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## **CHAPTER – 3**

### **SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSIONS IN THE SELECT NOVELS**

3.1 Social Norms and Values

3.2 Cultural Construction of Society

3.3 Beliefs and Tradition

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## Chapter-3

### Socio-Cultural Dimensions in the Select Novels

Social norms and values, cultural construction of society, beliefs and traditions are all part of the same frame in India that have forged its socio-cultural architecture. Social norms and values are social standards of behaviours, practices, principles which serve as guide for individuals in a society. What constitute these norms and values in India are a mix of traditional customs and religious teachings overlaid with the most recent societal changes. This includes things like the social norms of family structure. This is the part of Indian culture, where showing respect to elders and being hospitable are important values in Indian society.

Norms also extend to gender roles, where traditional expectations have historically bound men and women in very specific roles which are however being increasingly contested and renegotiated in contemporary India.

Society as a cultural construct addresses how cultural practices and historical experiences determine the structure of societies, their institutions, and social identities.<sup>1</sup> This cultural construct in India is identified by the intricate web of regional, lingual, and religious diversity. Though officially eliminated, the caste system appears in its obvious forms as well as in more subtle guises with consequences on social life and conditions though also remains in convention as a historical cultural creation that has influenced social differentiation. Festivals like Diwali, Eid and Pongal are an essential part of religious practices, but they also serve to deepen community bonds and remind us of our shared regional identity. The cultural aspect is further seen by the maintenance of longtime artistry, food and clothing that define a common identity and ancestral lineage among us.

These are beliefs and traditions, the ingrained cultural attitudes and customary prerogatives that have pervaded throughout generations. In many contexts in India, belief systems and traditions are planted deep in matters of religious dogma, historical events, or legend. Hindu beliefs such as *karma* and *dharma* in turn influence moral and ethical conduct. Islam also has traditions which directly affect Islamic practices like Ramadan to the principles of Hajj. Customs like marriage ceremonies, initiation

rites, and duties related to birth, and death provide a framework that is based on cultural norms and group identity. They provide a lens for viewing the world, shape individual behaviours and serve to keep a community together.

Social norms, values, cultural constructions of society beliefs and traditions are the basic elements that developed behaviours as well as the identity and relationships in society individuals.<sup>2</sup> They are the foundation of human interactions, shaping how we interact with each other, with institutions and larger social structures. They are also responsible for the moral and ethical framework of societies, serving to uphold order and continuity. On the other hand, some can limit the freedom and draw disparity. When viewed from a human rights perspective, these concepts denote the politics of social will versus personal freedom, disputes that embroil individuals and societies in present-day battles for equality, justice, and dignity.

The relationship between these norms, values, cultural constructs, beliefs, and traditions with human rights is complex and frequently riddled with tensions. The sense of social order, and unity helps members build a common identify with which they can associate. However, they might also stifle personal liberties, maintain discrimination and inequality. Human rights, as enshrined in international instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), underscore the principle that all people have an equal right to dignity and equality irrespective of their cultural or social context. The challenge is how to square normative expectations and values with the norms of human rights, especially when these expectations conflict with certain understandings of individual autonomy or equality.

Similarly, cultural traditions can collide with human rights when they serve as a shield for behaviour contrary to basic principles of dignity and freedom. Some practices like FGM (Female Genital Mutilation), child marriage or honor killings are defended as cultural traditions, yet they all violate the rights of individuals to equality and life. The dilemma is how to balance cultural differences and universal human rights. According to Nussbaum, the ‘capabilities approach’ ought to support people living their life with of dignity and freedom by ensuring them socially and economically and politically adequate circumstances for their development.<sup>3</sup> Under this approach, respect for culture is considered essential and yet the belief, that harmful practices can be justified merely because they have a historical footprint, is refuted.<sup>4</sup>

Society, as a cultural construction, will often also devalue and marginalize certain groups that do not fit into the dominant norm. That marginalisation can express itself in racially, religiously, and ethnically restrictive practices that contravene the core human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination. While analysing such matters, theorists like Franz Fanon and Edward Said have criticised how racialised cultural categories always served to legitimise colonialism, racism, and exclusion. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon notes how colonial powers developed a racial hierarchy that demoralized colonized people and lead them forbidden from self-determination and rights to equity. The Occidental pursuit of knowledge in the prediction, intervention, and control of peoples with Oriental 'Otherness' led Edward Said to coin the term Orientalism, describing how Western societies created an inferior 'Other' that could then be penetrated like a puzzle to validate imperialism as a cultural necessity.<sup>5</sup>

Literature provides a perfect lens for reflecting and critiquing these themes, deepening one's understanding of the multifaceted nature of social norms and human cultural constructions and religious beliefs. Through such stories, literature documents the contours of the values and practices in a society that can be preserved or criticized. For instance, the novels as *Nectar in a Sieve* effectively represents the changes that these new socio-economic norms brought to traditional ideas of social values. *He Who Rides a Tiger* is an examination of the dispute between one's own potential and cultural demands, in which the demands will always play a role in influencing decisions and behaviour. Even though the novel can teach its readers a lot about the dynamics between what one wants and what society makes them believe they are supposed to want. In *The Hungry Tide*, the contradiction of environment and culture embodied with critically constructed society which shows how certain ideas shape codified reality.

The narrative explores through concepts of displacement and environmental justice, looking at how cultural beliefs and historical contexts dictate societal responses to ecological struggles. *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is an exploration-led text that addressed gender-roles and personal freedom, what it does is that it piles up all these traditional norms and society-expectations on top of each other ultimately showcasing

how a traditional mindset serves no single purpose other than restricting the individuals' output.

The selected texts reveal how literature both mirrors and challenges existing norms, practices, and beliefs, working as a kind of agent for self-aware social thought and change. Through engagement with such themes, literature can serve as a time capsule of cultural heritage and a way to ask readers to think twice about the norm so that they become part of a universal shift towards an ever-evolving system of societal values and cultural constructions. This chapter is an attempt to explore and build in-depth understanding on the themes of social norms and values, cultural construction and beliefs and traditions.

### **3.1 Social Norms and Values**

#### **Social Norms and Values in *He Who Rides a Tiger***

Bhabani Bhattacharya, in '*He Who Rides a Tiger*', asked several questions of contemporary society which were largely related to the social norms and values, casting many stones on Indian caste system, religious hypocrisy and women's subjugation.<sup>6</sup> These are not simply extraneous details but driving forces that enact the character's daily lives and actions. Exposing the social structures that keep this community entrenched and oppressed, Bhattacharya does so through illustrative dialogue and critical incidents.

The caste system is one common social norm, and it exists prominently in this novel. The caste system not only proscribes the social status of individuals but also governs their daily interactions and opportunities. The story of Kalo epitomizes the systemic oppression that the caste hierarchy is built upon. Kalo is a blacksmith, he works with iron and due to his lower caste abides by the law of it everywhere he goes. In his guise as a Brahmin priest, Mangal Adhikari personifies the absurdity of the caste system.

The fact that Kalo can rise above his status of priest disrupts one common understanding of caste as a permanent category at birth. His very exploitation of the system that has for so long oppressed him is here recognised as power because he perceives the empire's fundamental weakness: "I who made this temple was not a

Brahmin. His audience is so shocked by this statement that it reveals the absurdity of caste distinctions.”<sup>7</sup>

Kalo, despite his success, also shows how easily caste can be superficial. A reader can sense his inner conflict over his deception: “The holy words have been taboo to folks of my caste for thousands and thousands of years”<sup>8</sup> He suffers under the weight of tradition and his new, false identity, proving that norms may be subverted, they don’t dissipate their hold over people easily.

Another pillar of societal value is the theme of religion, which the novel also examines. In his critique of the commodification of spirituality and exploitation that takes place under the guise of religion, Bhattacharya points towards Kalo as a system manipulator. A coalition that is supposed to be a house of worship and spiritual sanctuary has transformed into a stage for materialism and vanity.<sup>9</sup> The rich arrive at the temple not to get spiritual healing, but to expose their wealth by making milk offerings to the deity there. “While men died of hunger, wealth grew; and while kindness dried up, religion was more in demand,”<sup>10</sup> muses Kalo.

Kalo understands this hypocrisy better than anyone. His role as an imposter Brahmin gives him the ability to see through the religious rituals that he now manages. He sees how the offerings of milk for ritual are left to spoil while children starve. This spurs him to work against the system, and in silence, he feeds the babies with that milk. “Pujari, you hear? These respected gentlemen want the milk of Shiva’s baths to be given to the babies.”<sup>11</sup> In this action Kalo reveals the moral hypocrisy of the religious leaders who give more importance to fulfil their rituals, and least concerned about people who are suffering.

The shallowness of religious charity is further expanded when the author writes about superficial religious charity while sharing Kalo’s thoughts. The devotees are not compassionate, they feed the beggars to earn favours from the gods One of the richest devotees’ brags “At my father’s funeral ceremony last month, I fed a thousand beggars, blind men, cripples.”<sup>12</sup> This line highlights the fact that in the novel, religious deeds are transactional; charity is done not for humanity but with an eye towards increasing spiritual wealth.

Bhattacharya also investigates the gendering of social functions, such as women as slaves and oppressed in society.<sup>13</sup> Lekha, herself, is a mirror through which the novel examines how society projects itself onto a woman. Lekha is the daughter of Kalo, torn between her father and the realization of everything that is wrong. The novel refers to her beauty repeatedly and is almost lauded as an admirable trait but also feels like a curse. Kalo frequently comments on his daughter's physical appearance, for example: "How wondrous was the shaping of the girl! Her complexion became even more fair than at her birth, like carved ivory."<sup>14</sup> It is a measure on how women are pressured by society to fit into expectations of femininity while also negotiating their way through the throngs of oppression.

The women in the novel are exploited, sexually and economically, especially after the famine. A corrupt figure named Rajani lures young women into prostitution by giving them hope of survival. Who offers Biten a job, assuring the women that they can "*save themselves and their kinfolk*"<sup>15</sup> by prostituting themselves. This incident reflects on the condition of women, especially during crises and how they are treated like objects by society. It is additionally an indictment of the patriarchal expectations that necessitate women walking a tightrope between morality and maintaining life.

The constraints imposed on women are vividly portrayed through Lekha's own journey. She struggles with coming to terms with the actions of her father and for playing her own part in the temple, underlining the conflict between personal and societal expectation. At one point, she wonders out loud about her father's morals: "Is he the man who feeds the babies with the milk for Shiva's bath?"<sup>16</sup> This instance signals her total loss of trust in the values of her father, suggesting that she wants to chart a path through a society that clearly is not designed to benefit someone from this perspective.

The novel presents a vision of society in which the existing condition is being radically influenced if not dismantled. Through Kalo, Lekha, and Biten, Bhattacharya takes a scalpel to the oppressive conditions that shape Indian society even as she holds up little mirrors of rebellion and alteration. But the novel also suggests subverting norms may not be enough to bring about the sea change that is necessary for an advance in society, a complete rethink of foundational values.

## **Social Norms and Values in *The Hungry Tide***

In *The Hungry Tide* of Amitav Ghosh, social normative behaviour and expectations are framed under scrutiny through the lens of people in an isolated land having to struggle for both basic survival means as well as contending with their sense of identity: as individuals and as members of a small society. But at the heart of this novel, particularly in one setting, The Sundarbans region, is a liminal space that challenges and reshapes societal structures as a reality check. This is a place where traditional social hierarchies, gender roles and caste divisions are built up and broken down, as the people who live there learn they have an unprecedented opportunity to change their status.

The major themes of the novel *The Hungry Tide* is to describe the gender roles as viewed by the Sundarbans community.<sup>17</sup> Moyna is Fokir's wife, a figure with some of the dimensions of an archetype who juggles the responsibilities and pleasures and limitations placed on women. Although she is a traditional wife and mother, Moyna wants to study and become a nurse. She clashes with the expectations of her husband and of society, which get in the way of her ambition. There is a scene where Kanai confronts Moyna about why she wanted to become a nurse and there her answer highlights the conflict between what she wants to become and what society expects from her.

Moyna's resolve continues a sentiment echoed by the broader social prediction of the novel, where women are the backbone of the household and larger communities but are still expected to oblige by traditional domestic standards. There, Moyna fights to balance her ambitions with the realities of being a wife and mother in rural India, where options are constrained by patriarchal mores. The novel then, through the character of Moyna, criticises these limits in women's life and how women must carve their way out in pursuit of dreams within that constraint.

The research also examines the lasting power of caste and class within the Sundarbans society. It remains as backward a region as it ever was, and the caste system still determines social encounters and resource access.<sup>18</sup> This is most apparent in the interactions between Nirmal, the uncle of Kanai, and the settlers of Morichjhāpi, a community of refugees, a colony of refugees displaced by government policies. The

state patronises them as much as the local elite harbours a distaste for these lower caste settlers. In another scene, Nirmal contemplates the position of the settlers as, in one instance, he ponders on the grievances of settlers and considers that “less than human, worth less than the animals that roam these forests” The dehumanisation mirrors the age-old stratification based on rigid caste of Indian society, that exists and prevails in even less developed areas like Sundarbans.

Among the settlers, Kusum emerges as a strong voice on behalf of her community against the injustices they experience. In her speech on the Morichjhāpi crisis, she makes it clear that the long-standing anger and pain amongst the depressed castes who were ousted by force. She wonders, “Do they know what is being done in their name? Where do they live, these people? Do they have children, do they have mothers, fathers?”<sup>19</sup> The questions Kusum asks, serve to remind readers of the very same sharp divide that exists between the settlers whose fates are in the hands of those who belong to privileged classes after all, and various tribes who have been on the receiving end of these government policies.

So, the novel critiques social hierarchies and the violence necessary to enforce them in its portrait of tension that arises between the privileged and the oppressed.

### **Social Norms and Values in *Nectar in a Sieve***

While describing Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* it is essential to observe a concise and detailed account of social norms set forth when living within rural Indian society. Following Rukmani and her family as they struggle to fit these roles, the novel reveals the expectation to adhere to longstanding traditions of duty, marriage, and gender. Rooted in centuries-old cultural practices, these norms influence everything from characters’ decisions to their relationships and sense of self.

An example of these social norms occurs in the arranged marriage between Rukmani and Nathan. Though the daughter of a once a village headman, Rukmani is wed to a tenant farmer when her father can no longer pay the dowry. It conveys a social message that a woman has no worth other than to marry, and it is her dowry that automatically adds more value to her family: “A woman, they say, always remembers her wedding night. Well, maybe they do; but for me, there are other nights I prefer to remember, sweeter, fuller, when I went to my husband matured in mind as well as in

body, not as a pained and awkward child as I did on that first night.”<sup>20</sup> This itself illustrates exactly how little choice in life- or husband democratic women of her time had.

Additionally, the text points out the societal expectation for women to make male offspring, making society in the areas of rural China more patriarchal. Rukmani feels deeply disappointed that her first child, Ira, is a girl; because in the community only bearing male children is considered as a valuable role for women.

Throughout the text, there are examples of traditional moral codes for women. Kunthi, who, by virtue of her beauty and independent persevere came under the scrutiny of the village. Kunthi does not comply to the socially accepted image of female purity in this conservative village and so she is shunned. This contrasts with Rukmani even though her family is suffering, gets respect from all the villagers because she follows what society says. The marginalisation of Kunthi underscores the social costs women confront when they cross unwritten regulations set by patriarchal-social norms.

Gender roles were rooted in the social structure of the village determining clear-cut division of labour between different sexes. Like the other women, Rukmani is responsible for managing the house, growing their own food, and taking care of her children, while Nathan is expected to work in the farm as his role as overseer of the household. The continued division of labour is supported by this traditional understanding manifests the general conception that women are givers and men are takers. These roles remain largely unchallenged, as the family becomes poorer and poorer since Rukmani never speaks out or fights what she understands is her due.

It is also illustrated that society revolves around prestige and power from a family perspective. Rukmani and Nathan as parents and their perception on what is best for their children's futures, shows the quest for key values in a society. Ira has to move back in with her parents after being unable to give birth to a child destroyed her marriage. The stigma of divorce and her failure as a mother weigh heavily on Ira, but also casts a dark shadow over the rest of her family. While Ira's eventual turn to prostitution to maintain her starving household shows the reality of the society where women are regarded as valuable assets worth only on the condition that they marry

and make babies. The shame that Rukmani initially experiences at Ira's hands brings forth the allied stigma that is attached to women who refuse to adhere to the boundaries set by society. According to Ira "It is true, one gets used to anything. I had got used to the noise and the smell of the tannery; they no longer affected me....so now I accepted the future and Ira's lot in it and thrust it from me."<sup>21</sup>

*Nectar in a Sieve* closely examines the social construction which get determine to orientated of characters' lives. Through Rukmani's narrative, the text critiques common social norms traditional in Indian culture and society that are exemplified through narrow-minded expectations on an individual — especially women. This emphasis on marriage, male heirs, social probity, and kinship honour, as well as the resistance to modernisation are all deeply imbricated with the cultural weft of the village.

### **Social Norms and Values in *Paro: A Dream of Passion***

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Namita Gokhale criticises and questions the conventions, hypocrisies and shallowness of social mores and values prevalent in the urban Indian elite. In the novel, one can see how Piya, an individual of a more reserved nature views Paro takes on societal norms around her.<sup>22</sup> Gokhale uses this dichotomy of the two women as a pseudo-diabetic lens to explore traditional gender identities, moral hypocrisy and consumerism at its worst in their society.

The novel initially sets the standard for women, beauty and morality. Take for example Piya, who embodies the classic image of 'good Indian woman' complying with what has been told by our norms. She lives for her husband Suresh and is a perfect *bahu*. Paro on the other hand, challenges these societal norms and instead puts her sexuality out there whether it attracts social stigma as long as she goes after relationships constructed around power and personal need in opposition to love. Paro has a series of affairs, including one with B.R., a rich industrialist and goes against the norms that all married women must be subservient. The transactional qualities of these 'relationships' speak volumes about the way society not only objectifies women but also how their worth is measured by whether they fulfil a specific role to perfection.

There is a powerful event, the party scene in the text, that highlights the friction between tradition and rebellion, where in a party, Paro provocatively exposes her body. This is not just a show of physical appearance, but also an action through which women are rejecting the social decorum how they should act in public. The onlookers, and especially Piya, gasp when Paro makes such an abominable act at a highly esteemed high society gathering interjecting her shock with the recounting as if she is both scared and excited by this very incident. Piya ponders through responses of the other guests: "...the eyes of every single person at the party were riveted to those long alabaster legs."<sup>23</sup> This image symbolises Paro breaking free from the restrictions of female chastity and claiming a space where women can be seen as 'submissive' or 'decent'.

Another major social norm which the novel challenges is presence and the belief in the value of material gain. Gokhale criticises B.R. and his circle, the elite society, for its materialism and superficiality. Piya's admiration at B.R.'s wealth reflects the valuation of material prosperity with moral virtue. She describes his office, its "clear white lines of Formica"<sup>24</sup> and "immaculate swivel chairs,"<sup>25</sup> with the same vengeance that, she believes, has been bestowed on him by herself and all other less-successful people. But Paro, who uses B.R.'s wealth and position to her later advantages, sees through the veneer that money and social status equate virtue.

The novel also examines woman-as-commodity, as Gokhale portrays through the character of Paro, who uses her beauty to vie for control in an overtly patriarchal society. Paro knows all about the dynamics of politics, and she uses her sexuality in this sphere with men such as B.R., or the foreign filmmaker Loukas Leoros. Paro agrees and recognises that there is work involved in keeping up the illusion: "It's part of being a Beautiful Woman. It's a fulltime occupation."<sup>26</sup> It also epitomises the societal demand for women to endlessly work at being appealing, in essence equating them somehow with things traded by men, who are truly in power. Cognition of this dynamic enables Paro not only to subvert it but reveals the futility of such rebellion her own self-worth depends on the very system over which she seeks to lord.

The novel also provides a moral takedown of the upper class, and in particular regards the institution of marriage and marital fidelity. Paro not only has open affairs; Paro is also not the sole character that goes against the tenets of society. B.R., cheats on his

wife with multiple women, and it goes hand in hand with a broader societal norm, that of women viewed as adulterers while men walk away with their indiscretions. This hypocrisy is directly confronted by Paro, whose recklessness in pursuing her desires destroys her social connections in a society that has no inhibitions permitting male transgressions but feels scandalised when it comes to such acts by its women. Paro is patronisingly invited to dinner parties by the community even as they ridicule her in private, creating picture of a group of elites whose morals are a pretense.

The text examines the struggle between societal conformity and personal fulfilment, which is seen through traditional male vs female roles. The character of Piya symbolises a normative society and is shown to conflict with herself as she wishes for a surrounding like Paro but also desires security. But her defiance costs Paro dearly. Though she rebels against the established order, her satisfaction is doomed to give way to misery, her body, which was once a symbol of strength and appeal becomes one of rot, paralleled only by the ruin and disrepute she will soon bring upon herself. This path indicates that, even if those with an affected identity could feel temporarily free from the expectations of their communities to adapt a lifestyle as self-chosen rebel, but the immense constructions of power and gender are not easy to escape.

### **3.2 Cultural Construction of Society**

#### **Cultural Construction in *He Who Rides a Tiger***

The very cultural foundation of society is explored in relation to social structures, traditions and moral values in Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger*. The novel unfolds against the backdrop of the Bengal famine as social norms and rites are challenged during deep deprivation. In this tumultuous background Bhattacharya uses these characters Kalo, Lekha, Biten etc. to comment on the intersection of religion, caste and survival.<sup>27</sup> This scaffolding of culture, shaped by strands that remain centuries old, reveals how socio-cultural hegemony is reinforced or undone during times of crisis.

The societal and cultural construction of society in *He Who Rides a Tiger* significantly addresses the other major element which is the fragmented caste system. Built on the foundation of the caste system, a definition inscribed in Hindu culture

that determines everything from occupation to interpersonal bonds. Born a blacksmith, Kalo is at the bottom of society. Such things show the performative & fragile nature of the caste system. When he tries to transcend his caste status by posing as a Brahmin priest, this effort crumbles down.<sup>28</sup>

The ascent of Kalo itself is a reaction in the face of one of society's most ingrained assumptions that caste is divinely ordered and utterly immovable. Kalo's trickery also allows Bhattacharya to critique the arbitrariness of class and caste, where surface signifiers like the sacred thread can belie one's actual identity.

The temple which in theory should be a site of sheltering spirituality — is depicted as one of sin and depredation. For Motichand, his extensive rituals and donations are more than empty offerings given to achieve spiritual credit; such charitable acts simply affirm all that is wrong with his social status rather than revealing the sincerity behind religious virtue. His obsession with religious charity feeding five hundred people during the solar eclipse is depicted in a tone of cold irony: "They ate as much as they could hold and went away belching contentedly, praying for my long life and prosperity."<sup>29</sup>

This also highlights how religion is a performative act within the practices and performances of culture; Kalo turns religious symbols on their head. An example of it was the rising Shiva stone so-called miracle done by Kalo where we can see how a superstitious belief is being taken advantage of for wealth. The entire commotion symbolises the very manner in which religion can be commercialised, when a culture accepts practising ritual over true spirituality but as "mass of swollen grams pushed up the stone image they carried, bit by bit, hour on hour, till the miracle took place"<sup>30</sup> this event takes it to another dimension.

Bhattacharya also suspects the gendered nature of cultural creation, specifically the aesthetic norms which have been instrumentalised involving female honour and purity. In the novel, women are shown as two times oppressed due to poverty and their being put in a straightforward capacity. Kalo's daughter, Lekha portrays the impossible predicament that women face, that are individual autonomy and societal norms. Her looks are often commented on in the novel and they represent how much worth she has as a woman in a patriarchal society. Kalo treats her like a prized

possession, often comparing her to ivory statues as women are objectified and seen only in reference to their bodies being useful to others than their independence.

The most salient critique of the cultural construction of female honor comes in Biten's talk with Kalo, where we question why a girl ought to expire instead of letting herself: "Must a woman die rather than sell herself? Why must she die? Only her body, which seemed to be of no account, was involved."<sup>31</sup> It goes against the core teachings of our culture about what makes a woman valuable, even in times of famine and death. Biten's cynicism is part of a broader review that societal values, especially in terms of honour, are employed as tools to keep women submissive.

The novel depicts how economic deprivation lays bare the tensions inherent in cultural norms. Bhattacharya depicts how ancient codes of charity or honour or religious piety can be abandoned, or else cynically re-fashioned, to accommodate the exigencies of staying alive. Desperation leads to act that would be seen as immoral or dishonourable under normal circumstances stealing prostitution But Kalo in his desperation at its peak; a man who has only ever desired to make it in this world and having realised society is not built for the poor: "I was hungry, sir. A madness came upon me. It was because I thought I had to eat or I would die."<sup>32</sup>

In a similar way, the need to survive illustrates that the cultural construction of morality can be bent as well. Rajani, the brothel owner, reflects a reasoned self-justification for his exploitation of young women which harkens to the cultural value of sacrificial air: "What virtue is greater than self-giving for a true cause? Does not all our tradition sing the great glory of self-giving?"<sup>33</sup> Rajani twists cultural values to legitimize his exploitation an indication that societal norms can often be manipulated to the benefit of those in power.

### **Cultural Construction in *The Hungry Tide***

The cultural construction of society within '*The Hungry Tide*' by Amitav Ghosh is thereby influenced by the intricate nexus between tradition and ecology, with a certain historical displacement involved. The novel weaves through the historical strata in this region colonial past, vulgar people's myths, social hierarchy while pointing commercial culture shifts as it adjusts to political changes, pastoral scenarios and

other resolutions.<sup>34</sup> Through the lives of its various characters such as Piya, Fokir, Nirmal and Kusum Ghosh crafts a story that unearths the forms through which culture is shaped and sustained or undone along with the attendant conflicts between modernity-tradition or human and non-human agents in this terrain.

In the text, the Sundarbans is an area of spirit worship and religious belief through which its inhabitants attain collective consciousness and identity. Key to this cultural construction is the figure of *Bon Bibi*, the goddess who guards the people from predatory tigers within the forest. This oral tradition is reflective of the socio-religious practices prevalent among the people who would seek protection from supernatural forces, thus proving that Bon Bibi's legend resonates through all walks of life in Sundarbans, suggesting the humble background where these beliefs were rooted amidst a hostile living condition. In one moment, fisherman Fokir serves as reverence to *Bon Bibi* while referring the careful protection of life-sustaining water during a perilous mission alongside Piya. The prayer to *Bon Bibi* clearly demonstrates that belief of local people is not only a metaphysical phenomenon, but an outgrowth of the practical need to live in this environment.

*Bon Bibi* reflects how religious beliefs are a matter of survival in the Sundarbans.

This dependence on *Bon Bibi* for protection is symptomatic of a society constructed upon an intimate bond with nature which forms the cornerstone of their holistic sense of cultural self. The forest is not a passive setting but an active force, the myths and stories of that place takes on the values and actions of humans who live there. The legend of *Bon Bibi* is nothing but a cultural tool to describe the fine lines between decreeing humans what not to do in these forests that goes against nature's spirit over rules, by proving it that had nature its human face which when crosses the set limits finds no escape without any sign of justification.

Amitav Ghosh similarly looks at how a colonial past and layers of dislocation have constructed the Sundarbans in terms of cultural history. The refugees of Morichjhāpi, who were evicted from the island by the Indian government in the name of wildlife conservation, The Bangladeshi migrant settler community living in Morichjhapi, who were pushed out of their home country during Partition, and forced to settle down several times, illustrates the perpetual remarks of cultural identity in response to political forces.

In one of the novel's more tender moments, Kusum looks back on what has happened to the refugees: "This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world."<sup>35</sup> This statement captures the experience of those who settled in this place, and defined themselves through their history of moving. Morichjhāpi's sociocultural borders are formulated by a history of struggle and resistance with the state that covets land for preservation instead of shelter.

The conflicts in the novel arise when state interests represented by the government collide with the refugees who view land as last hope and future settlement. This struggle highlights how the established cultural identity is always shifting in reaction to external forces. Families were forced to give up a traditional, sustainable livelihood and pushed them out of society in the name of development or environmental preservation, actions that lead to a broader colonial legacy. The settlers resist the implementation of these policies, which is a matter of cultural survival in their case: holding together to keep the community and their way of life is an active form of resistance.

*The Hungry Tide* deals largely with the conflict between tradition and modernity, especially through how the characters process external reconfigurations led by forces such as science, development, and conservation. Piya, who represents the force of modernity a scientist and a conservationist, the Fokir represents the traditional way of life that has survived over generations. The cultural construction of society in the novel is marked by a continuous conflict among these two forces.

Nirmal, Kanai's uncle, is a figure straddling these two worlds. As a former Marxist and intellectual, Nirmal looks upon the settlers of Morichjhāpi as waiting revolutionaries, but all the same is fascinated by the old-world dimensions of life in the Sundarbans. His writing about the settlers indicates his internal battle to integrate modern political beliefs with an admiration for the land and wildlife that sustains them, as bizarre as it may be at times.

Through Nirmal's diary entries, in which settlers narrate how they overcame hardships and fought to live: "...What he wanted was to build a new society, a new kind of country. It would be a country run by cooperatives..."<sup>36</sup>

The government's efforts to remove the settlers for conservation reasons reinforce the tension between tradition and modernity.

### **Cultural Construction in *Nectar in a Sieve***

As Kamala Markandaya depicts in *Nectar in a Sieve*, the cultural formation of rural Indian society is heavily dependent upon its agricultural traditions, family roles and spiritual beliefs. The village brings to life a culture of the soil, and imparts forms which serve as customs and religious rites that hold together a shred of stability in an unruly existence. By detailing Rukmani's journey and the way her family changes in still rural, but rapidly modernizing India, Markandaya shows how cultural capital affects one's identity, both individual and group, at a time when customs were ancient against the looming backdrop of room for growth.

The sowing of crops is an example not only of cultural tradition, but also of the ritual importance that ceremony carries over into a practice central to the maintenance and improvement of life. Rukmani belongs to a family who depend on agriculture, an important agricultural practice highlighted throughout the novel. The same cyclicity we experienced in the days of planting and of sowing is deeply connected to all life, including death, in the village. Pre-sowing rituals for the seed planting by Rukmani and Nathan enhances the agricultural practices with respective deities. Rukmani narrates, "As soon as the rains were over, and the cracks in the earth had healed... we took our seed to our Goddess and placed it at her feet to receive her blessing."<sup>37</sup> This scene exemplifies the ways in which faith and tradition shape the villager's agricultural work by their labor with spiritual significance.

Religion in *Nectar in a Sieve* provides solace and is a method used to help keep the community together. The villagers look forward to festivities surrounding religious ceremonies, like the Festival of Lights (Deepavali) because it is a time when everyone can find some joy and feel united despite their suffering. The villagers do not only light lamps, the fireworks are set but they help in reminding them of their collective cultural attachment. Rukmani tells how she prepares for the festival: "I twisted cotton into wicks, soaked them in oil and placed them in mud saucers ready to be lit at night."<sup>38</sup> These acts are the symbols, the signs of hope and renewal in a community where survival is so often precarious.

Markandaya, too, invokes familial ties to underscore cultural norms of question, specifically with the involvement of marriage and childbearing. Rukmani's arranged marriage to Nathan speaks volumes of the society which was a common practice. Rukmani, on the contrary, comes from a formerly wealthy family but her father being unable to provide a proper dowry for his daughter; she marries the tenant farmer below them. Setting personal choice aside, one gets a cultural context of dowry an important role into getting their daughters placed in the best of life. No one protested during her marriage and Rukmani also accepts it as her duty. The social tradition of arranged marriages points to the dearth of power that is made available to women to choose their companion, while further highlighting the patriarchal grip on the society.

The gender stereotype of society also reveals the fact that a male birth is desired. Sons are typically more valued than daughters in rural India, as they are presumed to provide economic support for the family and carry forward the family name. This is a societal pressure that Rukmani feels more acutely after she gives birth to her first child, Ira, a baby girl. "Nathan had wanted a son to continue his line and walk beside him on the land, not a puling infant who would take with her a dowry and leave nothing but a memory behind." <sup>39</sup> It points out the gendered notion of what it likes to be a woman that their worth as women are bound to being able to produce sons.

A glimpse into cultural factors related to family pride family honor comes through Ira. Ira visits her parents in shame after her marriage destroyed by infertility. The choice of Ira to take up prostitution to provide food on the starving family screams at how brutally women are treated who dare to step outside societal norms.

The arrival of the tannery in the village announces a cultural transition, implying that there is an intrusion of the contemporary into older ways of living. That might bring an economic development, but it disrupts the social fabric, generating inflation, displacing people, and corroding traditional values. When a tannery is built in the village, Rukmani, and Nathan suspect this will destroy their way of living that has supported their people for centuries.

The theme of tradition versus progress is also apparent in the lives of Rukmani's sons, who abandon farming to go and work at the tannery. The choice of not working as a farmer anymore and to search for some other opportunity that bring them more profit,

makes evident the transformation in their cultural landscape where traditional agricultural practices are just no longer enough to guarantee people's sustenance. Nathan is clearly disappointed in his sons and hoped they would honor the family's agricultural tradition. The conflict between the generations demonstrates how cultural norms are being pulled in new ways by economic imperatives and modernization.

However, the novel shows that cultural traditions can still change and adapt to new realities. While the village evolves around her, Rukmani and her family reciprocate in kind with their customs, some of which help them to survive.

### **Cultural Construction in *Paro: A Dream of Passion***

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* by Namita Gokhale's satires on the construction of Indian society, and more specifically the urban elite. Through the characters of Piya and Paro, the text uncovers societal expectations about social conduct, relationships, and human interaction how culture is produced and entrenched by people in power positions.<sup>40</sup> She also reflects on the contradictions of this class, how it is capable of superficiality and poses larger questions about gender, morality and modernity versus traditional values.

One of the most critical ways that the novel depicts how culture constructs society is through ideas about gender roles and expectations. Women in this elite circle are held to a series of behavioural standards, especially as they pertain to that old hypocrite's standby sex and related public behaviour. The female class is represented by Piya who upholds what social norms require modest, self-sacrificing and dutiful. Her world revolves around her husband, Suresh, and she sees herself as a respectable woman. Paro, on the other hand, threatens these patriarchal values by exposing her sexuality and refusal to conform with traditional gender roles. Paro's multiloquent love, her attachments towards B.R reflect defiance against stereotypical expectations of women set in patriarchy.

The cultural construction of society is also demonstrated in the novel in marriage, and social status. Within that space, marriage is not only a personal bond but an instrument of social conformity and culture. One example of this is Piya and Suresh's marriage, which is very much an arrangement as well, meant to uphold her place as a

‘good wife’ in the norms set by their society. She didn’t get married because she fell in love with Suresh but was college time’s chemistry and not passion. Married him only to fit through a family rope of what society expects from good girl. Paro, on the other hand, is with a man who never loves her in the first place; for him their marriages are financial transactions intended to raise her status and grant her access to wealth and power. This underscores how, in a class like this, marriage is being used to widen status rather than confine it.

The text is also a critique on the culture construction of morality in the society, the way how it applies different to men versus women. The downfalls of Paro’s sexual behaviours are entirely public, while B.R. and the other male characters face few social consequences. Whereas married B.R. plays around, and as a rich and powerful man is not put under the same moral scanner that Paro is. Double standards, which often favour men regarding freedom and choice and require women to meet stringent behavioural norms, are rooted in social values. Paro openly flouts them in her relation with a politician, but the hypocritical nature of the powerful and privileged underclass is truly teased out in this case, as they participate almost entirely behind closed doors while retaining their facades in public. In doing so it reveals how skilful the construction of morality within culture is selective and inseparable from power relationships.

Another crucial factor in the cultural construction of society in *‘Paro: Dreams of Passion’* is the impact of Westernisation and modernity on the Indian elite. In the novel, the characters are discovered to be welcoming some features of Western culture — fashion, lifestyle, and relationships. Paro’s affair with Loukas Leoros, a foreign filmmaker here to represent the lure of Western sophistication and glamour, is an emblem to her infatuated relationship with the elite. Paro’s relationship with Loukas embodies the casting off Indian traditionalism in favour of cosmopolitan Western life. Nevertheless, the novel also points out that this Westernised embrace is somewhat superficial; its characters continue to operate according to traditional norms in other areas of their lives. For example, she is still defined by marriage and wealth building both of which are cultural standards and kept within her system, even if she outwardly rebels against them.

When it comes to cultural construction, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* becomes a commentary on the way society itself gets constructed among the Indian elite. The novel explores the lives of Paro and Piya, as Gokhale dissects what happens to cultural norms around gender, marriage, and morality when subject to the vagaries of power dynamics and material pursuits. The text satires about a society that values form more than substance and where moral rules are applied selectively, based on the position of power inhabited by each person. Gokhale does this by removing the layers of cultural constructions, thereby laying bare the innards of a society where readers are asked to reflect on their own values and world view.

### **3.3 Beliefs and Traditions**

#### **Beliefs and Traditions in *He Who Rides a Tiger***

*He Who Rides a Tiger* by Bhabani Bhattacharya unveils the complexities of faith and custom in an orthodox set-up. The psychological impact of these deeply ingrained habits is aptly demonstrated through its central character, Kalo, who undergoes an extraordinary transformation as he both succumbs to and challenges these practices, highlighting the strength and limitations of tradition.<sup>41</sup> By charting the trajectory of Kalo from a blacksmith to one of the most respected Brahmin priests, Bhattacharya underscores the irony and limitations of caste, religious orthodoxy, and social value-sets that are essentially hypocritical.

The novel has caste as its principal theme and in particular the Brahminical ideals that govern notions of access to society and decency within Kalo's world. There is no person or place that is not fed by caste in rural Bengal. As a blacksmith, Kalo is born low and so invisible and feeble that no one notices him. Kalo has neither sanctified birth nor sacred training: and when Bhattacharya takes him on a journey from house to house performing rituals as a Brahmin priest, this makes real or at least shows that caste is an illusion.

It instigates the transformation when Kalo wears an article of Brahminhood the *janeyu*, a sacred thread. His anguish over this is, again, the duality of conscience; he knows what a fraud he is. He knows that not only his appearance is being modified, but also, he is challenging centuries-old religious and social norms within his own

community: “Putting on the sacred thread he had made himself rootless.”<sup>42</sup> Despite his anxiety, this action frees him from his past and gives him an opportunity to break free of the constraints that come with birth. His charade tells us about all the hypocrisy that caste is birthright, and not merit or character, grants one respect and authority.

Through the character of Kalo, and the temple whose operations he heads, Bhattacharya scrutinises orthodoxy in Indian society. Kalo slips attains his new persona as a Brahmin, encountering the beliefs of the people coming to the temple in hope for divine pleasure. A moment where a donor pleads for an advance appointment to do a *milk bath* ceremony on his terminally ill dad demonstrates the power of superstition: The man begs profusely, but Kalo will not budge on his request to change the temple’s existing rituals due to them losing their ‘privilege’. It shows the nature of power dynamics and religious practices which get mixed up with each other. Kalo, a former outsider in this structure, ends up enforcing for it, a manifestation of the self-cannibalistic death spirals that oppression often is when repeated within the tradition.

Even in the climax of the plot where Kalo watches as Shiva’s stone rises from the ground through what some may describe a miracle is proof of blind faith in effect. He knows that his miracle is a whopping lie—a mirage of his own making—but the faithful slavish up riches in intended veneration: “Coins poured upon the deity, hundreds of silver bits. Women took gold bangles from their arms.”<sup>43</sup> For example, the unquestioning faith in divine intervention among the followers is evidence of the power that religious orthodoxy and superstition exercise upon society. Bhattacharya, in Kalo, enslaves his thus weaponized beliefs to suggest the mockery of religious institutions on one hand and how idiotic can mass be that they follow these practices for centuries without realising how crude are those tales.

Where Kalo’s rise lays bare the fault in social norms, his daughter Lekha wrestles between personal and familial obligation. As Kalo accepts and prospers in the system, Lekha runs from it. While this does constitute an act of rebellion against extractive religious orthodoxy that her birth into temple life places non-Black women in, it also represents the defiance of the tight caste and social norms that is expected, rather immunized by, said traditional.

Lekha considers what her father did when he climbed up the hierarchical ladder of society: “Instead of undermining society, he had become part of it, used its strength, for he had tacitly accepted its rules and served its purpose well.”<sup>44</sup> The success of her father was not a boon but rather the very force sculpting him into what she thought he fought so hard against. This recognition underscores the larger criticism of tradition within the novel. Even people who ascend the hierarchy will always be shackled by its machinations; they can never escape the expectation the hierarchy forces upon them.

### **Beliefs and Traditions in *The Hungry Tide***

In *The Hungry Tide* the beliefs and traditions in the Sundarbans are slathered onto every element of not only nature, but also history, and daily survival. The novel dives into how the people mix mythic beliefs, old customs, and social habits together to build a frame for their chaotic world.<sup>45</sup> Throughout the narrative, these beliefs – conspicuously *Bon Bibi* and *Dokkhin Rai* provide an indication of a reciprocal bond between people and nature forming both their way of life that sustains them as well as moralities that guide them in collective identity formation.

At the cultural and spiritual core of the Sundarban, the mythic figure, *Bon Bibi*, an entity close to being a goddess, protects humankind from the fiery terrors of myriad forest with its most formidable embodiment in *Dokkhin Rai*. This legend is feared by the inhabitants of Sundarbans who see *Bon Bibi* as their guardian against nature and its manifestations in tiger attacks, tidal surges etc. The Sundarbans are a place where we can see beliefs and traditions come from the necessity of survival in an unpredictable, hazardous terrain.

One of the most poignant moments in the novel, that reminds why this faith matters, is when Fokir, a fisherman whose identity and life is steeped in the customs of the Sundarbans, prays *Bon Bibi* to keep him safe while navigating with Piya through the dangerous waters. Fokir’s prayer to *Bon Bibi* highlights a reality in the community that is carried on throughout many other communities; no one can separate their spiritual learning from their daily life. For Fokir, *Bon Bibi* is as palpable as tide or mangrove, in this sense of a porous border between the spiritual and material worlds.

The tradition of *Bon Bibi* is not an individual prayer but a bunch of collective rituals and pilgrimages. The *Bon Bibi Puja* is an annual event that binds the community through their common beliefs and traditions. The ritual is primarily a religious ceremony which also acts as a social gathering that helps in establishing deeper relationships among the people who come to commune in Bon Bibi, making sure that she will protect them for another year.

Crucially, since the closure of borders and lockdown orders ensure social distancing on an unprecedented scale, retaining these community-wide acts are essential for keeping the fabric of sociability intact in a territory like the Sundarbans, where existential terror is common ground. A visit to the temple where Bon Bibi resides is more than just an act of religious piety; it personifies in symbolism the human urges, instincts, and entwined fate with those of nature. In these rituals one could see the local Sundarbans reinforcing their right to the land and survival bonded in tradition, as a response against an often-unfriendly environment.

The clash of traditional and modern beliefs is a recurring theme in *The Hungry Tide*, symbolised by Piya and Fokir who was born in one of the villages and represents everything that is unique to Sundarbans. Piya's scientific method of tracking the river dolphins is juxtaposed to Fokir's sense or connection to nature; her structured, methodical methods versus his embedded belief in *Bon Bibi* that enables him to predict tidal changes and navigate through the forests efficiently. This contradiction draws attention to the co-existence of modernity and tradition in the processual spaces of the Sundarbans, which are not very hygienic.

The novel hints that Modernity and Tradition do not have all the solutions alone for the people of Sundarbans. But rather than isolating these views, survival in such a harsh environment depends on a symbiotic relationship between them: the traditional beliefs and scientific knowledge are complementary forces that must be melded to survive the challenges of climate.

### **Beliefs and Traditions in *Nectar in a Sieve***

Kamala Markandaya uncovers the layers of beliefs and traditions of rural Indian society, exposing how these elements control and mould her characters in *Nectar in a*

*Sieve*. Set in an agrarian village, the plot unfolds in a community that remains deeply rooted in tradition when faced with hardship, grief, and uncertainty. The villagers are bred by an ideology that believes in fate, knows only to lean on God and sticks rigidly to conventional norms of living laid down over ages.

The village is one of the most widely practiced by depending on Goddess Blessing Agriculture-based practice. This act symbolises the faith of the villagers in higher gods to ensure the productivity of their crops and truly establishes a deep-rooted relation between religion, and agriculture. Another explanation is that this story illustrates the community's reliance on rituals to give them hope and security of having someone to help them save their crops during a time when nature would be unpredictable.

During crisis, such as debilitating droughts and famines that plague their village, the novel shows the villagers' commitment to their deities in their most raw form. In such times, these prayer and religion perceptions help the villagers through. When Rukmani does not conceive any kids after Ira, her mother is like go to the temple and pray for other children. The practice of praying to the gods is one that has marked upon their collective culture, as evidenced when Rukmani's mother picks her up and says, her religious faith in this symbol, even as her mother lays on her death bed, reveals the profound degree of confidence that someone can have in these superstitious notions.

The villager's celebrating festival between the harsh living conditions which is another ideological form of tradition which plays its role as projecting light them and other moments of happiness dressing up and seeing so people have some little respite of doing something a bit more special. *Deepavali*, the Festival of Lights is well explained in terms of its cultural and religious importance. Rukmani busies herself preparing for the festival, twisting cotton into wicks, soaking them in oil and pasting annas to give her children to buy fireworks. The festival is so much more than a religious observance it's about community, tradition, and the sustainability of culture. Rukmani borrows cloths from her neighbour and gathers her two children to take them because moment of joy in their lives is worth the whole of their poverty.

The novel further reveals the villagers' sense of fate and destiny, which profoundly influences how they face hardship and grief. Rukmani muses that their difficulties are an inevitable consequence of a greater order, which she and all the villagers must simply accept. The belief in fate is highlighted when Rukmani and Nathan are forced out of the village after they must sell their land to tannery owners, to support their children. Rukmani accepts the fact that they can't do anything and says "We are in God's hands. He will not fail us."<sup>46</sup> This reliance on God offers a kind of sustenance that enables the villagers to endure hardship with spiritual strength.

The villagers are also very superstitious, and this informs how they explain illness, death, and misfortune. The character of Kunthi, who can be seen as a problematic paradigm character is portrayed as morally ambiguous and powerful in her ability to manipulate men. Her power is portrayed as both physical and mystical, as Rukmani states, "She has a strange power... evil and powerful."<sup>47</sup> Fear of the evil and the desire to guard against such power is a common thread that echoes the villagers' belief in a world where invisible forces, be they good spirits or ill, determine their fate each day.

*'Nectar in a Sieve'* also touches on several traditions relating to family and marriage, which form part of the cultural backdrop in the text. The superficial layer of progressiveness in the village, there still exists social and cultural norms such as arranged marriages, dowries, and the never-ending thirst for a male heir. A woman is judged for not giving birth to a son — simply put, that's her value and function from the perspective of culture.

The book also illustrates how modernization has its effects on villagers, and the tension between tradition and change. The tannery that comes to the village poses a threat to tradition-based way of life, introduces new social dynamics, and disrupts the land's gentleness for them. The two sons of Rukmani, who gives up farming to work at the tannery, exemplify the younger generation's betrayal of tradition for economic security. Nathan is saddened by what his sons have chosen to do, an archetypal illustration of one generation clinging to the old ways with which other struggles mightily. However, Rukmani and Nathan still hold on to their customs although they are fighting to live in the fast-paced movement of their world.

### **Beliefs and Traditions in *Paro: a Dream of Passion***

Namita Gokhale in *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, gives a satirical depiction of the higher echelons of Indian society, where deep-rooted beliefs and values coexist with urban elite consumerism. It reveals the ways that shared beliefs and cultural practices, within communities, have a long reach and structuring effect on lives even as people try to negotiate them through the social demands of a changing society. In the parallel stories of Piya and Paro, Gokhale reveals the entrenchment of conformity, the tension between new lifestyles and a culture tethered to custom, traditionalism reshaping our lives and values impoverishing them from within; she shows us how beliefs structure both action and relationships.<sup>48</sup>

The traditional marriage as an institution of the social existence is one of those beliefs that encourages certain behaviours throughout the text. The narrator, Piya represents the archetypal Indian tradition which regards marriage as utmost goal that marks social respect. Her loveless marriage to Suresh is pragmatic but passionless as it suggests, confirms that her value stems from fulfilling the wife and homemaker role, not from belonging in a loving and passionate relationship. Piya's adherence to this philosophy is evident on two levels: the first, in the passive way she bows to her husband and holds up the illusion that their life is well sorted: stable job, respectable marriage.

Unlike Piya, who performs her duties of tradition in a typical way, Paro is rather depicted as the one challenging regular beliefs and norms about marriage and gender roles. Paro sees marriage to gain power and be socially higher in the class system. Her union with B.R., a wealthy industrialist, is an attempt to ascend to privileged status and power. Paro despises traditional anchoring in marriage so much that she publicly and shamelessly carries on multiple extramarital liaisons. Her act of not adhering to society-defined marriage norms portrays the dichotomy of age-old traditions vs. the modern and contemporary real. Here Paro symbolises an independent & new-age woman who is unphased by societal pressure and gives challenges to the established notion of men-oriented gaze.

The characters are also subtly influenced in their own life-stories and actions by religious traditions. Although the novel is set in a highly modern and materialistic

milieu, religious practices and rituals bedeck ordinary activity.<sup>49</sup> Like Piya, who steps outside to maintain the traditions of religious practices in an urban society. The religious practices she holds unto is a manifestation of her strong faith and advocacy to sustain such cultural practice.

Parallel to the religious traditions, a disparity can be seen between Piya and Paro on the acceptance of fate or destiny. Thus, the more traditional Piya, believes in fate and chaos — accepting that her current situation is all part of a greater scheme to this cosmic game. Her faith in fate sustains her during the trials of marriage and of not being Paro. This acceptance of fate is a notion also underpinned by the broader cultural perspective of *karma*, the suggestion that what one does becomes part of your actions in this life and has repercussions which will further shape future endings. This belief is reinforced by Piya who does not even struggle when it comes to accepting traditional roles of wife and prefers to take everything passively and this particular trait of hers reinforces the characters perception on fate. The novel draws attention to these competing, contemporary values alongside the traditional values that have continued for years. Though they strive for a new age with modernity and materialism as their moral compass, the characters are forever imprisoned by the superstition of beliefs that really define their ways of living together.

The texts *He Who Rides a Tiger* by Bhabani Bhattacharya, *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh, *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya and *Paro: Dreams of Passion* by Namita Gokhle provide absurd demonstration on the societal norms, values, cultural construction of society and beliefs and traditions that determine human experiences. They reveal the contradictions, hypocrisies, and strictures of society-particularly in areas of class, gender, and personal liberty. Each novel is a study in the dialectic between society and the individual, deeply resonant with human rights and creative survival.

Bhattacharya, in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, criticises the caste-based system through which this hierarchy circumscribes individual movability and by that it reinforces inequality. The novel raises questions on social values which diminishes humanity based on birth and the equality and esteem of right enshrined in constitution, irrespective of caste. It goes along with the rest of human rights discussion as the

novel reflects against oppressive systems that restrict people from getting freedom and equality.

*The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh considers society that culturally constructed in the environment of the Sundarbans, where harsh natural environment directs human existence. The novel deals with the interaction of these people living on the margins with the machinery of state control. Those characters battle forces of displacement and environmental decay, the settlers most of all. Focusing specifically on the need of human rights assurance and establishing environmental justice, Ghosh did not link the two elements with endangered ecosystems. The novel engages with human rights. For example, the land, resource, and cultural claims of marginalised subaltern communities against state-sponsored dispossession and devastation in a story.

Kamala Markandaya represents the toils of rural society in *Nectar in a Sieve*, where societal norms and values coalesce with gendered and class expectations. Her uncomplaining endurance of poverty, ruin and exile embodies the selflessness that society demands from women. The text challenges patriarchal worldviews that constrain women struggles of living and right to humanity in terms of economic security, social equality, and gender justice. The text also emphasizes the toll industrialization takes on agrarian life, asking questions about the economic rights of individuals, as well as if the state has a duty to protect those people who cannot protect themselves.

Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is indeed a satirical exposure into the lives of urban elite, criticizing their lack of moral strength where everything is cemented by money and social respect. The juxtaposition of Paro's defiance with Piya's conforming brings out a unique light and questioning the ways in which women must maneuver this space carefully as commodities within society. The ultimate collapse of Paro, in turn, illustrates the failings of rebellion as a form of resisting a system that values appearance over true liberation. Highlighting women's rights to self, freedom and equality, along with the urge from societal judgment, the text reflects a broader human rights context, such as gender discrimination and freedom of expression.

These novels simultaneously critique the negative societal values, cultural expectations and traditions that hinder personal liberties and conserve social discrimination. They draw our focus to social justice, gender equality, and human rights that were the driving forces for these literary works which demand an end to the oppressive systems which exploit and marginalise people from their dignity and their rights.

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## **CHAPTER - 4**

### **MAN VERSUS NATURE**

4.1 Man, Nature, and Society

4.2 Environmental Consciousness

4.3 Nature and Human Psychology

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## **Chapter-4**

### **Man versus Nature**

*Natura* is a Latin word that means Nature, from the verb *nasci* (to be born). Originally in the classical Latin, *natura* was close to essential qualities or innate dispositions of living beings; however, with time it also began to be used for all natural things: elements (air, fire), plants, animals alive and dead. The topic of ‘Nature’ was prominent in ancient Greek philosophy, where thinkers such as the famous Heraclitus and Aristotle contemplated function/thingness/change and what constitutes life.

*Physics* by Aristotle (the ancient Greek analogue of *natura*) was mainly the inner principle of motion and change in living things. During the Renaissance and Enlightenment, such notions evolved with the emergence of modern science that redefined everything we call nature as an objective measurable system with laws<sup>1</sup>. In the Romantic, however, nature was a wellspring of beauty and illumination and emotion too in contrast to mechanistic views of the Enlightenment<sup>2</sup>.

Today ‘Nature’ seems to have multiple meanings: it encompasses the physical universe, includes both that which we think of as ‘natural’, and its recognised properties; it also stands as a symbol for the opposite of anthropogenic material culture<sup>3</sup>. It shows the changing relationship between mankind and nature, reflected in its diverse origin.

#### **4.1 Man Nature and Society**

##### **Concept of Man and Nature ‘exploring’ Society**

For centuries, the relationship of man and nature has been a central theme in philosophical, literary, and sociological thought with different theorists attempting to explore the tensions, harmony or ethical duties this relationship entails. The Concept of ‘man and nature’ involves both the dependence of human life on the natural environment as well as how society regulates this relationship; usually representing elements of industrialization, urbanization, or environmental degradation.<sup>4</sup> Scholars

from a range of traditions have developed theories around this idea, stressing the influence of humans on nature and that nature reciprocates and shapes human society.

Philosophers, such as René Descartes and Francis Bacon, who lived in the Enlightenment era were among those who contributed to this idea that nature should be understood and controlled by human use of their intellectual capacities (e.g., through Reason and Science). Descartes conceptualized nature as a machine that human reason could study and utilize. This was a radical shift from previous holistic and spiritual views of nature, in which humans were part of an organic, divine whole.<sup>5</sup> In *Novum Organum* (1620), Bacon promoted the empirical study of nature, emphasizing humanity's control over nature through scientific discovery.<sup>6</sup>

However, that mechanistic perspective led to detachment between man and nature; humans being seen as conquerors of the environment, not as part of it. This perspective of nature fuelled the environmental degradation during the Industrial Revolution by depicting nature as a passive resource to be used for human progress, whilst humans continued growing scientific and technological ability to exploit natural resources. Such a stance towards nature laid the basis for modern science to develop, and later ecological catastrophes.

Against the mechanistic approach brought forth by Enlightenment thinkers, including Isaac Newton and René Descartes, late 18th- and early 19th-century Romantics like William Wordsworth and Jean-Jacques Rousseau reestablished a more organic relationship between man and nature—one grounded in emotion and spirit. In works such as *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* (1798), Wordsworth extolled nature for its ability to heal and inspire the spirit. To him nature was not simply a backdrop for human activity but a living spirit with which humans could communicate<sup>7</sup>. In a similar way Rousseau believed in nature's intrinsic goodness and its capability of ensuring humans both moral and physical sustenance<sup>8</sup>. In *Emile* (1762) he claimed that the way society corrupts men while closeness to nature restores human qualities.

Karl Marx, as a historical materialist, understood the relationship between man and nature where nature is the ground of human labour and production. Marx criticised how capitalism exploited not only human labour, but also the natural environment and

argued that industrial society separates humans from their work and nature itself. Marx, in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, described labour as the worker feels himself at home only when he is not working; when he is working, he does not feel at home<sup>9</sup> under the capitalist system. In its turn, the worker's separation from nature manifested itself into a capitalist system that misuses the natural resources without humanitarian care for ecological sustainability or workers.

According to Marx, the socio-economic process of capitalist production is responsible for degrading nature because labour has been abused. Later thinkers reinforced his outlook such as John Bellamy Foster, whose *Marx's Ecology* focused on the ecological dimensions of Marx's thought and argued that capitalist systems by their very nature undermine the man-nature relationship because they prioritise profits over ecological sustainability.<sup>10</sup>

Environmentalists and ecologists in the 20th century drew on earlier critiques of humanity's relationship to nature, insisting on the immediacy of environmental degradation generated by industrial society. *Silent Spring* (1962) by Rachel Carson inspired the modern environmentalist movement, she argued that human action specifically through mechanical means such as pesticides were having an irreversible impact on nature<sup>11</sup>. Carson highlighted the interconnectedness of life, offering a cautionary note that if any part of nature is affected, humans will also suffer consequences.

In the 1970s, philosopher Arne Næss expanded upon these ideas with his concept of deep ecology, which asked for a fundamental redesign of human society based on the concept of respecting all living beings due to their inherent value beyond any usefulness to humans.<sup>12</sup> According to Næss, modern society follows an anthropocentric view of nature—one which considers humans as a higher species above all others—that must be overcome in favour of an ecocentric one where humans view themselves embodied with a greater ecosystem.<sup>13</sup>

The idea of man and nature have gone through several philosophical, political, and scientific paradigms. The relationship between society and the environment has been a recurring subject from the mechanistic subjugation of nature in Enlightenment thought through to its organic glorification in Romanticism, and then through Marx's

critique of capitalist exploitation to our contemporary ecological movement. All these viewpoints emphasise different dimensions and aspects of this relationship, but all suggest the time has come to reimagine the human beings as sort of centre around the natural world, especially because of contemporary ecological challenges.

### **Intersection of Man Nature and Society and its impact on each other**

The relation between man, nature and society has been a significant theme addressed by both Western and Indian English literature revealing the interrelation among human activity, natural environment, human behaviour, natural landscapes and cultural frameworks<sup>14</sup>. Over history all these relationships have evolved, and literature serves as a valuable tool to reflect on the effects of human interventions in nature. The interplay of man, nature and society as a unified dynamic process is offered by English and Indian English literature depicting the interaction between them where one is guided by the other.

Romantics restored nature — as a source of morals and spiritual guidance — in a central place for English literature. The very essence of nature as a realm for healing and contemplation so human beings could escape societal corruption was central to the philosophies of writers like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In poems like *Tintern Abbey* (1798), Wordsworth suggests that a powerful bond exists between human beings and the natural world, and he even says that nature can heal the soul. As he puts it, “For I have learned / To look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes / The still, sad music of humanity.”<sup>15</sup> This relates to the concept that humanity has a deeper understanding of self through interaction with Earth’s environment.

The human disregard for nature reaching calamitous consequences is a theme evident in Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798). The mariner’s reckless slaying of the albatross, representing man interrupting the work of nature, earns him a punishment from God that comes in the form of disastrous weather<sup>16</sup>. Coleridge imagines a romantic view of nature as a moral force, punishing or rewarding humans according to the way they treat it<sup>17</sup>. Coleridge illustrates how disrespect for nature can engender catastrophe. The act of shooting the albatross reflects humanity’s violation of natural law giving rise to divine retribution in the form of calamities. The idea that

nature works like a kind of moral agent helping or harming humanity depending on how we tread on the natural world is one of core tenets of the Romantic viewpoint and this certainly comes through in Coleridge's poem. While English literature embraced a new emphasis on nature during the Romantic period as a source of moral and spiritual authority. With regards to nature, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge found solace in it if not enlightenment; both viewed the natural world as a retreat from the evils of civilization<sup>18</sup>.

### **Man, Nature, and Society in Indian English Literature**

Indian English literature treats the relationship between man, nature and society in a much more politicised way<sup>19</sup>. Such literature encapsulates the impacts as witnessed through a few decades, such as colonialism and degradation of the natural world and deprivations at societal level where communities with limited voices find it difficult to face these forces. It has been explored by writers like Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh with an indicative Indian context, focusing on the exploitation of nature and societal and human rights issues.

One of the significant explorations in Indian English literature on this very theme is Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004). Ghosh's novel, set in the tidal mangroves of the Sundarbans, delves into this frail survival of people and nature. The tension between nature and society is the main subject of the novel as they influence each other while the Sundarbans is presented in this duality<sup>20</sup>. This story lays bare the struggle between native endangered wildlife and struggling human survival, as exemplified in the tale of Morichjhãpi settlers being targeted by governmental efforts to reclaim what they consider sacred lands for threatened species. Nature is not merely a backdrop in this novel, but Ghosh evokes it as a character, both beautiful and treacherous. The ever-encroaching tides and the tigers prowling its forests are a constant reminder of nature's priority over human life, compelling society to move with its rhythms<sup>21</sup>. Piya, the marine biologist, who often observes nature through a lens but respects local knowledge and traditions illustrates this need for human understanding to revel within an intersection of man and nature.

A significant portion of recent Indian English literary conversations have also been framed by the environmental movement and the increasing awareness of ecological

degradation. Nature has become an effective tool for critique among many writers who explore the intersecting realities of environmental degradation and its impact on communities that are considered vulnerable by fast paced industrialization and urbanization in India. *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Bhabani Bhattacharya (1954) — This novel portrays rural poverty and the limits of human aspiration in the face of societal norms that compel humans to extract from their natural surroundings as means to disparity<sup>22</sup>. The central character Kalo determines himself through religious superstition, exploits nature and society around him to gain supremacy over his caste. Through the intersections of man, nature, and society in Bhattacharya's text, they are reminder of morally bankrupt moments within our societies time and again resulting in social inequalities<sup>23</sup>.

The struggle of the environmental movement and the need for saving nature from ecological imbalance and ecological degradation have influenced most of the modern Indian English writers. Nature serves as a backdrop for several writers to respond to and critique rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in India, showing the consequences of environmental degradation on vulnerable communities. *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954) by Bhabani Bhattacharya depicts rural poverty and how the societal imperfections compel the masses to use the natural world as a weapon of survival<sup>24</sup>. The protagonist, Kalo, takes advantage of religious superstition to exploit nature and society around him to gain supremacy over his caste. Bhattacharya's novel focuses on how the intersection of man, nature, and society can contribute to immorality and social discrimination<sup>25</sup>. Indian writers have also turned their attention towards the environmental effects of capitalist and developmentalist policies. For example, Mahasweta Devi in *The Arjun Yatra* closely interlinks the dispossession of tribal communities at the hands of development with the loss of their natural habitat. The native connection to the land is portrayed as sacred and inherent to these peoples' identity, which clashes with the forces of capitalism that want to sever this bond for profit.

Essentially, postcolonial theorists like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha particularly made an impact on Indian English writers through their concept of colonialism as a form of uprooting which breached human relationship with nature and society. Inspired by Said's *Orientalism* (1978), this idea of the East as a wild and seductive wilderness

needs to be changed to stop the exploitation of both its people and resources that the West has created<sup>26</sup>. While writing Indian English literature, this colonial legacy of exploitation is often explored with the connection of Indian English literature from the perspective of environmental degradation and social injustice. For instance, in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh is critical of postcolonial governments and their tendency to treat both nature and a marginalised social group as nothing more than available resources. This novel illustrates the continuities of colonial violence and post-colonial governance through its portrayal of the Morichjhāpi massacre against indigenous people of Bengal speaking to the processes by which environmental conservation is pursued with reckless disregard for the material rights of the poor<sup>27</sup>.

The intersection of man-nature-society is common in English literature, as well in Indian English literature, always brings out the deep complexities between human relationships with nature and societies that take care of these relationships. Literature creates a discursive space for thinking about both the ways in which spiritual and moral dimensions of nature, Romantic or otherwise, compel human experience from one direction and the political and ecological impulses from the other. The works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Roy, Ghosh, and Bhattacharya imply that its impacts are extensive and range from personal identity to global concerns such as environmental destruction and social injustice. In the wake of climate change and ecological crises that humanity is perhaps unprepared for, however, these literary explorations are still an important reminder to rethink how one understands the relationships between man and nature; between man and himself; between man and society.

### **Man, Nature, and Society in *He Who Rides a Tiger***

Bhattacharya offers a radical stance on social hierarchies, especially the caste system, and its relation to nature and survival in *He Who Rides a Tiger*. Kalo, a blacksmith from the lower caste who represents their rebellion against being subjugated to cruelty and injustice for centuries embodies more than just that conflict between nature and heavy structural constraints. Kalo transformed from a simple, downtrodden figure to a clever manipulator of religious and social beliefs. It is a portrayal of the struggle between man and nature versus man and his place in society.

The rural village of Bengal as the backdrop for the novel shows how nature is intertwined with and ranges all around lower castes who depend and earn their living from soil, land, agriculture or manual labour. Kalo is a blacksmith; his hands toil with natural creations like metal and fire, yet the caste system renders him uncultured. It shows how nature, while a giver of life, becomes one more prison in the unyielding rigidities of social order<sup>28</sup>. Kalo the outcast is a convict, defeated by the system, not just personally but as a member of that lower caste which defies nature in its very essence.

The most significant turning point of the novel is when Kalo disguises himself as a Brahmin priest, takes advantage of the villagers' belief in miracle-making and oversteps his boundaries. The climactic scene, where Kalo persuades the villagers that a stone god had come to life from the earth a normal outcome misread as a miracle—shows how nature is employed by the members of society, exploiting a natural phenomenon to uphold the never-ending game of power<sup>29</sup>. As Kalo states, “I have made you commit sacrilege and blacken your faces,”<sup>30</sup> marks the deep interconnection between human manipulation of nature with societal control. By exploiting, Kalo can rectify who he is naturally expected to be and subvert the systems that once controlled him. Bhattacharya explores the social divides of caste through Kalo and her neighbourhood, describing how humans weaponise nature, namely, religious narratives tied to natural events to achieve power. The temple in which the deception of Kalo takes place is a representation of nature (miracle) and society (hierarchy) are woven together, both ensnared for social domination.

### **Man, Nature, and Society in *The Hungry Tide***

The relationship between man nature and society can be seen in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. Based in the Sundarbans, a part of tidal rivers and mangrove forests lying within India and Bangladesh illustrates the fragile interrelationship between natural ecosystems and human societies. In this portrayal, nature is more than a setting; it is a powerful force that determines the cadence of life, subsistence and sociality<sup>31</sup>. Understanding the relationship between man, nature and society is one of the major concerns in this novel and especially in understanding this relationship setting of a novel is very important. Sundarbans is a jungle in its utmost purest form—constantly changing tide, dangerous animals and an unpredictable climate.

The people of the land, including a fisherman named Fokir. The highs and lows of Fokir's life, his mere survival and even his spirituality are intertwined with the tides and Bon Bibi, the goddess who keeps dangers of the forest from harming people. An example of this close bond with nature comes in the text as, "...he tells a story of an occasion when Fokir, at the age of five, recited from memory many of the cantos that comprise a tide country legend: the story of Bon Bibi, the forest's protectress."<sup>32</sup> In a life-or-death situation where man can only survive through respect for nature, Fokir acknowledges the interdependence of all living entities in his prayer. Nevertheless, the novel also shows how social forces interfere with this balance. The Morichjhāpi incident, in which settlers are displaced from the Sundarbans by the state under the guise of environmental conservation, embodies this tension between human survival and a dysfunctional prioritisation imposed by the state. Societal structures versus human engagement with nature are depicted in the way the Government ties itself to protecting endangered species even at the cost of settler lives.

A emotional question from Kusum "The island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals. But what about us? Are we worth less than dirt?"<sup>33</sup> summarises the critique of the novel, that environmental policies can be used as weapons against marginalised communities. Nature is a livelihood but also a contested space enforced by the government's conservation efforts where social forces determine who should possess and extract resources from land. The delicate balance between man and nature is further highlighted in Fokir's death, beaten up by the storm winds when he went to save Piya, a marine biologist whom he tried his best to keep away from the danger of wild nature. She is a scientist in the USA, researching river dolphins and the Sundarbans ecosystem. Fokir, on the other hand, has a spiritual relationship with nature as part of his lived experience as he hears the tides and knows the forest that sustains him<sup>34</sup>. Tensions between ways of knowing, and understanding nature are apparent through the alternating narrative voices where each narrator provides a different view towards personal interaction with wild 'nature' that often is framed by human structures. The storm, a symbol of nature's indifference to humankind, enhances the theme of human vulnerability against nature in the novel.

Ghosh presents nature as neither nurturing nor benevolent but indifferent to the sufferings of humans and like our journey through life plagued by the over

dominating societal forces we are projected to negotiate its lap as well<sup>35</sup>. Bhattacharya as well as Ghosh uses narrative form to comment on the ways in which nature is central and integral to their protagonists. And they also reinforce the role of nature in the characters' lives. The third-person omniscient narrator in *He Who Rides a Tiger* lets readers witness how that manipulation of religious superstition mirrors larger structures of society through Kalo. The story contrasts with Kalo's relationship with nature as a blacksmith shaping raw materials, and his exploitation of social ideas about nature. That contrast highlights the way people both utilise and abuse nature in this stratified class system environment.

### **Man, Nature, and Society in *Nectar in a Sieve***

Markandaya examines the interaction of man, nature, and society in her novel *Nectar in a Sieve* through the life of Rukmani, a rural Indian woman. Agriculture is important because it symbolises the interdependence between man and nature. The land is not just the place that the protagonist lives on, but also plays an essential role in their survival. The closeness with the land is shown in Rukmani reminiscences about how fertile and important it was while feeding her family. She says, "The tender budding of our new year, the periwinkles and the jasmine, the soft, scented champak blossom, had yielded place to the fierce flowering jacaranda and gold mohur."<sup>36</sup> This reveals the natural cycles directly affecting their lives, but it also reveals man's striving against nature; when there are poor harvests, hunger and death ensue! The terrible unpredictability of nature, in particular droughts and floods is an ever-present source of concern for the characters. The emotional devastation of Rukmani reflects the same sort of natural destruction, which is made to appear from time to time when the land suffers a natural calamity and becomes futile. The villagers are close to each other and maintain old traditions but with the change of nature, social integrity begins to collapse. The community gripped by natural forces struggles to emerge from it seems to demonstrate that man-nature relationship has a significant role in determining human well-being.

The characters experience constant anxiety from nature's unpredictable, and harsh forces manifested in, droughts and floods. Rukmani's emotional devastation and the destruction of nature is manifest in the barrenness that lands suffer due to natural adversity. Once vibrant village society based on tradition unravels as nature turns

hostile. How the community suffers to endure against the anger of nature explains that the relationship between man and nature is a major factor which determines the prosperity of both societies. For example, Rukmani and her family become destitute when there is a drought, and all their crops fail. The empty fields symbolise nature losing its promise to provide, and by extension the family disintegration. As the text points out, “Yet I must be honest, as my husband and sons have always been the tannery cannot be blamed for every misfortune we suffered. Tannery or not, the land might have been taken from us. It had never belonged to us...”<sup>37</sup> The interdependence on nature and the breakdown of it in villages reflects the delicate relationship between humans and nature.

### **Man, Nature, and Society in *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* by Namita Gokhale explores the themes of man-nature-society within the urban-modern realm. In the process, we not only get to see this enviable world of decadence and ambition but also, we see through the eyes of a pretty ordinary girl at heart; Paro, who is simply trying to find her way through an otherwise exciting life.

In this case, society has a more made-up quality to it and nature is clearly missing. The decaying city represents an alienated community which has drifted apart from its roots that suggests not only a disconnection from the natural world but also a more profound rotation in human relationships, and loss of self-awareness. Nature does pop up here and there in a metaphorical sense for Paro’s turmoil or for the call of society even – but nature doesn’t exist. In a slick, artificial farm scene where the set is designed to look organic, it symbolizes an attempt at nature. The protagonist reflects, “...actually, and all kinds of other insects, as the farm was near the Yamuna River. The atmosphere was quite tranquil, even a little subdued, despite all the pretty fairy lights and soft Shehnai music. It was, I could see, going to be a very proper party.”<sup>38</sup> Nature is harnessed to meet social expectations, highlighting society’s separation from real natural encounters, and exemplifying an artificial space reflective of the human hierarchy.

On the other hand, Namita Gokhale’s *Paro: Dreams of Passion* explores the theme of man, nature, and society in a modern-day urban setting where readers witness the elite

class and their disconnect with nature. In the novel, high-society decadence is explored through the eyes of Paro, an attractive woman who gets entrapped in manipulation and seductive desire. On this side, society becomes a relatively more artificial establishment with the absence of nature. The decaying city represents an alienated humanity which has lost touch with its roots that suggests not only a disconnection from the natural world but also a more profound rotation in human relationships, and loss of self-identity<sup>39</sup>. Nevertheless, nature does make symbolic appearances as a representation of Paro's inner conflict or societal pressures. At an extravagant farm party, for instance, where nature is artificially constructed and curated.

The protagonist reflects, Nature is manipulated to work for society revealing how contemporary social values distance themselves from true nature and instead create artifice of nature according to class. The character dynamics in which Paro's connection with the men in her life as well, reflects the exploitative nature of human society on the environment. As nature is exploited and abused for gain, Paro is also objectified and utilised by those around her. This speaks to the precariousness of such social institutions, and perhaps an eventual downfall as well. Gokhale criticises the loss of nature in urban cities, how such a disconnect between man and nature will lead to moral and personal decay.

In both *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, the relationship between man, nature, and society plays a central role in shaping the characters' lives and fates, though they manifest differently. Markandaya's rural setting emphasizes the essential connection between human survival and the land. While nature giver and nurturer, is also unpredictable and ruthless. The society depicted in *Nectar in a Sieve* is closely connected to agriculture, and the failure of crops leads to a breakdown in social cohesion. The land is both a source of life and a destroyer, as seen when the village succumbs to famine and disease, symbolising the fragile balance between man and nature.

On the contrary, Gokhale breaks readers out of the river-side villages and into an urban setting in *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, a place where residents have created an unsustainable barrier against nature, living in a self-contained world separated from reality. The characters behave like the way we exploit nature in modern times, they

manipulate their surroundings and each other very much to get what they want. This rise and fall of Paro in the social order represents an unsustainable relationship based on power, sensuality, and consumerism. The society where characters live is artificial, detached from nature and isolated. Nature has a profound effect on both the experience of the society within each novel and on the lives of its characters, too.

#### **4.2 Environmental Consciousness**

In the relation of Indian English literature, environmental consciousness indicates towards the awareness, understanding and representation of the connection between human beings with their environment, especially due to ecological degradation, cultural landscapes, or natural resources exploitation. That awareness is a sign of significant involvement with issues like deforestation, pollution, climate change and displacement of marginalised people due to industrialisation or developmental schemes. As Indian English literature has expanded the thematic and geographical scope of its narratives, environmental consciousness has emerged into this corpus<sup>40</sup>.

Indian English literature, particularly in its portrayal of ecocriticism, is entrenched into how human communities have interacted with the environment. By concentrating on environmental destruction, displacement and its effects of industrialization experienced by the subalterns, Indian English writers deconstruct the process of nature exploitation that is displacing groups who are less free to follow these changes. Together these works embody the complexities and interrelatedness of human life, culture, and environment to force readers into ethical reflection on conservation as well as a shifting concern toward sustainable and socially just practices.

#### **Environmental Consciousness in *He Who Rides a Tiger***

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger* highlights the link between man-nature and society from an ecological perspective. Bhattacharya incorporates an anthropocentric view, a clear message of how human ideologies have taken advantage of the natural world is portrayed through the characters, plot, and setting. This is a narrative that illustrates the relationship of human and community with the environment, but also the power structures that dictate human's place in it. This novel is based in rural Bengal that surrounds the natural environment, especially agricultural

land that provides the backbone of their survival. Bhattacharya talks about a rural village being fundamentally dependent on natural resources; agriculture and labour are two means that the village utilises.

Kalo is a blacksmith, his tools are the primal elements of fire, metal and earth itself yet even with his mastery over such core materials his place in society is minimized due to a caste system that teaches people to value what he produces but marginalises him as a person<sup>41</sup>. The interplay between the nature of Kalo's work and social structure illustrates the much bigger facet of rural India, where nature facilitates survival but society censures who gets to access it.

Bhattacharya critiques the way nature is manipulated by human belief systems to support social institutions. The stone deity is not just a backdrop for the characters' lives, but an active contributor in the human connection of the village. A novel in rural setting to accentuate the villager's difficult life where land and nature determines everything for sustaining. Their reliance on the land for food and sustenance also make these villagers vulnerable to environmental shifts, such as droughts or floods, which ultimately destroys their crops and thus their whole ecosystem. The novel emphasises major changes in climate be it natural or man-made, brings instability in societies.

Bhattacharya writes "The swollen water burst the banks and flooded the countryside, destroyed lives, eroded the soil and went to waste, while great areas of dry land thirsted and crops failed; harnessed, put to proper use, the rivers could irrigate, produce power, add to the country's riches. In the same way, the people's belief was a great force which could be guided in good ways, made creative. When this great force had ceased to go to waste, it would no longer be a curse, blighting lives. It would be the country's truest asset."<sup>42</sup> It reflects the ecological destruction and overexploitation of natural resources; this paragraph reveals the frailty of nature and shows that its degradation is a outcome of oppressive practices. The depletion of resources forces Kalo and others to take drastic measures, as they realise how the environment has become hostile to them. The famine acts as a metaphorical portrayal of the risks of environmental negligence and over-exploitation. The journey to the city, where Kalo fakes being religious to survive, reflects his disconnect from nature and the environment he relies on reflects his alienation from the nature that was once so vital

to him. His newfound consciousness of humans being alienated from nature is heightened in the contrast between city and rural life, The artificiality of urban life versus poverty at village. While in a new role of having to manipulate society and what they believe, he is still fearful by the loss of connection with nature. This personal isolation serves as commentary on an even larger scale relating the alienation caused by ecological destruction and loss of traditional livelihoods.

There is an inherent environmental consciousness throughout Bhattacharya's novel, and his narrative choices help to highlight this. The third-person point of view enables readers to witness the widening repercussions of the famine, with whole communities struggling against deprivation and a change in nature. This perspective highlights that environmental and climate problems are collective societal problems rather than individual problems.

### **Environmental Consciousness in *The Hungry Tide***

The book takes place against the backdrop of the Sundarbans, a huge mangrove forest in the tidal region of Bay of Bengal where human life is deeply influenced by nature that relentlessly shapes their lives. By presenting this intricate ecosystem and those who endure it, Ghosh meditates on the fragile balance between human civilization and the natural world in an age of ecological crisis, conservation, and survival. The naturally vibrant Sundarban, a cyclone and tidal flood prone region, as well as an where rivers eternally change course, is a land where humanity must learn to deal with unpredictability of nature<sup>43</sup>. A nurturing and hostile landscape that gives life through subsistence fishing and farming while threatening human life in return with natural disasters. The setting serves as both a literal and figurative backdrop to the themes around environmental consciousness; the novel explores particularly the vulnerability that comes in such an unpredictable world.

The story takes place in a mysterious region from which the river dolphins have all but vanished, and she is there to study them as a marine biologist except that her observations suggest an interdependence between human and animal life. As she first lays eyes on the dolphins, Piya finds it hard to believe that these marine animals can easily go around tricky, unclear waters; they seem like they're so in-tune with the movements of the tide and they are all intimately connected. Ghosh writes, "If not for

the tide country, the plains would have been drowned long before: it was the mangroves that kept the hinterland alive. Kolkata's long, winding sea-lane was thus its natural defense against the turbulent energies of the bay; the new port, on the other hand, was dangerously exposed.”<sup>44</sup> It also represents a much larger theme in the novel of how humans are coexisting with nature. The characters in *The Hungry Tide* all have different relationships to their environment, informed by their unique histories. Fokir, the uneducated fisherman, has an intuitive bond to nature.

His knowledge of the tides, the mangroves and the animals that inhabit the Sundarbans is based on centuries worth of experience rather than schooling. Fokir's existence depended on his reading of the environment; he acted as a guide giving Piya access to parts of the Sundarbans that required local knowledge to navigate. Ghosh used one of the scenes that talks about Fokir and Piya going to the inner parts of Sundarbans where he contrasts Piya's analysis with Fokir's intuitive knowledge of nature. Piya observes dolphins using scientific instruments and data she collects; Fokir takes information from the rhythms of nature around him. The text emphasises awareness of ecology derived from being part of nature instead of conquest and exploiting it. In every scene, Fokir is in constant communication with the ecosystem; as a fisherman, he knows that one must coexist peacefully with the ecologies around them to thrive.

Kanai, a Delhi translator, who starts off with much more distanced, cerebral view of nature Kanai remains distant from the natural world, which is ironic, considering that he grew up in a city away from nature and wildlife; and this distance from nature means he sees the Sundarbans with awe and fear. But as he spent more time in the region his view changed. Having read his uncle Nirmal's diary, Kanai is only beginning to recognize the ambiguity of ethics in environmentalism, especially as it relates to the dispossession of those displaced at Morichjhāpi. Through Kanai's journey Ghosh sheds light on the struggle between human rights against environmental preservation, and by thus writing in such a way about conservationists, he tackles the question whether these can be mentioned together at all.

One of the main conflicts in the novel is that conservation cannot continue at all costs; the need for human survival must also be taken into consideration, which is evident to readers in the Morichjhāpi incident. The Indian government forcefully evicted settlers

from parts of the Sundarbans to protect their wildlife and this event serves as a key plot point in the novel, where questions about environmental justice loom large.

The settlers, which consists of mostly marginalised, are trying to clear the land in the Sundarbans to survive but their existence is a risk for the endangered Bengal tiger. Kusum is one among the settlers who are displaced residents during the eviction; she mentioned the helpless policy the government applies on conservation. As she said, "...the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, were worth less than dirt or dust. 'This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world... Do they know what is being done in their name? Where do they live, these people? Do they have children, do they have mothers, fathers? As I thought of these things, it seemed to me that this whole world had become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil.'" <sup>45</sup>

Her words capture the criticism of environmental preservations that is depicted in the text, where animals are preferred over humans. There is lack of simple answer to this problem and so Ghosh uses his plot to explore how difficult it can be to reconcile the imperative of protecting nature with that of helping oppressed people.

Another key moment that highlights environmental consciousness occurs when Fokir and Piya follow the trail of the dolphins on narrow waves in between channels of water through the Sundarbans. Piya is hit by the thought that conservation, a worthy cause in and of itself, often forgets about the people closest to the land. She recalls how Nirmal; rely on the very ecosystem she is trying to save. Ghosh illustrates in his text "For him it meant that everything which existed was interconnected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature. He hunted down facts in the way a magpie collects shiny things. Yet when he strung them all together, somehow, they did become stories — of a kind." <sup>46</sup> This moment highlights the environmental awareness of the novel, that human existence can never be entirely separate from its natural ecosystem.

*The Hungry Tide* employs a fragmented narrative form, moving around quickly between the three main characters Piya, Fokir and Kanai as well as going back in time through Nirmal's diary. The disjointed storytelling reflects the uncertain nature of life, one that is dictated by the tides and weather, where nothing is stable or certain. This nonlinear structure mirrors the rich and complicated nature of environmental consciousness, with different characters representing alternative approaches to knowing and relating with nature.

The novel's environmental consciousness is also reflected through the historical and philosophical dimension of Nirmal's diary recounting his experiences with the Morichjhāpi settlers. Ghosh interrogates the conflict between preservation and development, through Nirmal's reflection. The portrayal of Nirmal embodies the novel's perspective of nature as an unconcerned entity, a force of survival that operates by its own rules without human intervention.

*The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh presents an in-depth exploration of environmental consciousness that sees human life depends on the mercy of nature, with survival relying heavily on knowledge and indispensable understanding of the natural world. The text challenges readers to think about the relationship between protecting nature and preserving the needs of people that rely on it, exposing a complex moral question that represents environmental consciousness.

### **Environmental Consciousness in *Nectar in a Sieve***

Environmental consciousness in Kamala Markandaya *Nectar in a Sieve* is integrated into narrative, characters and the setting and the nature is not just outside life with its abundance, beauty, danger, and challenges. In this story of a farming family and their village, the novel paints a deep picture of struggling to adapt to the vagaries of nature battling against industrialisation. In these interwoven lives, Markandaya comments on the tenuous relationship of humanity and nature and challenges social, economic frameworks that complicate their environmental struggles.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the rural background is of utmost significance to properly comprehend the environmental awareness around it. The environmental actions take place in a small village where Rukmani and her family lives depend on how well soil

will give crops. The environment, especially the land, is depicted as a nurturer and a punisher as embodying the agricultural life<sup>47</sup>. When fertile, the land gives food; when not, droughts and floods and bad harvests turn against poor rural people. When Rukmani thinks about the rhythm of nature as she expresses her connection to the land at a deep level “to teach them the ways of the earth: how to sow; to transplant; to reap; to know the wholesome from the rotten, the unwelcome reed from the paddy; and how to irrigate or drain the terraces.”<sup>48</sup>

Markandaya utilizes the land as a image for life and survival, showing how the inhabitants are dependent on nature to dictate the flow of their lives. The farmers vulnerability with its environmental adaptation exposes the thin line between human existence and natural forces. It takes place over a period of years; the characters’ fortunes rise and fall with the success of their crops. This tragedy at one point makes the fields unusable due to a flood, reducing Rukmani and family to starvation. Nature appears as an all-powerful entity throughout the novel, robbing the family of their pride and safety. Rukmani laments, “Our beloved green fields fall away to a blur, the hut becomes a smudge on the horizon.”<sup>49</sup>

More than a natural disaster, this environmental devastation is a reminder of the fragile relationship between man and nature. The flood scene also highlights the wider ecological and social dynamics in novel, namely how natural disasters impact all but more so those who are already economically weak.

Rukmani is a woman who is closely connected with the environment as the land is almost inextricably tied to her character, a relation most probably brought on by her need of relying on nature for survival. Throughout her life she negotiates each season, how much sustenance the land will provide for her family. The fertility, or otherwise, of the land weighs heavily on her identity and survival and on her sense of herself as a mother and wife to Nathan. Rukmani and Selvam are the ‘caretakers of the earth’, and their bond with it is deeply rooted in blood. This relation to the nature is most evident when Rukmani speaks about Selvam: “Selvam, who for all that he had been reared on the land and had the earth in his blood...”<sup>50</sup>

Her husband, Nathan, is also shares deep connection with the land. He realizes that the land can be giving, but it can also be taking away in an instant. He encapsulates

his pragmatic approach to farming when he states, “For the earth is parched to dust and all that I grew is dead. The rains failed...”<sup>51</sup> This approach indicates the ambiguity of the farmers lives with nature, and at numerous instances, highlights their fragile living.

The tannery that opens in the village adds another level of complexity to the environmental consciousness that infuses novels such as these. The Tannery symbolizes industrialization and the devastation of nature and traditional livelihoods. Though it allows for economic opportunity, it also contaminates and poisons the land and water, compounding problems for villagers. At first, Rukmani sees the potential of wealth coming to her village with the arrival of the tannery but soon learns that this development has a steep price in both environmental impact and personal loss. The tannery poisons the river, throwing off a natural ecosystem that had supported the village for countless decades. The intrusion of industrialisation into the village mirrors a more general criticism of 19th-century playgrounds, where progress comes at the cost of nature and humanity.

Rather, in *Nectar in a Sieve*, industry is a protagonist in its own right: the plot revolves around characters who are eternally working to endure an environment that shifts between capricious and blatantly corrupted by industrial powers. In the novel land is both life-giving and deadly; it is never a guarantee of survival. With signs of civilization failing around them whether through natural disaster or human activity the characters make difficult decisions about their future.

There is an instance where Rukmani and Nathan’s must sell everything they own, to buy food following a failed harvest. In a desperate bid to deal with starvation, they even part with their prized bullocks which are central to farming. The scene emphasizes the interrelatedness of human dignity and environmental sustainability the family’s social and economic well-being is dependent on the vitality of their land. With the loss of the bullocks, they lose their farming capacity to grow food and become even more susceptible to future climatic challenges.

Through the device of first-person narration, Markandaya gives the illusionistic sense to signify Rukmani’s profound relation with the landscape and her acute sensibility towards the Nature influencing her life. The novel allows for an attention to pay off

the personal, that is the inner voice of Rukmani, as well as emotional costs of environmental degradation. Through Rukmani, one can see that environmental devastation not only takes the food from character's mouths but shatters their emotional fortitude and community spirit. Readers can experience the emotional impact of environmental change on the characters survival through Rukmani's eyes how their livelihoods disappear; their hunger and loss; their disorientation when entire communities are uprooted.

The periodic life cycle of the farming community spring, summer, autumn, winter corresponds to the episodic framework of the novel. In all part of the novel, this rhythm of story is indicative of the life forces the environment channeled into each character they must adapt to whatever the land hurls at them next. the environment is present in both setting and character experience adventures.

*Nectar in a Sieve* delivers a profound look on the environmental awareness of mankind where their existence is dependent upon the earth along with nature every character reflects the souls often entrapped into powerful hands. By outlining how these characters attempt to adjust themselves to change in their surroundings and the threat that society and industrialisation pose, the narrative critiques societal structures that further isolate individual experiences against environmental obstacles. Ever since the beginning of time, nature and man are made dependent on each other but also have a conflictual relation, hence villagers in the novel must try to trade over nature even though it is hostile and unpredictable. The environment and characters, and the narrative structure of the novel reflect this deep environmental consciousness that nature has an undeniable impact on human life and society.

### **Environmental Consciousness in *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* provides an exploration of the theme of environmental consciousness, being primarily focused on urban decadence, social mobility, and personal ambition. Gokhale's novel further offers a modern, urban setting devoid of the natural and which relates to the criticism on the event of industrialization that traditional environmental narratives conceived largely in rural or natural environment. It points out the artificiality in modern man-made environments, which can lead to a sense of separation and alienation from nature, contributing to a

larger phenomenon of ecological disconnection. It perceives Gokhale as one of the writers to consciously reflect the environmental consciousness through the absence of nature in Modern life and artificialness through analysing characters, plot setting and narrative form.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* unfolds mostly in the upper-class of Delhi, filled with wealth, and urban rot. All through the novel, there is a juxtaposition of this inauthentic landscape with one rooted in real nature, portraying modernity's separating people from living an authentic and elemental life within nature. This engagement with nature serves as a metaphor of the empty lives of superficial desire and ambition driven characters.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps the clearest representation of the alienation from the environment is a lavish garden party held by the upper-class in the novel. Set in a perfect garden, the parties and reappearance of 'plastic' reveals nature as controlled and curated to fit within societal standards. Gokhale writes about some elements as "his plastic lips...my white plastic purse... crown of plastic flowers... I was a plastic flowerpot covered with white pebbles."<sup>53</sup> portraying that humans have made nature subservient to them. This event highlights the author's commentary of urbanism, in which nature is not a provider or spiritual space but rather an accessory or a tool for social performance.

Paro represents the detachment from nature and environmental awareness that characterizes the novel's city dweller bourgeoisie. Paro is an embodiment of a woman who has climbed in her step to the Delhi high society holding up her beauty and charm, manipulating with the surrounding. Her life doesn't have any meaningful relation with the nature. She indulges in a casual tone, ironically mentioning her trips to luxurious spots and places where nature is commercialised and encountered only as a leisure.

By contrast, Priya represents a more contemplative though not idealised perspective of estrangement from nature. She looks at this urban world in a detached way, describing the hollowness of her relationships. But she too is implicated in the environmental estrangement characteristic of the setting of the novel. At one point she reflects, "The taxi stand was near the main entrance to the hospital. Heat and dust and disease irradiated the cityscape. Misery and filth swirled all around me, and I found

strange courage and solace in the leprous beauty: every fly and mosquito, every wheezing widow and nauseous gestatory mother sang of survival. I was quite revived by the time [returned home.]”<sup>54</sup> While this line indicates Priya’s knowledge about the environmental destruction surrounding her, it also emphasises her inability in both to change her situation and influence her environment.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* follows the story of Paro in Delhi’s high society, charting her rise and fall through to an alienation prevalent in urbanised lives driven by social ambitions. When Paro climbs up the social order, she is even more detached from her relationship with nature. Her world is composed of synthetic elegance and extravagance where nature is comprehensible only in manipulated and monetized manifestations such as gardens, parks, holiday getaways each being manufactured to fulfill human cravings for it.

Through its depiction of the physical environment of Delhi, the novel also critiques the environmental consequences of urbanization. Gokhale depicts the city as filthy, congested, and oppressive over much of the novel. Smog clogs the air; blaring horns dominate the streets, and our natural surroundings disappear under slabs of concrete and skyscrapers. The decay of nature runs parallel to the decay of morals and souls, for the characters are caught in a maelstrom of excess and consumption.

Through the first-person narration of Priya, Gokhale creates immersive engagement with people and their environmental alienation that offers readers a nothing less than an intimate feel for how characters behave which can be more accurately understood almost comically through internalized speech<sup>55</sup>. Priya’s musings about how everything around her was synthetic, nothing felt real, and that even the love for her close people was fabricated, is a insight into environmental awareness in this novel. The landscape factors in both Priya’s constructs shape all of their lives, but more than simply livelihood, it disassociates them from connecting with a vast and essential part of life; the natural world.

Repetition and the banality of city life are firmly established in the episodic structure of this novel that chronicles parties, social events, and interpersonal dramas within the Delhi elite. This scaffolding embodies the cycle of alienation from the environmental, with each character passing through their simulacrum without ever making a

meaningful intrusion on the world of nature. The story reveals abandoning on consumption of goods, of relationships, of experiences and works as a pointed criticism against the ungrounded lifestyle of urban elites, disconnected from consequences to their environment.

Namita Gokhale critiques urbanization and environmental alienation in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* through its characters, the plot, setting and narrative form. Its depiction of the high lifestyle in Delhi reveals how people are environmentally disconnected as they acquire materialistic steps to reach social heights; this once more metamorphosing into a vicious circle turning urbanization into environmental degradation on one side and an absurd false sense of ecology with no realistic contact with nature on the other. Gokhale uses characters such as Paro and Priya to illustrate how synthetic urban life looks through a blind eye towards the commodification of nature, which is exploited as per human needs without the repercussions environmental slaughter posing upon the humankind.

#### **4.3 Nature and Human Psychology**

Nature and human psychology are closely interlinked with how an individual perceives the issues in their environment. One of the essential theories of human psychology is Sigmund Freud's theory on the concept of id, ego, superego. This view of the mind aids in providing a more complete perspective on human urges and how they are moderated both internally and externally through social norms or synthesizing natures.

The *id* within Freud's model of psyche represents the most primal and instinctual part of the human mind, which is purely oriented toward seeking pleasure and satisfying other needs required for survival in that moment. Undisciplined, wild, and entirely without regard for social norms or morals<sup>56</sup>. In a natural way, the *id* is displaying our earliest interpersonal bond to attributes, in which instinct, existence and wishes ruling. Like that how wilderness lay beyond human control, *id* represents primal unconquered part of human psyche. The *ego* is the one that balances between what the *id* wants and what this world demands. The *ego*, ruled by the 'reality principle', tries to meet the needs of the *id* in a realistic and socially appropriate manner.

By contrast, the ego is always at odds with nature, which can be viewed as both a trial and challenge for the kind of human beings that desire to exploit it. The *superego* acts as the moral conscience of the mind, assimilating and coding societal norms, values, and ideals. In doing so, it counteracts the id by creating guilt, shame, and a nebulous sense of right vs. wrong in you. The superego can be linked to human attitudes concerning nature in terms of environmental ethics, cultural and religious values that promote protecting, respecting, or revering their natural environment<sup>57</sup>. The worship of nature in many cultures like that of India, is an expression of the superego attempting to curtail human desire for domination and consumption.

From the perspective of Indian literature, nature and human psychology are interwoven many times in various degrees, where natural world acts as a reflection field for emotion of man using the natural works as a metaphorical language, or also as a space to ponder moralities. In literature, for example in the works of Rabindranath Tagore, nature is a symbol of calmness and spirituality. In the works of Rabindranath Tagore, nature is often a symbol of inner peace and spiritual connection. Nature, in his poem '*Where the Mind is Without Fear*', is a metaphor for an awakened mind, where one thinks fearlessly and rises above the social restrictions. Similarly, Tagore's engagement with inner world echoes in Freud's idea of the ego attempting to create equilibrium between the instinctual pursuits of *id* and ethical commands of superego while Tagore is negotiating individual liberty versus societal obligations<sup>58</sup>.

Therefore, Freud's theory of the *id*, *ego*, *superego*, or the psychoanalytic theory of human brain provides an effective framework on connection between nature and mind as reflected in Indian writing. Within the confines of literature, nature functions as this metaphorical terrain which lends itself to humans exploring their deepest, often disparate urges and finding a way to come in line with societal alignments. Thus, this section of the research aims to explore the connection between characters' psychology in the select novel and their environmental setting in which they perform their social, personal, and psychological roles.

### **Nature and Human Psychology in *He Who Rides a Tiger***

The socio-psychological characteristics of Kalo in *He Who Rides a Tiger* and their intertwining with nature is an example for the man versus society battle. The rural

backdrop of the book that of an agrarian economy, where people are excessively dependent on natural resources, reflects how realised human psychology is with the physical environment. Kalo's role as a blacksmith and his relationship with the elements (fire, metal, earth) strengthens his tie to nature, but his profession.

is also an aspect of being lower class and shows how society affects its norms and values on him mentally. The connection between nature and human psychology reflects in many incidents in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, for instance when Kalo evokes interaction with the riverbanks on his way to exile and reflection. Kalo takes a walk along the river, watching the flowing water after being exiled from the village. The river, a representation of both permanence and flux, reflects Kalo's ever-changing frame of mind. Musing on his sense of social alienation while he observes the currents, Kalo hears the river address his psychological dilemma: "harnessed, put to proper use, the rivers could irrigate, produce power, add to the country's riches."<sup>59</sup> Here, nature regionalises Kalo's psyche—fluctuation of water and its unique rhythm causes more eradication from the society that adds now to become vexation which leads to adamant execution plan.

This scene reflects the nature as a psychological mirror for Kalo. Here one can learn that nature is a psychological mirror for Kalo. The psychological turn comes when, staring out at the river, he understands that all his effort in trying to jump between social classes have been meaningless. He starts to see himself as a force, like the river, that can change direction to avoid cultural expectations and remould its societal topography. In context to the portray of Kalo's character development throughout the novel, the natural world acts as a symbol of his inner struggles and transformation.

Kalo becomes progressively manipulative of symbols in nature, and this impacts the bond he shares with his daughter Chandralekha in the novel. With Kalo getting deeply impacted with all his deceit through the stone deity, Chandralekha eventually starts questioning his moral domain. Though her connection with nature is still pure. Chandralekha's connection to the land, she looks after a small garden with her hands buried in the soil as a metaphor of purity and innocence, is matched by how close she lives to nature: "Kalo scowled as he watched Motichand walk off. This talk about Chandra Lekha's tender feelings. His owl-eyes seemed to eat Lekha's face at arati

time. Kalo would choke the throat of any man who tried to do her wrong.”<sup>60</sup> this metaphor highlights how the composition of their psyche is projected onto nature.

### **Nature and Human Psychology in *The Hungry Tide***

In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh engages with the psychological consequences of life within the Sundarbans, a region that is characterised by an extremely violent and unpredictable environment. The characters’ relationship within Nature reveals their psychological attributes such as their fears and thrive instincts. The tide-dominated geography of the Sundarban, with its constantly roving rivers, all-consuming beasts, and persistent risk of inundation provides a context within which the psychological states and interactions between characters are crafted.

An equally fascinating instance from *The Hungry Tide* that demonstrates the interrelationship of nature and human psychology is when Kanai gets stranded on one of many uninhabited islands in Sundarbans. With the massive, uncaring wilderness surrounding him only amplifying the psychological toll of isolation, Kanai slowly breaks, he faces the fears provoked in an individual when left at nature’s mercy. Ghosh writes, “...think of the tigers, crocodiles and snakes that lived in the creeks and nalas that covered the islands. This was a feast for them. They killed hundreds of people.”<sup>61</sup>

The immensity of local nature drive Kanai to reassess his existence. This becomes a mirror in which his psychological descent in the face of nature’s brutal absurdism reflects an ego that is breaking down. Until, before this moment, Kanai had thought of himself as superior, the one in control of everything around him. Later, confronted with the sheer, unstoppable force of nature, he undergoes a deep psychological transformation in his world there are natural laws that have no relation to man. That loss of psychological control matches his physical vulnerability and strengthens the theme of nature changing humanity as an element that strips away pride.

One more incident which stands out, is the first experience of Piya with the river dolphins during her boat ride with Fokir. For Piya, the image of dolphins gliding through the water quietly gives a moment of psychological clarity. Her connection to the animals is strong, as if they are managing through the uncertainty of the tides just

like she does with her life. “Yet the rhythm of the recitation was undoubtedly that of a puja: how often, as a child, had I heard those endless chants, rolling on and on, in temples as well as in our home?”<sup>62</sup> As the following lines illustrate, Piya finds her scientific interest in animals morphing into a deeper psychological bond with each of them, marking a transition in her relationship to nature. The image of dolphins is a manifestation of survival through the wild nature of the Sundarbans, a wildness with which Piya has her inner relation. This apparent acceptance that nature is not something which must be forced into submission, but rather a force to be educated on and respected embodies an important psychological turning point for her character. In doing so, though, it also shows us how nature impacts Piya from within, leading her closer to the inextricable blending and interdependence of human life and survival.

### **Nature and Human Psychology in *Nectar in a Sieve***

Kamala Markandaya makes nature an omnipresent force in *Nectar in a Sieve*, shaping her character’s psyche and their destiny. Taking place in post-colonial, rural India, the Novel tells the story of Rukmani, a farmer wife with strong roots to her earth. Nature becomes thus an almost organic character, with both good and bad intentions accessible only through Rukmani’s point of view. Rukmani’s optimistic determination is contrasted with the harshness of rural life and Markandaya depicts the psychological effects natural cycles have on the human psyche.

One of the most beautiful moments appears in the text when Rukmani plants her first garden. In her words, “When the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweetstirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for?”<sup>63</sup> In this statement, she captures a significance of the rightness of human desire and natural beauty living together. But this harmony is temporary; on every level, dependence is reflected as a relationship with the forces of nature in which she rises and falls depending on what each season brings.

The monsoon season, although a blessing at first, becomes destructive, sweeping away crops and thus illustrating how the might of nature can disrupt human endeavours. This incessant interplay between growth and decay reveals the nature of

randomness that targets how Rukmani survives this psychological endurance, eventually transforming her from a naive woman to a tremendously resilient one.

Rukmani keeps disintegrating as she observes the depletion of her own family. Markandaya explores the psychological implications of subsistence farming where survival is dependent on the nature, punishing Rukmani with her indifference that leaves no other alternative but for her to draw strength from within. The silent endurance of Rukmani is symbolic of the rural psyche taking in whatever nature can throw against them with quiet acceptance. This cycle represents a stoic approach towards destiny, which is an integral aspect of the psychology of rural Indian characters that live in harmony with nature.

The tannery, which when come up in a village, breaks both nature and social ecology. The changing of the social atmosphere and the aspects it has on tradition is shown through Rukmani's sons who are employed at the tannery. As Rukmani clings to the earth, her sons endeavor to leave their poverty behind, showcasing the generations gap caused by economic changes. As the tannery pollutes their water and land, this literal and metaphorical violation of nature reflects psychological turmoil as Rukmani attempts to come to terms with her lost identity using her loss of land and resulting inability to thrive. Markandaya, here critiques the industrialisation and the force that drives this movement away from nature taking away an ecological sense of purpose that psychologically grounds individuals.

### **Nature and Human Psychology in *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

Whereas Markandaya places her story in an idyllic rural setting, Namita Gokhale transforms her setting of the narrative within the elite circles of contemporary Indian Society in *Paro: Dreams of Passion*. The nature in *Paro* is synthetic and ornamental, but a metaphor of the internal psychological landscape of characters. The central character, *Paro* represents passion and impulses that clash with social norms. The artificial nature of the high society environment mirrors the characters inner lives, for as much as generally an admirable aspect of life, in high society nature symbolises a tool for seduction rather than sustenance.

Paro's mental health status reflects in her environment, especially in moments when the synthetic luxury of Bombay's rich provides a setting for Paro's turmoil. In one scene, Priya describes Paro's entrance at a party, "She was wearing a black sequinned off-shoulder kurta, which left one shoulder completely bare,"<sup>64</sup> But this scene serves more than just a development of the character of Paro, it depicts her defiance and desire for some attention and painfully reiterates that such humans are products of a rarified existence the high society beings who think and behave in a manner dictated by laws about appearance and position rather than love or lust. The clash between primitive urges and the demands of a civilised society produces an inner conflict, which Paro resolves by being defiant and bold.

The novel shows the mutual exchange of sexuality and psychological manipulation between Paro and B.R. While Rukmani exists in communion with nature to live, Paro relates to it in enjoyment and subjugation. Gokhale treats sexuality simultaneously like a force of nature and as a psychological weapon wielded by Paro to negotiate with the patriarchal system surrounding her. It reflects the perceived psychological divide of urban versus rural, whereas Rukmani act to the rhythms of nature, Paro tries her best to dominate through human relationships and desire.

Paro's ageing recalls a kind of own beauty back from nature, almost suggesting the price for living through vanity and inclinations. The transformation of Paro in the novel is corporeal and Gokhale uses these changes as a means for psychological reckoning, she must face the transience of social norms that stems from physical charm, delineating the artificiality of her belonging to the 'dark urban nature' of riches and sensuality. The change in Paro's looks as she ages symbolize her diminishing status within the circle, as throughout her youth, she was considered beautiful.

The struggle between man and nature is the life-force of characters in *He Who Rides a Tiger* and *The Hungry Tide* as it highlights the effects of nature on human psychology. While Bhattacharya focuses on the psychological effects of the violence of oppression in societal structures through Kalo's manipulation of nature, Ghosh explores the psychology behind human desire for domination over nature through his description and depiction of life in Sundarbans. In this way, both authors examine the impact of nature on behavior and thought, in addition to their narrative forms

themselves, suggesting furthermore in a spiritual and physical ways and also through the construction of narrative timeline as there has been a broader emotional landscape torn from earth.

Through their different narrative techniques, *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Paro: Dreams of Passion* explore the theme of nature against human psychology. Rukmani recalls her early life with the impact of a story emerging from an also grown-up girl, and within its depth one can find a sense of belonging to land. The concept of this internalized narrative is important, as it helps depict her psychological protection against nature's brutalities. In *Paro*, on the other hand, Priya is an observer caught in a dreamy state of admiration tinged with jealousy for *Paro*. Priya's vocal presence seems to embody a moralistic mistress, amplifying the character's psychological distress as she battles against society.

The *He Who Rides a Tiger* represents Kalo's primal connection to nature by aligning with Id. As Kalo struggles to survive and living with poverty, he is accustomed to a harsh reality which leads him towards a survival mentality as let by hunger and social oppression. In this way, nature becomes a cruel antagonist of his internal revolt against the tyrannical power.

Fokir's intimate bond with the Sundarbans corresponds with his emotional disposition as explored in *The Hungry Tide*. He possesses the deep primal Id-driven impulse that offers him to establish harmony with natural environment. He doesn't justify his decisions; he's ruled by an almost instinctual connection to the tides and mangroves. His simple, grounded, and naturalistic bond with the environment is brought into contrast when he faces outsiders who perceive nature differently, exposing allegiances to an unacknowledged custom based on survival and regard for the force of nature over lawful man.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani exemplifies the Ego, balancing her survival needs against moral and familial duties. Her reliance on the landscape, that gives and takes in turns, is both sustaining and depleting: she struggles against famine. The unpredictability of the land tests her beliefs but she keeps growing, both headstrong and susceptible. While the land becomes a part of her, her knowledge about the health

of her loved ones tempers this attachment so that her decisions are well balanced between needs and morality or practicality and responsibility.

Paro in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is a character whose Superego battles it out with the Id. She carries out affairs with heart, and still does not care for the society. What drives her psychologically is her inner battle between desires amid judgmental eyes.

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## **CHAPTER – 5**

### **FREEDOM AND INDIVIDUALITY**

5.1 Quest for Self

5.2 Identity Crisis

5.3 Social Equality and Justice

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## Chapter-5

### Freedom and Individuality

In English literature freedom is seen in diverse forms which originated from social, political, and personal factors. One definition of freedom views it as political emancipation, a loosening of the grip of tyranny, for example, the 18th-century Romantics such as Blake criticised the authoritarian forms in his work '*London*'.<sup>1</sup> One way to think about freedom relates to autonomy; the works of authors such as Virginia Woolf include characters finding independence and self-expression in a society that seeks to restrict their movement, as reflected in *Mrs. Dalloway*.<sup>2</sup> Freedom in postcolonial literature like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which deals with colonialism and traditional societies, tends to mean cultural and national autonomy.<sup>3</sup>

Freedom is also reflected as intellectual freedom, notably when the character actively rebels against society, as in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* where Stephen Dedalus searches for an unchained artistic self.<sup>4</sup> Dystopian literature often emphasizes and contrasts freedom against totalitarianism as the Orwell's *1984* portraits, where thought-control subverts the significance of individual freedom.<sup>5</sup> The depiction of Freedom in English literature reveals discourses on the themes of individuality, society, and the human spirit yearning to rise above boundaries.

The bridge between 'freedom' and 'individuality' is one of the core themes in English literary writings, as characters from such works experience personal isolation to achieve empowerment through presentation of their distinctive self. Liberation is often depicted as the prerequisite for self-realisation and characters must resist against established or exploiting social structure to achieve independence. Romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley reflect on how one's own liberty to break free from convention leads self-revelation, void of social pretext in the reflection set by nature. In Victorian novels like Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* the female protagonist challenges narrow social customs by seeking independence and emotional self-expression.

Jane does not have the luxury of freedom in defining herself: her identity is interdependent; both her specific choices and experiences are but reactions tied to

nature; her path reflects that true selfhood cannot be forged without an understanding of ethical notions external to the self.<sup>6</sup> n Modern writer's works, such as Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* intertwine individuality and freedom in the psychological depth of unconventional characters who eschew traditional expectations. Her characters struggle through inner worlds that question public agendas, reminding that free thought and self-conception are integral to individuality.<sup>7</sup> As English literature demonstrates over these periods, there is a dialectical relationship between liberty and self-expression liberty expresses itself in individuality, while a clearly defined individual works to enhance his or her own sense of freedom with the certainty of strengthened personal identity that liberty has endowed upon him or her.

Indian English novels often present liberation and selfhood as symbiotic instruments that develop and shape the characterisations and journeys of human beings. Freedom as a personal pursuit, caught up in the national movement against the British is perhaps best understood through Raja Rao and his writings on India such as *Kanthapura*. The novel, explored at both the micro and macro levels comprising of features that reach beyond individual human stories to a gesture that defines the nation itself, sees its characters represent the dilemma between social notion and personal freedom; between submission to a faith by birthright whilst carving out identities reflecting a generation who disregard limitations.<sup>8</sup>

In the relation of poverty and rural life, Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* tells the story of freedom and individuality through the plot. This work shows an alternate form of freedom, existing in a deeper sense intrinsic to the nature of human beings through Rukmani's individualism, inner strength, and survival despite hostile socio-economic realities, choosing silence over trivialising spoken word. Freedom, here is not a political gesture as it is an unapologetic expression of agency and endurance.<sup>9</sup> In postcolonial writers such as R.K. Narayan portraits that freedom juxtaposes itself along the search for identity amidst transforming Indian culture. The mutual relation between freedom and individuality in the Indian english literature reveals that while freedom may appear as a personal liberation, it is limited and articulated by our socio-cultural orientation.

## 5.1 Quest for Self

Freud's theory focuses on the structure of the psyche, consisting of the id, ego, and superego. Freud theorized that the self was largely controlled by the ego, which balanced primal urges from the id and moral codes from the superego. The self is a vessel at the mercy of unearthly drives and friction between primal desires, whereby unique behaviour is shaped with behaviours being fashioned from repressed forces along with the pressure of contending inner forces.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, Jung's view was that the self is a whole to be integrated he used the term individuation, by which an individual integrates all parts of their personality into both consciousness and awareness. Jung elaborates the theory of self in four ways: the persona (the social mask), shadow (repressed traits), *anima/animus* (inner gendered qualities) and self as a unifying archetype. Jung defines the self as an integrated whole, embracing all archetypes within and uniting conscious and unconscious qualities of character.<sup>11</sup>

The 'self' is often viewed in Indian English literary contexts as being comprised of both inherited culture and the experience during postcolonialism with theorists examining identity throughout colonialism and postcolonialism.<sup>12</sup> This procedure of identification, however, is perhaps best addressed through the notion of the 'subaltern,' a term made popular by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a postcolonial theorist for whom its functionality conveys both how marginalized voices are silenced and how their identity refuses to exist on terms that may resonate well with Western assumptions about the individual self.

The critical entanglements of hybridity may be understood through the two seminal poles offered by Homi K. Bhabha who portrays the desire for cultural identity as a split between tradition and modernity, and ultimately describes subjectivity in terms of the 'third space' where distinct elements within identity are perceived closely immersed into each other. Raja Rao defines '*Indian self*' which is spiritually oriented by its culture (nature) and yet often crippled from within because of the clash between inner colonisation and the broader experience of colonial domination.<sup>13</sup> Within these two sub-genres, theorists of Indian English view the self as a multi-layered construct, consisting of an indigenous identity wrestled with colonial history and the quest for autonomy.

### **Quest for Self in *He Who Rides a Tiger***

Bhabani Bhattacharya in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, investigate the personal tragedy of Kalo against a backdrop of famine and poverty ravaging Bengal. Bhattacharya examines the essence of identity but and its multifaceted ability to shift and develops the character of Kalo, who begins his life as a humble blacksmith, comes into conflict with the very social and religious structures that have oppressed him throughout his youth. His journey is not just making it out alive, but being associated with the wealthy class while others remain in the system of social hierarchy. Against the backdrop of rural Bengal in the grips of famine, his search can only lead to a transformation that pushes against the boundaries of tradition, acuminate by economic and social deprivation.<sup>14</sup> A pivotal event in the text along Kalo's quest appears as the caste and poverty have imposed limitations on him. In the dark moment, Kalo reflects on how everything feels pointless for him and that even who he is or how he should live is held by others. "He is iron all over, three maunds of the metal..."<sup>15</sup> Bhattacharya portrays Kalo's inner sensibility of being imprisoned by a caste-based society. The awareness leads him to a desire to escape, the first step in reclamation.

Along as a backdrop, the cityscape in the novel is an intimate part of Kalo's search for self. His background is a rural village, making the world of the city feel both like opportunity, and alienation. While Kalo is negotiating the city's power structures, he witnessed the different aspects of a person all in response to ambition and resilience. The crowded streets and vibrant temples that Bhattacharya so beautifully describes provide a backdrop for Kalo's unfolding transformation, in which he is continuously adapting to a society that values power and position over integrity. One of the most deeply intimate and agonizing moments reflecting Kalo's journey of self, occurs between him and his daughter who hates him for lying about their mutual values and confidence. Kalo is transformed, but at some emotional costs, when his daughter rejects him the most devastating power in exchange for isolation from what he loves.

He asks himself if all the sacrifices have changed him so much that he has lost his authentic self; can this self be worth it, and still longing to have a genuine relationship with her? Kalo is left with a deep identity crisis reflected by a phrase, "Kalo tried to understand the facts. Biten, a Brahmin, had refused to wear the sacred thread which was his by birthright, even at the cost of losing the girl he loved. And here was a

blacksmith with his Brahmin posturing who had not let his daughter marry the man of her choice lest their caste be “desecrated” and the posturing ended.”<sup>16</sup> As he contemplates the feeling of hollowness from a life constructed on deception and ambition. The deeper implication to this scene is that self-discovery requires authenticity, not surface-level power, or status.

Bhattacharya uses a third-person omniscient narration to explore Kalo’s inner conflict, such that the reader can see how he sees fading in and out of being his projected self-image. This narrative structure enables Bhattacharya to articulate Kalo’s internal conflicts while depicting the society’s perception of his evolution. At one point, the narrative voice changes, focusing on Kalo’s frustration and feeling of being trapped and forcing the reader to feel his mental battle. It makes you feel and perceive Kalo more as his quest for self, transcends to becoming personal and socially meaningful as well.

As Kalo embarks on his journey in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, there are other characters who embark on journeys that explore the quest for self where each one shows varying aspects of struggle and discovery against societal bounds and personal aspirations. Chandra Lekha is one character among many who engages with her own search for identity, even while living in the shadow of her father’s lies. Kalo, the protagonist, dons a fake Brahmin identity for upward social leap and Chandra must embody her socio-political ethics free from her father’s footprints. Chandra’s path is more internal as she struggles with the shame and betrayal of it all, finally realising that her ability to live with self-respect and independence must come first in conflict with a father whose decisions force her to compromise on her principles. In doing so, her character focuses a spotlight on the trauma of social aspiration and the conflict it brings to relationships.

Another character who shows the theme of quest for self is Brahmin Daan, a spiritual figure who’s introduced as an original mentor and guide for moral virtues. Bhattacharya uses Daan to investigate competing and comprised ideas of selfhood within the confines of religious identity. Daan further embodies this need to cling to power. quest for self can be paradoxical when religious obligations of faith clash with personal concerns because identity based only on assigned roles will always remain delicate.

A village leader, Manik Das, pursues a more subtle path toward self-awareness. Although Das is eager to help, he learns that the situation is much worse than many believed as families return looking like shadows of themselves and are forced into inhuman treatment just to survive. The villagers demonstrate extreme actions in confronting Kalo, and the fact that he does nothing to prevent the deception undermines his original conception of the self as a moral leader. Das's journey embodies the theme of self as it relates to moral responsibility and ethical cowardice explaining that one cannot simply be defined by their name or status in society but must embody true courage and virtue. Using the lens of these characters, Bhattacharya shows how quest for self is universal, though its expression differs according to context and values.

*He Who Rides a Tiger* mirrors much of Bhattacharya's concern for a society that tries to crush individual identity through strict class boundaries, as seen in Kalo's journey. The character of Kalo is on a journey for self-worth and an answer to the question of inherent value in society's eyes; it exemplifies how much strength it takes to build a self when the societal structure tries its hardest to prevent it. Bhattacharya, through Kalo, implies that the journey to selfhood is not a sole path and makes it rather ideological where one must test the structures which negotiate their value.

### **Quest for Self in *The Hungry Tide***

The quest for self is depicted prominently in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* through the journeys of its characters Piya, Kanai and Fokir as they travel through the dangerous waters of Sundarban along with their intense personal lives. Through the lens of ecological balance, the novel crafts personal and ecological stories, suggesting that self-discovery is both contiguous and cyclical, calling upon one's pasts while nonlinear strands compose present realities based on how relative perceptions colour absolute truths of human relationships intertwined in nature and with cultural heritage.<sup>17</sup> The search for identity, freedom, and a sense of self was different for each of these characters.

Piya a cetologist pursues her career of studying rarest dolphins of the Sundarbans. Her search for identity is tied up with her scientific ambitions and her rupture from India.

The bond between Piya and Fokir becomes a critical aspect of her journey toward the quest for self. One of the prominent moments in the text reflects the quest for self when Piya encounters with the transcendental connections of Fokir with the river and sea creatures, prompting her to think about the limitations of her scientific mind. Ghosh writes, “It’s all inside here. I’ve told it to him so often that the words have become a part of him.”<sup>18</sup> In this context, Piya begins to understand that self cannot be known or defined by a search of intellect alone but must consider its relationship with the natural world. Through her connection with Fokir, she reconciles the Western rationality that she represents and the native wisdom that she perceives, reconstructing herself as a scientist, but even more so as a person.

Kanai, the translator, and businessman, initially comes off as someone who has completely distanced himself from his rural roots. When he returns to *Lusibari* to read the journal of his uncle Nirmal, he is drawn into a confrontation with memories he has buried and feelings that remain unresolved. Kanai digs through Nirmal’s writings during a critical section of the plot and comes across his uncle’s thoughts on mankind and nature. As Ghosh writes, “...once the tide turned everything would disappear: the rising waters of the mohona would swallow up the jungle as well as the rivers and their openings.”<sup>19</sup> – an idea that selfhood is constantly reformulated by outside influences in the Sundarban. Kanai’s search for self turns into a struggle to balance his privileged existence with the tenuousness of human life as reflected in stories of those living on the fringe in the Sunderban.

Another one of Kanai’s major transformative moments comes at the face of death when he is very nearly killed by a tiger and realizes that he is now vulnerable. This primal and primitive experience wrecks his ego and makes him revisit a notion of some personal identity without his powerful, successful trappings. Simultaneously, Ghosh also suggests through Kanai that selfhood is not a steady state but an adaptive process; and humility to know limitations is part of this construction.

Fokir, whose search for identity is quieter but no less profound, as the text depicts his struggle between tradition and survival and the relationship he has with these forms of personal freedom. Fokir embodies a different and alternative model of selfhood someone who is one with the tides and creatures that define his living. His unvoiced assertion of identity, like when he refuses to surrender his lifestyle choice while the

economy makes it difficult for him to survive, is indicative of a quiet rebellion against social expectations. He shows selflessness and courage when he risks his life to save Piya from the storm. His relationship with Sundarbans is existential and spiritual, rooted in a selfhood that rises above the material and rhythmically communes with natural world.

The setting of the Sundarbans is critical in influencing the way characters search for self. This tidal landscape with its unpredictable floods and dense mangroves epitomized identity, constantly coping between the tension of survival against the yearning phenomenon of belonging. Ghosh portrays the Sundervan as a place “where the where the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable.”<sup>20</sup> evoking the fluidity with which characters see themselves. The land of Sundarban is a literal and figurative space for self-exploration, sparking adaptation and search for meaning in the characters throughout the plots.

Ghosh blends two narratives, one of Piya on her scientific expedition and the other of Kanai discovering Nirmal’s journal, to reflect the interrelatedness of individual journeys. Dedicated to memory and remembrance, the journal serves both as a vehicle for Kanai’s self-discovery and as an entry point into the tide country’s political and ecological struggles. In a similar manner, the reappearing motif of tide, reflects the cyclical nature of identity and its embrace with transience.

The search for self that the novel centers on is placed within a context of community and experience. Fokir is a lone voice that speaks a silent yet loud identity which carry as individual but seem not to be able to abandon self-interests. The narrative surrounding the storm, and especially his sacrifice to save Piya, establish relational dynamics of selfhood and empathy as defining elements. Further, the death of Fokir moves and changes the lives of Kanai and Piya and their identities too. Through this theoretical understanding of self, Ghosh shows how the quest for the self is -not an individual pursuit but a negotiation with culture, nature, and society.

### **Quest for Self in *Nectar in a Sieve***

*Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya presents the journey of self-realisation against the backdrop of rural Indian life, marked by poverty, traditional values, and

environmental challenges. Rukmani, the farmer's wife, is the protagonist of an evocative story that anchors a deep exploration of meaning in life and strength and independence in a rapidly changing landscape of human society.<sup>21</sup> Markandaya, through character, plot and setting depicts selfhood and it reflects as a critical commentary on human adaptability.

Rukmani embarks on an exploration of self in her new marriage to Nathan, a farmer as she tries to adjust herself into the rural world. At the beginning of the text, Rukmani is projected as a hopeful woman who takes care of her land and family. Her care in cultivating that relationship implicitly underscores her bond with nature as well as the foundation for her self-discovery. Her identity as a wife, mother and farmer is deeply connected with the nature, but throughout the novel her changing relationship with the soil is an expression of who she is becoming.

The tannery foreshadows a turning point in her journey; it disrupts the delicate harmony that exists in town and threatens her family's livelihood. Rukmani's struggle with powerlessness and disconnectedness from her sons upon their departure to work at the tannery exemplifies this loss as he narrates the story, she observes that, "when construction actually started, the bricks stacked high, the cement in heaps, whatever time he could spare he spent at the site watching while brick was laid on brick and mortar flowed between..."<sup>22</sup> The external conflict makes Rukmani question herself and her identity as protector of the family.

Nathan represents quest for self through his struggle for dignity that takes place in silence. Nathan is a tenant farmer, subject to the unpredictability of nature and the cruelty of landlords, but he does his best to remain in control. In one scene of the novel, when a monsoon washes their crops away, Nathan's silent resolve to re-sow them speaks to his inseparable bond with the land. This behaviour highlights Nathan's philosophy that identity and the land of his labour cannot be separated from one another.

Nathan's lost battle leading to the death on the road to town is a reflection of how easily the rural self can be replaced. The last moments of his life spent lamenting for his losses, the man who ultimately fought to keep in his humanity but was swallowed by other forces. Markandaya, through Nathan, accentuates this essential balance

between self-sufficiency and dependence on factors outside of oneself while demonstrating that societal frameworks extinguish the journey of establishing one's free being through oppressive representation.

The journey towards the city, marks a drastic change of direction in the story, representing estrangement and fragmentation of identity. Leaving their village in search of a better life, Rukmani and Nathan are met with the endless brutality of urban poverty. In one scene of the text, Rukmani reflects "It was not enough. Sometimes from sheer rebellion weategrass, although it always resulted in stomach cramps and violent retching."<sup>23</sup> The frailty of self against systemic inequality is revealed through the couple whose life as beggars brings them humiliation in adapting to urbanity. Rukmani's return to the village after Nathan died leads her to reclaim her past identity with a new self. Though ravaged by loss, she draws power from her memories and from her heritage. Her journey is a cyclical blueprint of quest for the self she survives through resilience and adaptability.

Through these characters, the novel explores notions of resilience, loss, and adaptation within a framework of self. The path taken by Rukmani demonstrates that selfhood is not fixed but continues to change in relation to external forces and internal awareness. By showcasing that a traditional life is disrupted by an economic change, the text also critiques the way that industrialization and modernization is changing rural identities. Search for identity in *Nectar in a Sieve* is depicted as quest of survival and adaptability to ever-changing ordeals. Rukmani's story captures the struggle faced to find purpose and meaning amidst challenges. Drawing from intricate characters, rich environments, and a microcosmic reflection of life, Markandaya provides a transcending means of investigating the idea of self.

### **Quest for Self in *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* offers an intimate exploration of self through character's life, Paro and Priya, as they navigate their privileged environment filled with chaos fuelled by love and lust amidst crumbling societal boundaries. However, the novel criticizes and satirizes the void of urban high society, where appearance is more important than reality satirical but piercing examinations about self-discovery.<sup>24</sup> Through the dynamic presentation of plot, character's development,

and narrative style, Gokhale captures the self as a dynamic entity shaped by societal expectations and personal ambitions. Paro is an independent female who refuses to adhere to traditionally gendered standards, desiring freedom and identity within a society flooded with misogyny.

The search for self is rebellion against the norms of society as seen in her defiant affairs and contempt for the double standards practiced by high society. In one scene, Paro is chiding her married lover B.R. with brutal honesty. It is the moment that embodies her frustration with a world that seeks to relegate feelings to market value, and it reflects her fierce commitment to assert herself as an individual in a universe bent on turning her into an object for consumption.

Paro's connection with her body and beauty becomes an important part of who she is. She purposefully showcases her physical appearance through a display of feminine beauty, and she utilizes such attractive aspects to dominate both situations and people. But her reliance on external validation reveals such clear insecurity at its core, indicating that this search for true self is ultimately as much a resistance to her sensitivities.

The late-life existential crisis that Paro undergoes as her beauty fades exposes the hollowness in her life. While Paro rebels in the flamboyant styles, Priya seeks herself from within where her battles lie with envy, sadness, and self-validity. Although Priya is not the protagonist of story, but she plays an invaluable role in it, watching as Paro grapples with her marriage and motherhood, often projecting her insecurities on her friend.

Over time, she begins to realize that her sense of inferiority and societal pressure for women to fit into a particular structure needs reconsideration. In one critical moment of Priya's evolution, she realizes that she is complicit in the same system of double standards regarding women and their freedoms that she spoke out against at work. Priya's jealousy of Paro's scandalous affairs is also evident as she reflects, "She was wearing a silver tissue sari, and was positively glittering with diamonds...her—chokers, pendants, rings, bangles, sequins. Tall as she was, she was balancing on the highest stiletto heels I had ever seen in my life. Even her payals were encrusted with incredibly real-looking diamonds. Her lipstick was a pale silver, and silver eyeshadow

gleamed over her hard eyes...Her audacity and self-confidence took my breath away. This was not how brides behaved in my world. All the brides I had ever encountered kept their sari pallavs covered, and their heads so perilously downcast as to appear anatomically endangered.”<sup>25</sup> This self-realization marks a pivotal point in Priya’s story, where she starts questioning her subservient acceptance of society and her propensity to identify herself through others.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* is set against the backdrop of an urban elite setting, which provides a critical context for the characters’ searches for self. The decadent parties, superficial friendships and the unacknowledged dynamics of society life make space for multiple layers of roles to be played out in front of audiences. This environment of beauty and misogynistic intrigue becomes Paro’s exquisite battleground and playground, where she negotiates with society; compelling herself to yield at times. In contrast, Priya gazes at the urban environment with a form of nostalgia but could not separate her pursuit of self-realisation from the charms of privilege.

Paro dramatic entrance at a high-society party underlines how identity may become performative in such settings. The narration suggests a deep-rooted loneliness and insecurity behind her appearance. It hints at both the exterior performative nature of identity and inner battles for authenticity.

Gokhale’s satirical narrative style plays an important role in the theme of selfhood. Priya as the unreliable narrator is an artistic way to give depth to the story because she has personal biases and insecurities that influence how she views Paro. Through this narrative strategy, Gokhale offers an exploration of diverse approaches to the search for identity and selfhood, and personification. Throughout the novel, themes of gender, class and power are interwoven into the characters’ journeys. While Paro openly defies the constraints of patriarchal culture, Priya is simultaneously a prisoner of these same norms; this creates an interesting dynamic where the protagonist must engage with her desires through conflicting sources of agency. The text is a commentary on the emptiness of privilege, how both notion and societal status can hollow out others to influence an identity.

## 5.2 Identity Crisis

Identity crisis in English literature is a character's inability to reconcile various aspects of identity, which are often triggered by cultural, social, or performer difficulties. The concept was particularly prominent during the modern period when the works of writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf considered 'fragmented consciousness' and the 'search for recognition' as prominent themes of their texts.<sup>26</sup> Identity crisis implies a character's confrontation with his societal function, moral standards, or meaning of life, highlighting, and encapsulating such societal dilemmas as colonialism, industrialism, and the discomfort of humanity. Identity crisis in Indian English literature symbolizes the conflict of traditional cultural values and modernity or colonial legacy. It mirrors the struggle of striving for an individual essence in a society that moves from native vines to Western ideologies.

Psychoanalytic theory developed by Sigmund Freud lays the groundwork for comprehension of identity crises as an inner conflict stimulated by the unconscious. Unconscious human identity is, as per Freud among others, a function of three components: the id (animal desires), ego (the rational self) and superego (moral conscience). Identity crises arise when those facets are at odds with each other, like if the superego (societal expectations or morals) represses the id (innate drive and desire), leaving the ego struggling to find balance.<sup>27</sup>

In literature, identity crises in a character resulting from unconscious guilt, moral dilemmas, and repressed desires are a commonplace theme, such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. As Freud notes, such crises typically occur when there is several external or internal pressure that forces to come face trauma, with desire.

Carl Rogers, a humanistic psychologist, places identity crises through the perspective of self-concept and congruence. Rogers asserts that the conflict between 'ideal self' (who we want to be) and the 'real self' (who we are) creates an identity crisis. The result can be not feeling good enough or included or lost. In literature, this theory can be seen in characters who are attempting to achieve self-discovery like F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*, where the pursuit of his perfect self leads to an existential dilemma. According to Rogers, identity crises are determined

through the provision of unconditional positive regard and authentic experiences which lead to solidarity.<sup>28</sup>

Analytical psychology developed by Carl Jung in attempts to explore identity crises can be seen through the perspective of individualisation, which integrates unconscious and conscious aspects of an individual. Identity crises arise from the clash between ‘shadow’ (repressed traits) or maintenance of archetypes such as ‘persona’ and ‘true self’, but Jung views the identity crisis as an opportunity for development.<sup>29</sup>

According to Jung, an identity crisis is resolved when these conflicting forces are reconciled and form a unified self. This is depicted in literature usually when a character develops from self-discovery or through any psychological or philosophical conflict. The character’s identity crisis comes from reconciling societal expectations and his inner truth as reflected in Hermann Hesse’s *Demian*.<sup>30</sup> As pointed out by Jungian theory, it should be underlined that identity crises are not disruptions but transformative processes i.e., a transition towards greater self-awareness and wholeness.

### **Identity Crisis in *He Who Rides a Tiger***

Struggle with the ideas of identity crisis is predominant as exemplified in Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *He Who Rides a Tiger* where the characters must come to terms and adjust their actions within inflexible hierarchical systems yet changing moral and ethical landscape. Their identities are directly related to caste, poverty and strife for dignity and control of lives in a highly structured society.

The identity crisis prevalent in the novel is embodied in protagonist Kalo. He starts his long journey as a low-caste blacksmith, defined by the oppression of caste. The famine robs him of his source of income and pride in front of the other family members, making him question not only his role as a provider but also as a man. At one powerful moment, Kalo thinks to himself, “He took note of the yellow paint of the coach all the others were dark brown—and except for hunger, he could have laughed.”<sup>31</sup> This is the start of his existential crisis, that his inherited identity cannot protect him anymore from the systemic injustice.

Kalo's crisis hits a turning point when he takes the form of a Brahmin priest to question the caste hierarchy. His new identity gives him strength, authority and respect; however, it also causes the inner dilemma. In one pivotal scene, Kalo reflects in one night "...a huge brooding idol he stared into the depths of the night, the warm sweat starting on his chest and drying quickly." <sup>32</sup> It reflects the dilemma that Kalo faces in reconciling this unexpected power with who he really is and the mental burden of living a deceitful life. His transformation serves as a critique of social structures where people must present false personas so they can receive respect and can continue in existence.

Chandra Lekha, Kalo's daughter, experiences an identity crisis as she faces what her father did and the burdens of societal pressure that weighs on her. She goes from being proud of her father for being a survivor to feeling betrayed when she finds out he was not completely honest. The text captures her dilemma, about reconciling loyalty to a father and moral obligation. Chandra Lekha not only has to cope with her identity being challenged, but the stigma of her father's deceit. However, she must also deal with the societal stigma that attaches to her father and his deception which only serve to complicate Chandra's own existence but discovering and accepting herself means turning afar from the judgements of society and following her own morals. Through Chandra Lekha's character, Bhattacharya examines the paradox of women facing patriarchal as well as moral constraints and highlights a more nuanced understanding of selfhood.

The rural and urban landscapes of *He Who Rides a Tiger* are vital backdrops to the characters' insecurities. The village suffering from famine is a place where caste, profession and blood relation which form identity become irrelevant at the time of survival. In one scenes Kalo sees villagers trading their dignity for a mouthful of food but his statement in a particular scene could be aligned with this moment of the story; "All men are born equal." <sup>33</sup>

Bhattacharya uses a third person omniscient narrative in the novel as he sets out to explore the internal strife of his characters having an identity crisis. The way this narrative is written reveals the inner struggle of Kalo as he was transforming himself to a priest from a blacksmith. The symbolism of tiger as power and danger reinforces

the tenuousness of Kalo's perceived identity. He becomes ensnared as he attempts to ride the tiger of societal deceit.

The theme of identity crisis is further reinforced using irony present in the novel. Kalo becomes a Brahmin priest and sees his profession as a pretence even as he rises to power; at the same time, he feels bereft and alienated from within. This irony underlines the conflict between the society telling their sound differ from what he feels on his inside, this illustrates the complexity of an identity in a stratified society.

The novel specifies that while painful and disorienting, identity crises can become stimuli through which oppressive structures are challenged and new modes of selfhood imagined in their wake. Bhabani Bhattacharya in *He Who Rides a Tiger* presents the identity crisis not only as a personal agony but also as an outcome of socio-economic inequality. Ultimately, the novel depicts identity as something to be both contended with and resisted through Kalo's journey of transformation, Chandra Lekha's moral dilemmas, and the contrasting settings of village and city. Bhattacharya criticises the system that forces human beings to sell their soul in exchange for existence without dignity.

### **Identity Crisis in *The Hungry Tide***

Identity crisis is an important theme in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, comprising the characters' conflict with belonging, existing in the world and being part of this socio-ecological complex of Sundarbans. The landscape of the tides is constantly changing, and thus offers a metaphor for identity inside this work; fluid and ever-in-flux. In the tangled lives of his characters, Ghosh explores how personal identity intersects with displacement and cultural hybridity, and how those intersections shape relationships with themselves and one another including a sense of self.

The relationship with Fokir only deepens Piya's identity crisis, his silent yet open connection to nature questions her own empirical view of the world. The division between her opposing views represents the divide between Western rationality and indigenous knowledge, resulting in compelling Piya to reconsider her beliefs about identity and belonging.

By placing characters in a state that is neither stable nor completely chaotic, the Sundarbans becomes a setting where loss of identity is amplified. The tidal

environment that keeps transforming is in line with the transformation of identity undergone by its characters.

*The Hungry Tide*, very skillfully conjoins the physical displacement and loss of identity faced by his characters with an equally continuous shifting place in the Sundarbans to achieve a deep exploration of belonging in itself.<sup>34</sup> The novel revolves around Piya, who is an Indian-American and has a bicultural identity. She is ethnically Indian yet far removed from the Sundarban's traditions and languages. Not being able to speak Bengali, she was a foreigner in the land of her ancestors.

On the other hand, Kanai Dutt embodies a kind of identity struggle that emerges from privilege and a cosmopolitan dissociation with his roots. As a successful translator, his life in Delhi stands opposite to the realities of survival in the Sundarban, which demands social solidarity and rootedness. One more instance of an identity crisis in *The Hungry Tide* is Nirmal's transformation during the Morichjhāpi episode, which is narrated through his diary. Nirmal is a retired schoolteacher with a passion for poetry and Marxist Philosophy. He defines himself as a seeker of justice and the power of knowledge. But when he meets the settlers at Morichjhāpi, his ideology fails him and he could not act on it.

Ghosh uses various narrative styles and forms stream-of-consciousness, journal entries, the epistolary form, changing perspectives to explore internal conflicts of characters. The lens through which Kanai discovers more about himself is Nirmal's journal, while Piya's scientific observations are opposite Fokir's understanding of the tides. The silence is pervasive, particularly with respect to Fokir's character, and serves as an instrument for developing the psychological theme of identity crisis in this novel. His silence is not just the absence of words but a strong articulation of his inner turmoil and relationship with the environment.

Amitav Ghosh, depicts this internal conflict not as a personal but as a universal phenomenon resulting from different cultural, ecological, and corporeal forces whose entanglement creates a strong impact on the process of identity formation. The novel works to neither understand nor embrace identity as singular or easily articulated, but through its characters, settings and narrative form attempts a much more complicated reflection of existing in a changing world.

## **Identity Crisis in *Nectar in a Sieve***

In the novel, the struggle to find identity and belonging is evident through the character's lives, where personal upheaval continuously reshapes Rukmani's life. The novel is set in the small town of India during a time when industrialization slowly began to seep into their traditional values, affecting personal identities who are attached to their land, families, and ways. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the theme of identity crisis emerges where one is challenged to reconcile their beliefs with crushing reality.

Rukmani's struggles with identity starts when she marries Nathan and moves to the countryside. At first, she embraces her role as wife and farmer with hope and resolve. "He was a man and did not understand. How could I stop worrying? We had no money to leave her. Who would look after her when we were gone, and the boys were married with families of their own? With a dowry it was perhaps possible she might marry again; without it no man would look at her, no longer a virgin and reputedly barren."<sup>35</sup> Yet, over the course of the narrative, the land starts to become a battleground for conflict and dispossession, but when a tannery comes to the village, changing their lives forever, Rukmani finds herself disconnected from her surrounding and forced to re-examine her role in life.

During a severe drought the family is on the verge of starving to death and all hope is lost which leads to one significant moment. But the land on which Rukmani depends is failing, and she laments. This moment serves as a critical change for her internal conflict, comes to accept the fact that no amount of work and faith in nature can assure survival. This new clash between her idyllic perception of the land and subsistence farming's harsh truths results in an existential crisis that forces her to reconsider not just who she is but what she thought she believed in.

Nathan is a farmer, who provides for his family. The crisis in him is triggered because he continues to fail to protect his family from socio economic and environmental adversity. After the tannery begins encroaching on their land, Nathan, once a proud man, reflects in a key scene: "for we cannot have except by the land, for I have no other knowledge or skill; and as you say I am getting on and for me it would be impossible to find another landlord. Who indeed would rent his land to such as I am, past hard labour and uncertain of paying what I owe?"<sup>36</sup> This adds emphasis to

Nathan's existential crisis and how external forces destroy his identity as a farmer and masculinity.

The conflict of identity continues through his travel to the city with Rukmani in search of their son only exacerbates his loss of identity. In this new and strange city, his spirit breaks, turning him into a beggar so that he can stay alive. And his dying, far from the home which makes it a very difficult death. Through Nathan, Markandaya criticises a society and an economic system that deprives people of their identity, pride, respect, and dignity.

Transitioning from the village to the city is a critical point in the novel since it shows how alien and exhausting this reality can be for the characters and all their identity struggles. The city is a reason of deep estrangement for both Rukmani and Nathan. The couple faces humiliation and their subsequent experiences of the city life made them question their own identity. The return of Rukmani to the village after the passing away of Nathan indicates an effort to rediscover her identity through resilience and memory. And yet her experience from the city has left some scars, showing that forced displacement can damage oneself.

Rukmani is a woman in a man-oriented society. Her identity is rooted in being a wife and mother, which is further shaken as she deals with infertility and the societal pressure of being the provider. At one point, reflecting on her lack of self-worth, Rukmani laments: "...doing her best to feed herself and her children." <sup>37</sup> This comment illustrates the societal pressure that contributes to her crisis, an inability to see herself as anything more than a womb and mother. The first-person narrative employed by Markandaya helps readers to understand Rukmani's character on a much deeper emotional level as they get to experience her inner turmoil and wavering self-identity. Through the descriptions of land and contrast between urban and rural, the emotional landscapes of those facing an inner conflict in these fraught moments are magnified. symbolism of the land as source of life and loss reinforces that identity cannot be separated from land.

The novel's episodic structure, shifting between hope and despair, echoes the psychological journey of its characters. Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* reveals, identity crisis is an intricate part of the human experience, affected by deeper

external and internal struggles. Rukmani's journey through the novel examines the fragility and flexibility of selfhood amid economic and societal pressures. The demise of Nathan shows how systemic inequities can cost the lives of people; the urban setting visibly demonstrates this disorientation and displacement. Markandaya's narrative is a tribute to the persistence of the human spirit, demonstrating that even amidst devastating loss and technological encroachment, it is possible for men and women to fight for their identities and survive.

### **Identity Crisis in *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

Identity crisis is an important theme in Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, as identity is defined and learnt in relation to both limits and possibilities in the performance of selfhood as subjective experience and as social image. Paro and Priya unravel their crises in different ways, but intersect at the same struggles of self-worth, belonging and authenticity. The novel examines the disintegration of identity in a society fixated on appearances and power dynamics. The chapter projects *Paro: Dreams of Passion* as a significant critical analysis of identity crises faced by the women, trapped between the patriarchal structures and urban societal constraints in contemporary India.<sup>38</sup> Paro and Priya highlight opposing yet overlapping quests for selfhood, their respective crises of identity mediated through class, ambition, and cultural dissonance.

One new direction for Paro's sense of self outlines her relationship with her body, which she uses both as a weapon of power and expression but later realizes it as a source of anxiety. Paro realises that how beauty, once the reason of dominance in the society, is temporary. However, the feeling is reflected by Priya. In a symbolic scene that mirrors her inner conflict, Priya peers at a mirror only to be met by her age-worn reflection: "...looked long and deep into the mirror. I knew I was not beautiful, but I felt I was special, somehow."<sup>39</sup> This moment embodies her crisis as she confronts with the dissonance between her self-image and the realities of time. Her insecurities are worsened by society's obsession with youth, leading to a deep internal conflict.

Paro's identity crisis tracks as she learns the social capital that comes from her beauty and its potent, alluring overdrive has begun to fade. This loss prompts her to grapple with a more spiritual question of self-worth: Who is she, besides her physicality? As Gokhale uses Paro's diminishing relevance to her society, she critiques a culture that

attaches a woman's worth to her physical appeal, exposing the existential void that ensues when those constructs break down.

Priya's identity crisis, too, plays out in her relationship with silence — both her own and that which society imposes. Unlike Paro, who proclaims herself flamboyantly, Priya internalizes her struggles, and muffles her perspectives and feelings. This repression is especially notable within the confines of her marriage, in which she takes on the role of a dutiful wife, even when the snags of domesticity leave her feeling diminished. In the opening line of the novel, Priya reflects on herself, "I am writing about them because I saw myself in her."<sup>40</sup> This line illustrates the one of the methods through which expression can expose the societal norms which are contributing to the identity crisis.

Paro and Priya's identity crises are shaped by their relationships, which mirror their internal quandaries. The way Paro engages with men, especially her lover B.R., underlines her reliance on validation from the outside. B.R. rejects her, and she is left trembling with a rejection so complete, so deep, that it topples the artifice of self she has only just created. To Priya, relationships serve as a lens with which she evaluates her own decisions and compromises. Her marriage is stable but lacks the passion and individuality she envies in Paro's life. In one reflective moment of the text, Priya recognizes the gap between the ideal self and her real self. This is a defining moment for her character as she grapples with the life, she has built versus the life she longed for. It is an illustration of the emotional labour of navigating identity in a world that limits who we can be.

Paro's identity crisis is contextualized within her rebellious streak that defies patriarchal conventions and her quest for individualism through self-expression. However, there are insecurities behind her actions and the social standards she aims to liberate from. Paro uses her physical beauty as a way of wielding agency but also critiques how this dependence renders her fragile when these outward signifiers of identity diminish. Paro's identity crisis is exacerbated by unhealthy relationships, particularly her disastrous marriage to B.R. and affairs, attempts to reclaim agency within her life only to leave her feeling detached and unfulfilled.

Within this tension between the question of identity and the search for belonging, the text discloses Gokhale's scrutiny of patriarchal and class-based constructs that engender identity fragmentation through the characterization of big and small, good and bad characters—the larger message being a nuanced examination of the multifaceted yet contradictory essence of self in a complexed urban India.

### **5.3 Social Equality and Justice**

Social equality and justice are important to make a society in which all individuals can utilise opportunity, assets and have equal rights. It focuses on eliminating institutional barriers to rights, social inclusion, and civil liberties based on race, gender, class, or ethnicity, so that every individual is treated with respect and dignity. Justice, on the other hand, addresses historical and structural injustices, and protects marginalized populations.

Together, they seek to build an inclusive society where outcomes are governed by merit and fairness does not privilege or prejudice.

Indian English theorists have closely interrogated issues of social justice and equality in the unique context of the historical and socio-cultural aspect of India. The foremost figures of the movement, B.R. Ambedkar asserted that social justice could not be attained without dismantling caste-based discrimination and that equality in education, access to resources and elimination of untouchability were the only ways to achieve social justice in society.<sup>41</sup> Ambedkar, in his writings, including *Annihilation of Caste*, demonstrated that systematic oppression perpetuates inequality and that constitutional safeguards and affirmative action are necessary to transform society.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak criticizes how colonial legacies perpetuate social hierarchies and stresses how marginalized voices must be amplified. Her seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* highlights the silencing of marginalized communities in dominant discourses, suggesting the demand for justice mechanisms that value inclusion and representation.<sup>42</sup> Scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha explores the intersection between identity and equality in a multicultural context, examining negotiations of power structures by hybrid identities. Bhabha's theoretical construct of the 'third space' suggests the opportunities for social justice in the view of cultural

exchange and coexistence as opposed to binaries of privilege and oppression. These thinkers and literary works together show that equality must work through structural reform but also through a reimagining of collective identities based around respect and recognition from one another.

### **Social Equality and Justice in *He Who Rides a Tiger***

Social equality and justice are the backbone of Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger*; they run through the characters, the settings, and the wider socio-economic structures. Through Kalo, Chandra and the village community, Bhattacharya critiques the entrenched inequalities of caste and economic hierarchies, and highlights the struggle for dignity and justice that is often obstructed by a repressive system.<sup>43</sup> Kalo's journey from a poor blacksmith to a scheming Brahmin priest is a devastating investigation of the workings of caste oppression. His rise challenges the strict hierarchies that shape Indian society, but it also sheds light on the subversive struggle for social justice. The novel uses Kalo's journey to interrogate the absence of social equality, and to show how much it can cost to seek justice in an unfair world.

Kalo's daughter Chandra Lekha is the voice of rebellion against the entrenched injustices derived from caste and gender. Her unwillingness to accept her father's deceptive practices further illustrates her commitment to integrity and fairness. Her character also highlights gender inequality, as her fight for freedom and respect is complicated by her father's conduct. Through Chandra Lekha, Bhattacharya critiques the patriarchal social structures which deny women their deserved rightful import in the struggle for social equality.

The settings in *He Who Rides a Tiger* the starving Indian village and the city expose the inequality that marks Indian society. This drought- and poverty-struck village embodies systemic neglect of rural communities. In one scene in the novel, villagers are made to barter their dignity for a few grains; an illustration of socio-economic inequality that leads to retribution and injustice. Bhattacharya's use of irony and symbolism deepens the investigation into social equality and justice. That image of the tiger, an incarnation of power and also a threat, captures the precarious balance one must maintain to defy societal norms. The title, *He Who Rides a Tiger*, implies the threat of subverting oppressive systems.

The novel's third-person, omniscient narration gives an overview of the characters' internal battles and external circumstances. By immersing readers in Kalo's thoughts and moral predicaments, Bhattacharya draws attention to the human cost of systemic deprivation and the tortuous routes to justice individuals must take. *He Who Rides a Tiger* addresses social equality and justice, its characters and settings intricately navigate the complexities of caste, gender or economic oppression.

Bhattacharya tackles the systemic obstacles to a more equitable future, but also the cost that challenging those structures can have to our moral health and psyche. Through Kalo's pragmatic rebellion, Chandra Lekha's principled resistance and the contrasts between rural and urban life, the novel criticises an unfair society and a demand for a reimagination built upon equity and dignity.

### **Social Equality and Justice in *The Hungry Tide***

Through various settings and characters, *The Hungry Tide* is an exploration of social equality and justice, manifested in the lives of marginalized communities, the correlation between humans and nature, and the plight of individuals navigating between societal oppression and personal dreams. The Sundarban, a tidal landscape, becomes a metaphor for the amorphousness of justice and equality that shatters hard societal constructs.

The systemic inequality is critiqued in the novel, particularly through the perspective of the Morichjhāpi massacre, where settlers were violently displaced in the name of conservation. This historical episode illustrates the predicament of poor, homeless migrants, who fled to Sundarbans for shelter and livelihood.<sup>44</sup> Through Nirmal's journal, Ghosh conveys the settlers' suffering, their displacement and the violence wrought against them. Nirmal wonders, "Nor was there any sound other than the lapping of the water, for the shore was so distant that even the insects of the forest were inaudible."<sup>45</sup> This line interprets the injustice of prioritizing environment preservation over human rights and fails to address the sufferings of the vulnerable people who live in absolute poverty.

The settlers' search for equality becomes a symbolic fight against systemic forces. Through the settlers' displacement, Ghosh critiques the way justice is often a weapon

for powerful, rather than a universal principle. Fokir's character, too, is an embodiment of the silent struggles of people pushed to the margins by class and literacy. Even though he has such a strong relationship with the land, he is excluded from the decision-making process in Sundarbans.

A privileged translator, Kanai stands in contrast to Fokir and Piya, his presence highlighting the gulf between power and justice. His initial arrogance and detachment embody urban elites who are insulated from the struggles of marginalized communities. But reading Nirmal's journal becomes a transformative experience that pushes him to face the reality of inequality. Nirmal's version of the events of Morichjhāpi massacre deeply disturbs Kanai, and he begins to interrogate his own complicity in systemic injustices.

The Sundervan provides a literal and metaphorical setting for the exploration of justice and equality. Its unsteady nature reflects the precarious lives of its residents, who contend with poverty, displacement, and environmental hazards. Ghosh's description of landscape "The islands are the trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringe of her sari, the āchol that follows her, half wetted by the sea. They number in the thousands, these islands. Some are immense and some no larger than sandbars; some have lasted through recorded history while others were washed into being just a year or two ago. These islands are the rivers' restitution, the offerings through which they return to the earth what they have taken from it, but in such a form as to assert their permanent dominion over their gift"<sup>46</sup> vividly frames the tension between human and natural forces. While alternating between personal journeys and historical accounts, Ghosh's narrative structure cultivates a layered exploration of justice and equality.

Nirmal's journal provides a window into the systematic subjugation of the settlers, while the story of Piya and Kanai unfolds the nuances of privilege and otherness. These perspectives stand in stark contrast to one another, revealing the multiple angles from which we must look at justice, as it must be both personal and yet reach for the great beyond.

Through Amitav Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide*, the reader develops a balanced understanding of social equality and justice, learning to empathize with oppressed

communities and navigate the difficult choices faced by conservationists. The novel critiques these systemic inequalities that perpetuate justice through the different experiences of Piya, Fokir, and Kanai while also envisioning a more inclusive idea of justice that encompasses what the novel terms as the balance between human lives and aquatic lives. Sundarban, itself emerges as a potent image of the intricate nature of justice, all lives are conjoined for the pursuit of equality.

### **Social Equality and Justice in *Nectar in a Sieve***

*Nectar in a Sieve* is a novel based on socio-economic struggles of rural India. It is a piercing critique on systemic injustice through its characters, settings, and narrative. This novel is a eloquent commentary on inequities of resources, gender roles, and capitalist oppression of the poor farmers, with a humanistic view on the principle of social justice.<sup>47</sup>

Rukmani and Nathan's relationship with the land abstracts inequality and justice. Being dependent on nature, they were easy prey for exploitation. The expansion of the tannery is an illustration of the structural injustice that the poor endure. When the tannery extends, devouring farmland, Nathan remarks, "It is an important part of living...and work is another. There is nothing for us here, for we have neither the means to buy land nor to rent it. Wouldyou have us wasting our youth chafing against things we can-not change?" This moment reflects the basic inequity of a system that denies ownership and control to those who cultivate the land. The tannery workers interrupt the harmony of the village, representing the arrival of industrial capitalism. The villagers, who used to live together in collective values, now are displaced and alienated. This transition highlights the divide between the realities of exploitation and the promises of modernization.

Markandaya's exploration of justice encompasses gender dynamics, illustrating the struggles of women. When Rukmani has her first child, a girl, she is a little disappointed, because of pressure from society to have sons. Ira's story is also a deeper critique of gender and economic injustice. Her husband's abandonment of her for not conceiving emphasises the exploitation of women's roles. When famine hits, Ira turns herself into a sex worker to feed her family, embodying the sacrifices women

make in patriarchal society. This act challenges conventional morality, which ignores a societal structure that leaves women with such choices.

The novel also highlights caste and class as major barriers to social equality. The subservience of the villagers to the zamindar here stands for a deeply entrenched hierarchy that offers the poor no opportunity to grow on social ladder. Despite all of Nathan's hard work, the family is forever in debt, a symbol of structural inequality that traps the lower classes in cycles of poverty.

The novel's narrative structure and use of symbolism serve to deepen the exploration of justice. While the tannery is the recurring motif of systemic oppression, the land is the provider and a battle terrain. Rukmani's garden, a tiny place that she lovingly nurtures, illustrates her resistance to these forces. In one passage as she cultivates the pumpkin vines she reflects upon the miracle of growth: "I was young and fanciful then, and it seemed to me not that they grew as I did, unconsciously, but that each of the dry, hard pellets I held in my palm had within it the very secret of life itself, curled tightly within, under leaf after protective leaf for safekeeping, fragile, vanishing with the first touch or sight."<sup>49</sup> This moment highlights her belief in the possibility of renewal, despite systemic inequities.

Nathan and some of the other farmers demand a fair price from the tannery, though it was an unsuccessful attempt, but their action is a defiance of the existing condition. Likewise, Rukmani's support her female friends Kali, Janaki, and Kunthi and provides a sense of community and mutual strength. The significance of working together to tackle systemic oppression is examined in these relationships. One scene involves Rukmani's attempts to save her family from starvation amid the famine. She writes letters for the villagers in exchange for food, and uses her literacy, a rare skill among the rural poor, to bridge social divides. This symbolizes her silent rebellion against the system that aims to suppress and alienate the underprivileged.

*Nectar in a Sieve* ensures that one gets a deep insight into the tragedy of the individual along with a profound critique of all kinds of social inequality and injustice. The novel's strong characters, vivid settings, and complex narrative serve to highlight the resilience and dignity of people amid systemic violence. Markandaya asks for justice

that knows no economic or gender barriers, based instead on empathy, solidarity, and the desire to lift up the marginalised.

### **Social Equality and Justice in *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* explores the interplay of privilege, power, and social disparity of Indian elite, painting a portrait of a world where justice appears like a dream. Using a satirical tone and complex characterizations, the novel also explores structural inequities in gender, class, and morality.<sup>50</sup> It also follows lives of the affluent, the story reveals the hypocrisies, struggles and glimpse of justice that define them.

The novel emerges as a crucial text in its exploration of gender as the center of inequality and shows how women's identities are determined by societal expectation and the whim of powerful men. Paro herself, though outwardly a fierce woman, is a living representation of the internal struggle of women battling a patriarchal society that offers rewards for beauty but punishes disobedience. When Paro casually dismisses her dependency on B.R. for financial stability, saying, "They made the rules,"<sup>51</sup> it evokes that deep-rooted gender inequities often compel women to accommodate unjust power structures rather than oppose them directly.

The theme of class inequality is also shown through the conception of the poor and rich characters in the novel. The lavish settings, including B.R.'s opulent apartment, are signs of privilege, but the challenges faced by domestic staff and workers expose the exploitative underbelly of this lifestyle. In one especially memorable scene, the discomfort of a servant when he handles Paro's extravagant belongings is used to illustrate alienation and dehumanization of the impoverished and marginalised.

The novel's treatment of social justice systems calls on the expansive patterns of power and submission that permeate interpersonal dynamics. Paro's relationship with B.R. is a perfect example of the transactional nature of love in a world dominated by social hierarchies. B.R. is manipulative to those around him, but he also falls victim to his own insecurities. Ultimately, Paro's disillusionment with B.R. has less to do with a critique of that individual than it does with a condemnation of the standard for men that prioritize wealth and status over emotions.

Priya's marriage with Suresh embodies yet another gender-based injustice, entrenched in society's expectations of women. Though she appears to accept this role as the dutiful wife, her mind is brimming with dissatisfaction with the constraints that come from marriage. Her conflict of having dreams and ambition while also having to fit into society shows the psychological impacts of systemic oppression.

Gokhale's narrative structure is crucial to delving into themes of social equity and justice. Priya's first-person perspective lets readers get a glimpse into the ironic perspective of the elite's contradictions and hypocrisies. Priya's observations are colored by envy and critique, making for a collective narration that draws the intricacies of negotiating privilege and marginalization. The novel's episodic structure, with its attention to key events and relationships, reflects the fragmented reality of justice in the characters' lives. Paro's physical beauty, described extravagantly, stands in for the glamour and cost of privilege. Her eventual physical decline mirrors the unsustainability of a life based on appearance and social climbing.

The motif of Marine Drive, where both Paro and Priya encounter the decisive moments in their lives, becomes a metaphor for the impermanence of justice. The turbulent sea reflects the characters' struggle to find solid ground in a world shaped by inequality. The scene, "We drove aimlessly around Marine Drive after that. We sat primly apart. There was a faint monsoon drizzle, and the steady susurrations of the sea at ebb tide. After a while B.R. parked the car, and proceeded to stare at me keenly, his hands still on the steering...than some villainous looking characters loomed outside the window glass, gesturing and knocking threateningly. B.R.'s immediate reflex was panic; he snapped the lock shut, switched on the ignition, and speeded away, perspiration beading his brows."<sup>52</sup> encapsulates the two sides of justice. *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is a sharp, satirical critique of social inequity and justice; a scathing expose of the hypocrisy and failures of a society obsessed with privilege and appearances. The novel critiques the systems through which inequality is maintained, offering glimpses of resistance and resilience through its vivid characters, evocative settings and incisive narrative.

The dynamics of social equality and human rights become a prominent motif in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, *The Hungry Tide*, *Nectar in a Sieve*, and *Paro: Dreams of*

*Passion*. These novels illustrate how systemic inequalities of caste, class, gender and ecological condition strip human beings of human rights: dignity, justice, freedom.

Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger* critiques the caste system's oppressive hold on individuals like Kalo, and his rebellion against the hierarchies of caste indicates to the denial of the right to equality. His decision to disguise as a Brahmin priest illustrates how far the downtrodden must go to reclaim their humanity. In Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani's struggle for survival with industrialization symbolises the socioeconomic injustice that robs rural communities of their means to livelihood and sustenance, perpetuating vicious cycles of poverty.

One of the most major obstacles to the justice and human rights in these novels is gender inequality, especially in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Nectar in a Sieve*. In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Paro and Priya wrestle with patriarchal standards that measure their worth in beauty, relationships and compliance. Paro's eventual disillusionment with the elite world points to the ways in which society's expectations rob women of their free will, while Priya's internal battle exposes the psychological burden of living up to societal perception. Similarly, Rukmani and her daughter Ira in *Nectar in a Sieve* encounter economic and gender-based injustices which force them to make sacrifices, as demonstrated by the necessity of Ira's need to turn into a sex worker for survival. These narratives draw attention to the intersection of gender and class, and how women's rights are violated in patriarchal and economically exploitative societies.

In Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, human rights is put in a broader perspective by connecting social equality to ecological justice. The Morichjhāpi massacre demonstrates that marginalized communities were deprived of their land and livelihood for conservation. Fokir's deep ties to the Sundarbans, and Piya's scientific works, suggest the need for a frame of justice that accounts for both human and ecological rights. The forced displacement of villagers in *Nectar in a Sieve* in the name of industrial expansion reflects the similar tension between modernization and the rights of the underprivileged. Together, these novels argue that there can be no true social equality without simultaneously addressing intersection of human rights to dignity, gender equity, and environmental justice and they make clear that justice must include all strata of society.

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## **CHAPTER – 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

6.1 An Overview of Previous Chapters

6.2 Major Findings and its Social Relevance

6.3 Future Scope of the Research Study

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## Chapter-6

### Conclusion

#### 6.1 An Overview of Previous Chapters

This research is followed by an Introduction chapter which provides a basic groundwork for the study of human rights, detailing its historical background, development and emergence as an universal discourse. It starts with how human rights emerged from early philosophical thought to being codified through modern legal processes, emphasising the purpose of institutions such as the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This chapter also discusses the definitions provided by various agencies and institutions with respect to human rights, including articles relating to fundamental constitutional rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution as well as definitions given in dictionaries.

This chapter also includes Review of Related Literature of the various academic research works of human rights in literature, and the representation of these rights in different literary works. A review of literature highlights key studies that focused on the connection of human rights with literature. The Literature Gap section offers directions for future work and points out the need for additional exploration and examine the purpose of literary works in advocacy on behalf of marginalised communities.

This chapter also covers the Interface between Human Rights and Literature and shows that literature plays an important role to increase awareness about social issues, inform people of injustices in the society. This overview lays the groundwork for the chapters to follow, in which the selected novels will be examined in the context of human rights.

This theme of marginalization and subjugation of the subaltern, protest and formation of new society is prominent in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, *The Hungry Tide*, *Nectar in a Sieve*, and, *Paro: Dreams of Passion*. Despite being set in different socio-cultural context, these fictions investigate how marginalised people fight oppressive systems, how this individual and collective resistance shapes the possibilities of a changed society. The novels provide contrasting views on the way the subalterns are being

exploited, how they voice their resentment, and how they respond to new social formations.

These novels, despite being set against different socio-cultural contexts, tackle the question of how the marginalized struggles against oppressive systems and how this individual and collective resistance shapes the possibilities of a reorganized society.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, the representation of the downtrodden is directly connected to the caste based social structure in India. The story focuses on Kalo, a blacksmith of the untouchable caste, who challenges the rigid, oppressive caste system governing his life. His revolt for dignity is a key element of the narrative that finds him making a scheme to disrupt the social order, dressing up as a Brahmin priest. The manipulation of religious symbols and caste dynamics expose the complex power structures that abuses the marginalized.

This moral complexity offers a nuanced perspective on marginalization, as Kalo's quest for dignity leads him to use the same corrupt methods of those in power. Kalo's method of resistance is predicated on turning the caste system against itself, leveraging the religious superstitions and hierarchies that have terrorized him. But this victory is empty, as it does not translate into sustainable social reform and instead exposes the fragility and the moral underpinnings of the caste system.<sup>1</sup> But the new society proposed in *He Who Rides a Tiger* is one in which the marginalized can rise above their social position, and the road to that society involves moral compromise. And the novel ultimately raises the question if we can have true social equality by such deceptions, and ultimately suggests that without some sort of structural change, the personal victories through such deception are ultimately transitory and illusory.

In contrast, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* adopts a different approach in its marginalization, which is played out at the intersection of environmental displacement, class, and subaltern identity. In the novel, this setting is the Sundarbans, a remote, environmentally vulnerable region where the downtrodden inhabit their world. Here, marginalization is not only a consequence of caste or class but also of geography and state neglect. The refugees of Morichjhāpi are also environmentally and politically exploited. Their eviction from the land by the state, which prioritizes

wildlife over human lives, is a testament to the struggle between environmental action and human rights.

In contrast to Kalo in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, the marginalized subjects of *The Hungry Tide* protest publicly. The Morichjhāpi massacre, in which refugees are violently evicted from their homes, is a direct confrontation between the powerless and those holding the power. But this protest culminates in tragedy, the state's savage repression highlighting the tenuousness of the subaltern's resistance. Protest in this novel is not a subtle manipulation but a collective and desperate act that is overpowered by larger political forces.

*The Hungry Tide* depicts the story of a new society. That is struggling to reconcile with the entanglements of development and environmentalism. The novel offers a glimpse of a world where the concerns of the marginalized people are always secondary to bigger environmental and political objectives.<sup>2</sup> It questions whose lives matter in the formation of new societies and whether marginalized voices are heard amid state power and the global environment.

The marginalized are generally depicted as the poor people of the rural part of the country, embodied by Rukmani and Nathan, tenant farmers who are vulnerable to both the landowners and the forces of modernization in *Nectar in a Sieve*. The tannery arrives and rips the villagers from their land, and pushes them deeper into poverty. While Kalo struggles against the system, desperately attempting to subvert and destroy it, Rukmani and Nathan respond to their marginalization with endurance rather than rebellion.

Protest in *Nectar in a Sieve* is largely internal and unspoken. The villagers do not have power and the means to oppose the changes forced upon them by the tannery, and their protests are suppressed. The novel deals with the quiet resilience of the underpowered, in the strength it takes just to endure when survival feels impossible.<sup>3</sup> In *Nectar in a Sieve* a new society is created by the grasp of industrialization to the agrarian ways of life where agrarianism is marginalizing. The novel presents an ugly picture of this new order, in which the downtrodden are relegated to the margins of society, and the divide between wealthy and poor deepens. In this sense, the new

society is not the society of hope and progress, but one of alienation and loss for the rural poor.

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, the marginalized aren't the rural poor or lower castes, but women, especially the ones trapped in the tentacles of patriarchy and social obligation.<sup>4</sup> Paro, the protagonist, is marginalized not because she's poor but because of social norms, her value is determined by her connections to rich men. Unlike Rukmani or the refugees of *The Hungry Tide*, Paro is a figure of defiance who refuses to be constrained by ideology or morals.

The protest in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is internal and intimate. Paro's revolt is against the roles assigned to her as a woman, wife and mistress. Her ties to men such as B.R. and Mishra are her efforts to gain power over a life that invariably leads to more exploitation from them. Paro's protest isn't a collective uprising as it is an individual struggle against the demands of a patriarchal society. Therefore, *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, where women like Paro find modernity, suggests a cynical vision of the representation of the new society. While Paro steps outside of conventional modes, she is ultimately imprisoned by a cycle of manipulation and exploitation. The novel implies, the new social order may grant women liberation, but it still leaves male power structures in place.

Across these four novels, representations of the marginalized differ widely, always defined by diverse social, cultural, and political contexts.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, caste defines the terms of marginalization, and the subaltern resists through subversion but this resistance is morally ambiguous. *The Hungry Tide* deals with environmental and political marginalization, in which protest is collective but often unsuccessful in front of state power.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, marginalization is connected to economic exploitation, and resistance demonstrated as endurance instead of revolt. *Paro: Dreams of Passion* addresses sexual politics and gendered marginalization, as the subaltern narrates her protest through personal rebellion but still trapped within patriarchal structures. Each novel provides a different perspective on the marginalized, exploring the ways in which exploitation, resistance, and the notion of a new society is demonstrated in varying circumstances.

In the novel this construction of society turns on traditional and religious ideas of purity and hierarchy. Religion and caste reinforce each other to uphold rigid social barriers that hold people in the lower castes, like the untouchables, at the bottom of the hierarchy. The use of religious symbols to manipulate social structures shows how deep culture can function as a mechanism of preserving unequal societal foundations.<sup>5</sup> Religious rituals, festivals and observances serve to reinforce this sense of difference, a cultural artefact that has no space for questioning or mobility.

The novel also reflects on the beliefs and practices that sustain such injustices. Since people think that caste is decided by karma and that children are born into a caste due to actions of their past lives, the notion of social equality is challenged and exploited. Since many of these traditions are grounded in religious practices, these traditions get stuck to their lives, and it is difficult for them to disentangle from it, it is hanging like a stork around their life.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* takes a nuanced view of how social norms are challenged and reconfigured in the context of an isolated region such as the Sundarbans. Here, social values aren't decided by caste, but rather survival and the natural environment. The people of the Sundarbans work and live closely connected with the tides, rivers and wildlife, which shape their values as a community.

Ghosh offers a society in which social norms are fluid, typically determined by trusting a need for survival against ecological adversities. In *The Hungry Tide*, the realities of life in the Sundarbans colour the cultural construction of society. The novel demonstrates the flexible and resilient nature of local society in the Sundarbans and shows how it adapts to the shifting waters and the unpredictability of human life.

An elaborate system of belief based on local folklore in *The Hungry Tide*, particularly the worship of a goddess of the forest called Bon Bibi, who protects residents from the threats of the wild. This conviction that Bon Bibi will protect them provides a sense of communal safety in a treacherous landscape. Ghosh also examines how external forces like government policies, conservation efforts, and modernity threaten these age-old traditions. The tension between established customs and the intrusion of outsiders exposes how belief can be damaged by changing socio-political conditions.<sup>6</sup>

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* sketches a society rooted in tradition where the social custom revolves around familial obligation, communal responsibility, and survival. The characters live by values of hard work, respect for the land, and a connection to the natural world. These norms direct the character's behavior towards one another and the world, regulating everything from marriage to farming techniques. The focus on communal living and cooperative work mirrors the value of social cohesion in a rural community.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, these social customs and traditions shape culture. The village's identity is tied to its relationship with the land, and the characters' sense of self is linked to their ability to cultivate and nurture their environment. Community and shared values are often strengthened through cultural rituals and traditions such as festivals, marriages, and harvest celebrations. But with the arrival of a tannery that way of life changed as industrialization began its intrusion.

In the novel, faith and customs are bound up with religion and the land. Religious ceremonies and offerings to the gods reflect the villagers' use of belief in divine intervention in their lives, whether this is through the success of their crop or the birth of children. Rituals in marriages, fertility, harvest festivals are indicative of life as cyclical and in connection with the land. But Markandaya also demonstrates how such beliefs work in a world of famine, poverty, and change, exposing the fragility of a subsistence-based society.

Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is a contemporary urban critique of social norms, especially those relating to gender, sexuality, and power. The novel weighs the traditional burdens women face against the new freedoms enabled by urbanization and modernity. *Paro* challenges the social norms that revolve around wealth, status and male authority prevalent in the society as she attempts to make her own identity in a patriarchal society.

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, the elite urban world pervades cultural construction of society, where appearance and social networking determine success. Women are defined by the men around them, who see them as objects to be controlled, desired, or disposed of. In this novel, beliefs and traditions are rooted in social status and gender roles, not religion or community.

The beliefs and traditions in this novel are connected to social rank and gender norms, not faith or community. Paro's defiance of these customs serves as a critique of the conditioning that treats women as inferiors. Her efforts to escape these customs reflects the complicated relationship between tradition and modernity in urban India.

The socio-cultural dimensions of these four novels reveal the different settings that shape social norms and values, culture and belief systems and each novel have a different perspective on how individuals and communities relate to these forces, demonstrating the complex ways that culture shapes and limits social life.

The theme of Man versus Nature is expressed in the novels *He Who Rides a Tiger*, *The Hungry Tide*, *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Paro: Dreams of Passion*. Although each novel is embedded in distinct social and cultural contexts, all the novels revolve around individual and collective relationships with the natural world, and the impact of these relationships on the human psyche, society and nature. In this chapter the differences of representation of man with nature and how this interaction arises in terms of conflict, harmony and consciousness are described. In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, nature does not play a major role in the plot but is integrated in an understated manner into the fabric of society. The caste system around which this setting revolves indicates a more symbolic vision of nature.

*The Hungry Tide* explores the relationship between man and nature. Set in the Sundarbans, a tidal landscape where the land and sea are in a state of constant change, nature is a powerful force that dominates the lives of the people. Here, man and nature are in a constant battle, and survival requires a delicate balance. The novel portrays nature as both nurturing and destructive. To the people living in the Sundarbans, nature isn't something to tame or control, it's something to respect and fear.

The novel is concerned with this unpredictable natural environment that has shaped human psychology. People of the Sundarbans develop this mindset because they understand that nature can change their life any second, they are very resilient, pragmatic, and adaptive. People like Piya, outsiders to this world, begin their contact with the natural world through the lens of science, keeping it distant.<sup>7</sup> As the novel progresses, Piya is led to comprehend that the local people's connection to their environment is deep and almost spiritual.

*The Hungry Tide* also depicts environmental concerns by tension between preservation and subsistence. The government's attempts to protect the Sundarbans' wildlife, especially the tiger, tend to come at the expense of the marginalized communities living there. The novel does not provide simple solutions, but rather complicates ideas of environmental vulnerability with discussions of social suffering, and social justice.

The relationship of man and nature is explored in *Nectar in a Sieve* with the rural farmers who rely on the land for their existence. Nature is a source of life and a source of suffering for Rukmani and Nathan. Cycles of drought, flood and famine shape the trajectory of their lives, and people's psyche is constantly challenged by these natural calamities. Nature here is indifferent to human suffering, and the villagers' survival based on their capacity to withstand the deprivations it forces upon them.

*Nectar in a Sieve* highlights the relationship between man, nature, and society as one of delicate interdependence. The villagers lead an interdependent lifestyle with the land, yet that harmony is tenuous.<sup>8</sup> The novel highlights the industrial progress that leads to the destruction of not only nature but also the rural way of life in favor of an urban industry that marginalizes these values.

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, nature serves a more symbolic function in the narrative. It's a social and psychological novel that is set mostly in a city, and it significantly deals with the social and psychological challenges of the characters, the women in particular.

The natural world isn't physically present in the novel, but it is present in the emotional and psychological landscapes of the characters. Paro is also rebellious and challenges societal norms, which could be interpreted as a reflection of the untamed force of nature, an embodiment of primal instincts that rebel against the strict structures of society. Paro embodies a raw force of nature that breaks through the safe, artificial world of high society. Her psychological struggle is a battle between her natural desires and pressure from a nuanced, though morally repressive world.

The novel comments on society's repression of these natural instincts in women to ensure order and control. Each novel depicts human's relationship with nature in diverse ways, showing the uniqueness of human existence in the natural world. *He*

*Who Rides a Tiger* offers nature as a metaphor for social order; *The Hungry Tide* shows the literal collision of man against an uncontrollable and unpredictable nature. *Nectar in a Sieve* stresses the delicate balance of harmony that exists in rural life with nature, whereas *Paro: Dreams of Passion* uses nature as an allegory for inner psychological turmoil. These novels together, give a deep exploration of how human behavior, society and consciousness are shaped by nature.

*He Who Rides a Tiger*, *The Hungry Tide*, *Nectar in a Sieve*, and *Paro: Dreams of Passion* all deal with individual freedom and expression, but come from a variety of cultural, social, and personal perspectives. In each story, the protagonist's struggle with the idea of self, faces identity crises and deals with severe social inequality stresses. However, the way these themes are portrayed highlights the specific challenges of characters navigating their socio-political realities, offering different perspectives on the tension between personal freedom and obligation towards society.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, the quest for self is framed as the struggle to overcome the perspectives of the caste system. The protagonist, Kalo, is driven by a desperate desire to have dignity in a world that does not respect the lower caste.

In *The Hungry Tide*, the quest for self and freedom is intertwined with the interaction of humans and their environment. The characters Piya and Kanai both try to define their own identities in relation to the Sundarbans. Piya's scientific pursuit of understanding the river dolphins is her way to find a place for herself in a foreign environment. Her desire for self-discovery is shaped not only by self-reflection but also, the broader dynamics of transcultural recovery and watching environmental impacts.<sup>9</sup> Kanai's journey, by contrast, is about his quest for identity in the context of societal structures. As he navigates the Sundarbans people's lives, he is forced to confront his privileged identity and his detachment from the everyday struggles of the marginalized. This encounter leads to an identity crisis that plays out in Kanai's own complicity in injustices faced by the region's people. Kanai's intellectual pursuits are compared against the harsh realities of the Sundarbans, capturing the conflict between individual freedom and social responsibility.

The novel also deals with the limitations of social equality and justice, specifically in the context of environmental conservation and displacement of people. The

government's prioritization of wildlife over the rights of the refugees at Morichjhāpi illustrates the tension between environmental justice and human rights. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the quest for self, is embedded in the themes of survival and endurance. The protagonist, Rukmani, does not strive for personal freedom in the usual way; rather, she is defined by what her family and community need her to be.<sup>10</sup> Her identity is interwoven with the land she cultivates and the relationships she nurtures.

As the villagers lose their lands and face the destruction of the agricultural economy, an identity crisis arises, not just for Rukmani, but for the whole village, whose roles and values become victims of the pressures of modernisation. Rukmani and her family end up being trapped in a system that prioritises financial gain over human dignity.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* deals with the quest for self and freedom through the lens of gender and sexuality. Paro, the central figure, refuses to conform to the standards for a wife or a mistress. Yet Paro's path is riddled with contradiction, and the efforts she makes to define her freedom only result in further entanglement in the social systems she longs to escape.

The novel thus poses an identity crisis not only for Paro but also for the women of her world, ever negotiating their identities in a patriarchal society. Paro's struggle is an allegory for the larger difficulty of defining oneself as an individual in the world that treats women as an object. Her revolt is also empowering and self-destructive, as she moves between leaps of independence and falls of vulnerability.

Social equality and justice remain distant in *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, as the novel critiques the systemic gendered power dynamics indelibly shaped by patriarchal power structures that impact the lives of its characters. Although Paro's rejection of conventional gender roles is a rebellion, it doesn't bring real social change. Rather, it depicts the deeper, endemic promiscuities that govern interactions between the men and women, even in an advanced and modern community.

All four novels explore the themes of freedom and individuality through diverse lenses, pointing towards the complexities of personal and social identity in various socio-cultural contexts. *He Who Rides a Tiger* explores the moral ambiguities of pursuing freedom in an oppressive caste system, while *The Hungry Tide* interrogates

the challenges of individual discovery amid environmental and social injustice. *Nectar in a Sieve* offers a more passive quest for self, where survival and endurance carve identity, and *Paro: Dreams of Passion* critiques the gendered constraints on the freedom of women in modern society. All these novels together offer a deep investigation into the tensions between individual freedom, social norms, and the quest for justice.

## **6.2 Major Findings and its Social Relevance**

*He Who Rides a Tiger* tackles human rights within the lens of India's oppressive caste system. The novel explores this systemic denial of dignity and social mobility to people of lower castes, embodied in Kalo's fight to earn recognition and respect. It criticizes a deeply ingrained society that pushes people toward the roles inescapable to them regardless of their potential. By showing how the basic dignity of a person is denied by the social hierarchies, the novel calls into question the very fundamental right of equality that every human being is supposed to be provided. *The Hungry Tide*, which explores the intersection of human rights with environmental conservation and the demand for indigenous peoples' rights. The book asks an urgent question of whose rights come first those of the endangered animals or the poor people. Through this, Ghosh emphasizes to the disregard for the basic rights to life, livelihood, and shelter of the Sundarbans' human residents.

*Nectar in a Sieve* primarily portrays human rights through economic survival and the right to dignity as human beings. The novel charts Rukmani and Nathan's losing battles against poverty, exploitation and industrialization that rob them of their land and their means of making a living. With establishment of tannery, their concerns and well-being are ignored as they are pushed to adapt to economic progress, a reflection of the larger issue of the poor rural folk being deprived of their right to live and dignity as they face these harsh realities.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* centers around human rights in the context of gender inequality and the right to freedom. Paro's experiences mirror the systems of patriarchy that insidiously undermine women's rights to their own bodies and lives. It criticizes society's tendency to objectify women as they become mere objects of desire, or instruments for a man to have control. The ongoing denial of women's

rights and self-determination in modern society is examined, through Paro's rebellion and her fraught relationships with men.

In these novels, human rights are approached differently; however, they lead to similar conclusions: the systemic injustices that deprive marginalized communities of their basic dignity and agency. Be it caste discrimination, economic exploitation, environmental displacement or gender oppression, the novels portray systematic infringement of human rights, in societies that are arranged to benefit the interests of the powerful people, at the cost of the downtrodden. These rights are violated in ways where each novel critiques the injustice and calls for rightful recognition and protections of the basic rights of each person. All three novels offer a critique of such injustices, emphasizing the need to acknowledge and protect the basic rights of human beings.

### **6.3 Future Scopes of the Research Study**

Further research could consider a wider range of world literatures, investigating how human rights issues affecting marginalized communities are represented across different cultural, geographical and socio-economic contexts. Further research may focus on the intersection of gender, caste, class, race, and nature in literature as a way of bringing forth multifaceted narratives of subjugation and human rights infringement. Researching how narratives of environmental degradation, displacement, and climate change in literature shape human rights especially for marginalized and indigenous populations. Future works could explore the implications of enduring architectures of postcolonial and neocolonial power on contemporary depictions of human rights oppression in literature in formerly colonized regions.

Further research can be done on how literature serves as a tool of advocacy, awareness, and policy that tackles the causes that stem from human rights issues, including issues of gender equality and labor rights to environmental justice, for example. One possible multidisciplinary approach would be to consider how human rights issues in literature interact with legal frameworks, exploring how the regimes of human rights laws impact literary narratives and vice versa. Literature can be addressed through research on the representation of psychological trauma that causes

human rights infringement, such as mass displacement, exploitation, and gender violence. Future studies could explore how literature anticipates or informs changing definitions of human rights, and particularly how this may affect digital rights, privacy, and global migration patterns.

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## **ANNEXURE(S)**

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**Emergence of a New Society in Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

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**Abstract**

Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is a satirical portrayal of India's upper-class society, offering an incisive critique of its hypocrisies, moral contradictions, and evolving values. The novel sheds light on the emergence of a new society shaped by urbanization, materialism, and the complexities of gender roles. Through the characters of Paro and Priya, Gokhale navigates themes of self-perception, liberation, and societal expectations, painting a vivid picture of a society in flux. This paper critically examines how *Paro* reflects the formation of a new social order characterized by identities and shifting power dynamics. A 'new society' in the contemporary context refers to a shift from traditional, hierarchical structures to a more fluid and individualistic social order. Literature captures these transitions, offering insights into the aspirations, contradictions, and struggles of emerging social paradigms. Through the use of humor and sarcasm, Namita Gokhale examines the evolving nature of Indian culture in her literary work *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, which delves into these subjects. Indian-American writer Namita Gokhale has made a name for herself by boldly tackling gender, race, and social concerns in her works. As a contemporary writer, she combines humor and irony to critique societal norms while addressing themes of identity, liberation, and the female experience. Gokhale's works often delve into the complexities of urban life, offering sharp observations of modern relationships and the challenges faced by women in evolving societies.

**Keywords:** New Society, Culture, Values, Relationships, Social Hierarchy, Gender Issues

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## **Introduction**

The word 'society' originates from the Latin term *societas*, which means fellowship, association, or companionship, derived from *socius*, meaning ally or companion. Over time, the term has evolved to encompass various meanings related to human interaction and organization.

According to Cambridge Dictionary: "a big group of people who live together in an organized way, making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done." Oxford English Dictionary describes it as Being "a group of people who live together in a community and share the same customs, laws, etc." Similarly, according to Merriam-Webster, a society is "an enduring and cooperating social group whose members have developed organized patterns of relationships through interaction with one another." These definitions reflect the complex and interconnected nature of human communities.

Celebrated for her bold examination of gender, identity, and the intricacies of city life, Namita Gokhale is a contemporary Indian English writer. A co-founder of the Jaipur Literature Festival, Gokhale has significantly contributed to contemporary Indian literature by creating a platform for diverse voices while crafting her unique narratives. Her debut novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, marked her as a bold and innovative writer who blends humor and irony to critique societal norms. Gokhale's works often reflect the struggles and aspirations of Indian women, offering nuanced portrayals of their lives in a society caught between tradition and modernity.

Gokhale's themes often revolve around gender dynamics, identity, and the interplay between custom and modernity. In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, she juxtaposes the lives of Paro, a bold and larger-than-life character, with Priya, an insecure and reflective narrator, to explore ideas of liberation, desire, and societal judgment. The novel underscores the contradictions of a society in transition, one that outwardly embraces modernity while clinging to patriarchal values. Gokhale's characters, rich in their complexities, embody the struggles of individuals caught between conformity and self-expression.

The novel's setting, largely in the high-society circles of Bombay and Delhi, serves as a backdrop for Gokhale's incisive exploration of the existences of the rich and powerful. Gokhale uses vivid descriptions and sharp dialogue to portray the excesses of this world, where appearances and social status often take precedence over genuine connections. Paro's journey, from her passionate love affairs to her eventual decline, reflects the transient nature of force and opportunity in a world governed by superficial

values. Gokhale's critique of this society is evident in the way she juxtaposes Paro's flamboyance with Priya's quiet resignation, highlighting the various ways ladies explore cultural norms.

The writing style of the novel is another notable aspect of its critical impact. Gokhale employs humor and irony with precision, making her commentary on societal norms both engaging and thought-provoking. The narrative structure, with Priya's observations interspersed with vivid descriptions of Paro's escapades, creates a dynamic and multifaceted portrayal of the characters and their world. This approach allows Gokhale to delve deeply into the internal and external conflicts faced by her characters, offering a nuanced exploration of their lives.

While *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is a satire, it is also a deeply empathetic work that acknowledges the struggles and vulnerabilities of its characters. Gokhale does not judge her protagonists but instead presents them as products of their environment, shaped by the contradictions and complexities of their society. This balance between critique and empathy makes the novel a strong critique of the emergence of a new social order in contemporary India.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* is a masterful exploration of the changing dynamics of Indian society, offering a sharp critique of its hypocrisies while celebrating the resilience and complexity of its characters. Namita Gokhale's incisive writing and keen observations make the novel a significant contribution to contemporary Indian English literature, resonating with readers across generations.

### **Literature Review**

**Nigam and Tandon (2019)** explained how the works of Gokhle progress feminist politics within the narratives that feature assertive and resourceful female protagonists challenging the patriarchal environments. The author further argues that Gokhle's literature not only captures the complexity of femininity but, instead, with a critical gaze, also subverts social norms and traditional gender norms. The analysis illustrates Gokhle's construction of her multifaceted, well-rounded female characters that refuse to accept subordination and endorse individuality by providing examples from within the novels. Nigam and Tandon also talk about the intersectionality of Gokhle's work, covering everything from caste to class exploitation and cultural identity.

**T. G. and Dangwal (2023)** analyzed the formation of female identity by employing psychoanalytical theory. The researchers have studied the character development in the novel by critically analyzing the image of the protagonist as a 'woman identity' through her religious, social, and cultural worlds. The writers contend that one's

identity develops from the time of birth and throughout life as a result of one's interactions with one's family, community, and culture. This research, by applying Margaret Mead's theories, argues that the formation of a child's identity significantly depends on the mother's behavior.

**Wanjari, Anita P. (2015)** claimed that all nations and states had domestic violence against women. Although it has always been personal, it is now a tragedy of public matter. Traditional gender roles undermine women's human rights in many nations. The society's heritage and culture include several damaging practices. There is a common misconception that Indian women are nothing more than a husband's property.

**Rahman, M. Kalieel (2022)** analyzed that for a long time, ladies have been kept from having justice in social, economic, political, and constitutional spheres and largely ignored as the 'Weaker Sex.' The twentieth century has seen a new awareness about women's marginalized status, resulting in the birth of the Women's Liberation Movement. Literature, being the mirror of society, does not reflect the pathetic condition of women but explores women's questions extensively and vociferously.

### **Research Methodology**

**The present paper is based on critical analysis of the original text and secondary information has been collected from research journals, articles, Newspapers, magazines and reference books.**

### **Portrayal of New Society in *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* vividly captures the transformation of Indian society in the late 20th century, reflecting the emergence of a new social order characterized by urbanization, materialism, and changing gender dynamics. This "new society" contrasts sharply with traditional values, blending a superficial embrace of modernity with deeply ingrained cultural hypocrisies. Through her satirical narrative, Gokhale critiques this evolving social landscape, exposing the contradictions in its traditions, culture, and values.

The new society portrayed in the novel is driven by wealth, ambition, and appearances, often at the expense of authenticity and moral integrity. The exclusive class portrayed in the story is obsessed with power dynamics, where relationships are transactional, and emotions are secondary to social status. This culture, epitomized by Paro's audacious yet tragic character, values superficial success over meaningful connections.

In this new society, continuity and innovation are tendencies in which practices rooted in culture are reconciled to provide for contemporary needs and desires. Culture

as an institution comprises aspects such as marriage, family, feasts, and related ceremonies; however, such values are devalued into mere opportunities for status. For example, the weddings in the novel are not spiritual and genuine unification. Instead, they are forms of power and wealth manifestations. Thus, the rituals, while conforming to realistic traditional forms, are emptied of meaning in this setting, symbolizing how cultural forms have become commodified into the performance.

Sex roles also form an essential part of determining the values of this changing society. The new social order provides women like Paro with the potential to taste freedom and get power, but at the same time, they are judged by society. Paro's rebellion against patriarchal norms, her unapologetic relationships, and her defiance of societal expectations mark her as both a symbol of empowerment and a victim of her society's double standards. In contrast, Priya's more subdued journey reflects the challenges of navigating these expectations while maintaining a semblance of personal integrity.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* is right in the middle of tradition and modernity where cultures are enforced but at the same time violated. Namita Gokhale's sharp satire and nuanced characterizations highlight the contradictions and complexities of this transformation. The novel serves as a mirror to the evolving Indian urban elite, critiquing its values while offering a compelling exploration of its cultural and emotional terrain.

### **Influence of New Society on the Characters**

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, the influence of the emerging new society profoundly shapes the lives and decisions of its characters, particularly Paro and Priya. Paro embodies the spirit of rebellion and liberation characteristic of this society. Her bold choices and unapologetic pursuit of personal desires reflect the loose grip of traditional norms, especially on women's behavior. Paro thrives in the high-society circles of Bombay and Delhi, using her charm and confidence to navigate relationships and assert her independence. However, the superficial values of this new society are centered around appearances and power that leave her vulnerable and eventually decline. As Paro's life unfolds, it becomes clear that the society that allowed her freedom also imposed unspoken judgments and limitations, illustrating the paradox of modern liberation.

Priya, on the other hand, offers a contrasting perspective on the influence of this new society. As an observer, she internalizes the contradictions of modern life, struggling with sensations of jealousy and deficiency in a world fixated on status and achievement. The strain to adjust to societal expectations shapes Priya's insecurities, as she compares her quiet, conventional existence with Paro's flamboyant lifestyle. Yet, Priya's reflections also reveal the emptiness of a society driven by materialism and hollow relationships. Her

journey highlights the emotional toll of navigating a world where traditional roles and modern aspirations clash, leaving individuals like Priya torn between conformity and self-expression. Through these characters, Gokhale explores the profound and often conflicting impact of a rapidly evolving society on individual personality and agency through these characters.

### **The New Social Norms in *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

The new social norms depicted in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* emphasize individual freedom, material success, and a redefinition of relationships, directly challenging traditional values and ethics. The pursuit of pleasure and personal ambition dominates this emerging society, side-lining communal responsibilities and moral codes that once held families and communities together. Traditional notions of loyalty, modesty, and marital fidelity are re-examined, with characters like Paro embracing fluidity in their relationships and rejecting societal expectations. This shift often creates moral ambiguity, as ethical decisions are driven more by personal gain than by collective well-being. For instance, the transactional nature of relationships and the emphasis on appearances expose the fragility of trust and authenticity in a society that prioritises status and power over integrity. This dynamic highlights the tension between the promises of modernity and the ethical dilemmas it introduces, ultimately forcing individuals to navigate a complex and often contradictory social landscape.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Namita Gokhale presents a vivid portrayal of a society undergoing a profound transformation, navigating the tensions between traditional values and modern aspirations. The novel offers a critical lens into the social norms and values of India's urban elite, where materialism and status dominate interactions. Traditional ideas of family, loyalty, and community are redefined within a framework that emphasizes individuality and ambition. Culture and heritage remain important but are often commodified, serving as backdrops to a lifestyle focused on appearances and power. The juxtaposition of old and new is a recurring theme, highlighting both the opportunities and the emptiness inherent in societal evolution.

Gokhale's nuanced portrayal of gender underscores the shifting role of women in this new society. Paro's boldness and defiance challenge patriarchal expectations, positioning her as a symbol of liberation, albeit one fraught with vulnerabilities. Priya, in contrast, reflects the quieter struggles of conformity and introspection, representing the complexities faced by modern women navigating traditional expectations and emerging freedoms. Through these contrasting characters, Gokhale captures the duality of a society

where women seek autonomy yet remain tethered to societal judgment. In this multifaceted exploration, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* becomes a strong discourse on the evolving roles, aspirations, and challenges faced by individuals, particularly women, in a rapidly changing world.

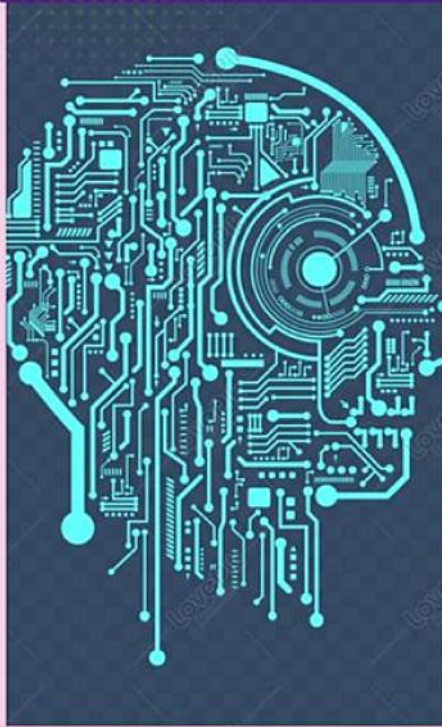
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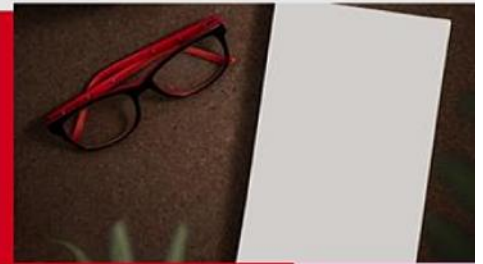
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## UNFOLDING SOCIAL EQUALITY AND JUSTICE IN BHABANI BHATTACHARYA'S HE WHO RIDES A TIGER: A CRITIQUE

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### ABSTRACT

*Bhabani Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger provides a rich representation of the struggle against social injustices and caste discrimination in colonial India. Set against the 1943 Bengal famine, the novel dissects caste-based hierarchies. Through Kalo, a blacksmith who becomes a defiant reformer, Bhattacharya investigates the psychological, social, and moral landscapes that support resistance. The paper studies the manner in which this novel criticizes the exploitation based on caste and religion and presents equality and justice as the foundation of a civilized society. Everyone should have the same opportunities, rights, and freedoms regardless of gender, caste, religion, or financial background; this is the essence of social equality. Its overall objective is to eradicate the prejudices rendered to the people and groups the opportunities to lead happy lives free from oppression. These are the liberties and securities a person has automatically by being a human being. Such as protection of individuals from discrimination, fairness in their treatment by the law and protection from or against injustice. Accordingly, social equality combined with human rights outlined above form the core foundation of progressive societies. Thus, the present paper explores Social Equality and justice.*

**Keywords:** Society, Cast, Inequality, Justice, Human Rights.

### Introduction

He Who Rides a Tiger also highlighted the colonial aspect of India that made a clear statement for social inequality justified by the class struggle of the colonial for colour. The novel is set against the backdrop of the great Bengal famine of 1943, when one million Indians died of hunger the novel portrays, as observed vividly the social reality of the poor and their struggle for respect in a caste and class-distinct society. Getting respect, finding a way to fight against exploitation and the way to eliminating power in its oppressive form all are the issues that Bhattacharya explores through Kalo. Thus, to make the approach inclusive, one requires equal rights for all people and human rights. These principles require that everyone around the globe should receive fair treatment and be valued as individuals, irrespective of the social status that they hold in society at large. These aspects of literature are intertwined to reveal and give voice to the suffering of these neglected populations. One narrative which does battle with these issues is Bhabani Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger. Set

against the Bengal famine, the novel explores the intersection where caste intersects with power and exploitation while celebrating the dignity of humanity in a system full of injustice. Bhattacharya is not merely a theoretical critique of social inequalities, but also a vision for social transformation.

### Literature Review

**Sharma, Pramod Kumar (2014)** said there should not be discrimination based on gender, race, religion, faith, or nationality; rather, it is inherent in every person. These rights are essential for everyone's bodily, mental, social, and spiritual health, and they are consistent with people's freedom and dignity. Furthermore, they are essential to foster an environment that is conducive to the material and spiritual advancement of the people. Taking into account the immense significance for people. Some other names for human rights include "birthrights," "inherent rights," "basic rights," "fundamental rights," and "universal rights."

**Sahoo, Subrata (2018)** unfolded that in India, Dalits have previously been designated an inferior position; they were granted the lowest place on the Hindu hierarchical social ladder; they were distant from the mainstream society and of the alleged purity and cleanliness of the upper caste Hindus, both spatially and culturally. The upper-caste Hindus have deprived the Dalits of their 'right to life, liberty, and security of person'.

**Vaja and Shaikh (2020)** explored the issues related to exploitation, caste- system or bad religious practices. This study is a thematic analysis of the novel written by Bhabani Bhattacharya. The basic argument in the work is how Bhattacharya challenges social standards that uphold injustice and misery through his narrative. It tells the story of blacksmith Kalo and his daughter Chandralekha who try very hard to stand amidst an exploitative society woven around social prejudice. It also points to the dishonesty of the rich and powerful using people's religious beliefs for their benefit as well.

**Bhardwaj & Sharma (2019)** outlined that the celebrated Indian English novelist Bhattacharya highlights a form of structural violence that endures in a subjacent manner within the culture. He often portrayed the lower classes and oppressed to shed light on social justice. Bhattacharya explores the lives affected by class conflict, caste-based violence and other social injustices through his novels. His profound comprehension of India's socio-political terrain enables him to portray these concerns with authenticity and poignancy. The novel '*So Many Hungers*', for example, approached this important issue of illiteracy, specifically through women in rural areas and how it affects their community. Bhattacharya highlights the urgency with which society has to get educated to eradicate superstition and exploitation in people like Meera's grandmother, a literate woman of her locality.

### Research Methodology

The present paper is based on a critical analysis of the original text and secondary information has been collected from research journals, articles, newspapers, magazines, reference books and interviews.

### Portrayal of Social Equality and Justice in *He Who Rides a Tiger*

Not only does class struggle represent the content of the novel but it is embedded into the text. He also paints a picture of social evil that befalls those in poverty or those that are wealthy. The crisis makes the rich even richer, and the poor cannot afford food. And if Kalo lies were morally grey, he got those once above him to expose corruption among elites. He uses his intelligence to turn over the whole system, the hypocritical virtue that sustains an unequal society.

As one considers justice and equality, Kalo's rebellious gesture is the object of focus, and It is discussed in this section. But he also raises more complications around caste and class at the same time, he puts pressure on his community to confront the conditions of their existence. It is of keen interest that this novel delivers a religious system as a means of grabbing power and how domination is maintained. Kalo barely stays alive on the belief of such people and also gives a message on how

some cast systems are formed on exploitation. Kalo's path mirrors the nuances of combating systemic inequity.

Lekha, Kalo's daughter, also intensifies the theme of justice and equality represented in the text. Her education and dreams stand for the hope of a future devoid of the shackles of caste and patriarchy. The universal aspiration of hope and justice in addition to resistance against oppression is what Bhattacharya superbly portrays in *He Who Rides a Tiger*. Critique of the deep-rooted social evils of caste and class is woven in brilliantly with the story of transformation and rebellion represented through Kalo whose redemption gives an uplifting message on human resilience. Bhattacharya's work continues to be a powerful and relevant response to notions of social justice and equality in this work that continues to inspire readers among several generations.

### **Kalo as a Social Reformer**

In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Kalo's suffering becomes a radical social crusade against caste oppression and social hypocrisy. Crushed by society's oppressive force, Kalo invents himself as a Brahmin priest, a strategic move that points to how absurd and empty the caste system appears. By using the same religious and social constructs that oppressed him, he subverts the nature of caste-based privilege. In the novel, he personifies as a social reformer, defying social norms and inequalities. Disguised as a Brahmin, He utilised this opportunity to destroy the oppressive structures and dismantle the pretension surrounding the caste system by using treachery and subversion within the confines of the society. Kalo's actions are about more than survival; they grapple with the moral and ethical underpinnings of caste hierarchies.

His journey is a testament to the revolutionary journey of a man who believed that dignity is not a preserve of a few men, but a human right; and that the spirit of reform and resistance against deep-rooted social evils is the way forward. His journey itself is proof of his belief that dignity should not be the prerogative of the elite class and that it is a universal right for everyone regardless of their caste and class.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides A Tiger* is a powerful metric for social equality and justice, firmly reinforcing the deeply rooted disparities of colonial Indian society. The novel tackles the systemic inequity of caste, how deeply ingrained values have tied people to their traditional places in society and how they are often invoked as a rationale for discrimination. Kalo symbolizes the powerlessness of the oppressed against such systems and also their capacity to fight back for justice. The novel also highlights the role of the privileged class in these injustices and calls for equality and justice. Justice in the novel is not about law, but about morality. Kalo's story illustrates the human toll of systemic inequality, the suffering and humiliation inflicted upon the vulnerable. *He Who Rides a Tiger* is a complex study of social equality and justice, underprivileged people battling oppressive social orders entrenched in every facet of life, from education and work to marriage, politics and religion. Also, it is a narrative that deals with dynamics of power, class, caste, and shows that how oppression is systemic and resisting it takes a lot of sacrifices. It's why Bhattacharya's view of social equality is essentially humanistic as much as the shared dreams and battles that bring people together despite the divides they face. The love between Kalo and his daughter Lekha is a symbol of hope that everything is possible, and one can hope for a new dawn of dignity and justice. The novel's exploration of justice is multi-layered, taking on forms both individual and collective.

The novel's exploration of justice is complex, articulating both individual and collective aspects. Bhattacharya's criticism is not limited to caste; there are broader matters of systemic inequity that will resonate with anyone from any culture or period. By comparing the two faces of self-serving morality and the privileges of the elite with Kalo's desperate but defiant pursuit of his dignity, Bhattacharya creates a powerful narrative of resistance. Kalo's daughter Lekha further strengthens the ideology that strives for a future with progress devoid of systemic barriers. *He Who Rides a Tiger*, urges readers to

reconstruct the structure of society around the dignity of human labour rather than hierarchical structures. Bhattacharya's depiction of social equality and justice becomes a powerful symbol of looking at the structures of discrimination and confronting them.

It is through Kalo's rebellion and the rising consciousness of the downtrodden that the novel offers a vision of a world governed by equality, justice and human dignity. It encompasses the resilience of all those who work for justice despite obstacles in their way. Several key moments in the novel support this analysis, including Kalo's speech in the courtroom, his reflections on societal hypocrisy, and his eventual facing off with the powerful elite.

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