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Preface

We are delighted to present, with great pleasure, the **Volume-2, Issue-7, July 2026** of the **Journal of Creative Research in English Literature & Culture (JCRELC)** — a peer-reviewed international journal devoted to the exploration and advancement of literary and cultural scholarship.

JCRELC is part of the **SPARC Institute of Technical Research** publication series and was envisioned to meet the growing global demand for an academic platform that unites critical thinking, creative inquiry, and interdisciplinary research in the field of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**. The journal aims to serve as a bridge between scholars, educators, and practitioners, providing an inclusive space for diverse voices and perspectives.

The mission of JCRELC is to foster intellectual exchange, innovation, and academic excellence by publishing original and thought-provoking research in areas such as:

English Literature:

Literary theory and criticism, comparative literature, postcolonial studies, modern and contemporary literature, diaspora studies, gender and identity, eco-criticism, digital humanities, narrative and stylistic studies, and creative writing.

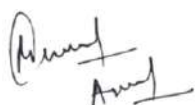
Cultural Studies:

Media and popular culture, film and performance studies, cultural theory, identity politics, globalization and culture, heritage and memory studies, translation and intercultural communication, visual arts, and linguistic representation in literature and media.

Each article published in this inaugural issue exemplifies the journal's commitment to promoting meaningful scholarship and fostering dialogue that connects literature and culture with the evolving dynamics of society.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all **Editorial, Reviewer, and Advisory Board Members** who have contributed their expertise, as well as to the **authors** whose valuable research enriches this publication. Our appreciation also goes to the **editorial team of the SPARC Institute of Technical Research** for their consistent guidance and support in bringing JCRELC to life.

We hope that this inaugural issue of JCRELC will serve as a valuable resource for scholars and readers alike, inspiring continued exploration and critical engagement in the vibrant domains of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**.



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Insect Surrealism and Protest: Global Fiction's Subaltern Resilience and Anti-Authoritarianism

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Abstract— This article synthesizes five foundational texts—Ian McEwan's *The Cockroach*, Rawi Hage's *Cockroach*, K. Raghavendra Rao's *The Cockroach Man*, Kenzaburō Ōe's *The Silent Cry*, and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*—to investigate the intersection of insectoid surrealism, political satire, and underground resistance in international literature. This paper builds a theoretical framework for analyzing a conceptual "Cockroach Janata Party"—a metaphorical collective representing the resilient, unflushable, and ubiquitous marginalized masses rising against oppressive political climates—by operating at the intersection of postcolonial theory, biopolitics, and literary animal studies. With an emphasis on similarities to India's current socio-political environment, the analysis interprets these pieces as intentional artistic interventions against corporate-bureaucratic state machinery, majoritarian populism, and state-sanctioned authoritarianism. This article shows how bug and animal allegories transform from historical instruments of colonial dehumanization into powerful mechanisms of democratic dissent, ideological subversion, and radical subaltern agency by examining tropes of metamorphosis, subaltern survival, and decentralized resistance.

Keywords— *Animal Allegory; Subaltern Agency; Political Satire; Insectoid Surrealism; Biopolitics.*

I. INTRODUCTION: THE AESTHETICS OF POLITICAL SURVIVAL AND THE INSECTOID SUBALTERN

A common tactic of state-sponsored dehumanization throughout the lengthy history of political discourse is the comparison of dissidents, immigrants, and marginalized groups to insects, particularly cockroaches. The insect metaphor has traditionally been used to deprive human subjects of their rights, reduce them to bare life, and justify their systematic containment or eradication—from the genocidal broadcasts of totalitarian regimes to the current xenophobic and majoritarian political discourse (Mbembe 2003; Agamben 1998). Authoritarian systems try to reduce political opposition and structural inequality to a straightforward issue of public cleanliness and state security by portraying the human other as a pest, an infection, or a biological threat to the nation-state's purity. As Mary Douglas (1966) argues in *Purity and Danger*, such metaphors of contamination serve to reinforce social boundaries and justify the exclusion of those deemed threatening to the body politic.

However, a radical act of aesthetic inversion is becoming more and more prevalent in modern global fiction. A broad set of worldwide and regional novelists have decided to reclaim the metaphor, turning the cockroach and the animal into symbols of political resiliency, adaptability, and subaltern resistance, rather than rejecting the insectoid classification imposed by dominant power systems. The conceptual framework of a "Cockroach Janata Party"—in which the Hindi term *Janata* (the public or the common people) is combined with the image of the unflushable, hyper-resilient insect to represent a decentralized, unstoppable collective rising up against a hostile, authoritarian political climate—is closely aligned with this literary technique. The Cockroach Janata is a symbol of the ultimate democratic underbelly: a pervasive, faceless mass that survives the harsh heel of majoritarian rule, prospers in the gaps of the state apparatus, and upends top-down structures from the shadowy corners of society.

This article compares five literary, cultural, and political works—Ian McEwan's *The Cockroach*, Rawi Hage's *Cockroach*, K. Raghavendra Rao's *The Cockroach Man*, Kenzaburō Ōe's *The Silent Cry*, and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*—that exemplify

this spirit of animalistic and insectoid dissensus. These texts come from a wide range of historical, geographical, and ideological contexts—from the anxieties of post-Brexit Britain and the realities of migrant survival in Canada to regional Marxist-bureaucratic friction in India, post-war trauma in Japan, and the classic critique of totalitarian corruption—but they all rely on allegorical defamiliarization to illustrate the mechanisms of political tyranny and the potential for grassroots resistance.

This study examines how the insectoid and animal subaltern serves as a potent critique of contemporary state structures by comparing and contrasting these writings, with particular reference to India's current political environment. The psychological effects of governmental oppression, the casualization of violence, and the eventual failure of monolithic regimes to totally destroy the dispersed, buzzing collective of the ordinary folk are all examined in these literary works. The theoretical framework draws on Ato Quayson's (2003) "Calibrations," which reads literature and what lies beyond "as a way of understanding structures of transformation, process and contradiction that inform both literature and society" (p. xi), as well as on postcolonial theory (Spivak 1988; Fanon 1963), biopolitics (Foucault 1978; Agamben 1998), and literary animal studies (Derrida 2008; Wolfe 2003).

II. TRANSFORMATION AS POPULIST CRITICISM AND POLITICAL SUBVERSION

We must first explore the legacy of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) and how current writers have modified it to analyze modern administration in order to comprehend how the idea of the insectoid subaltern functions as a vehicle for political critique. Kafka's story focused on personal alienation, domestic guilt, and the existential burden of capitalist labour—what Walter Benjamin (1968) described as the "fear of the father" and the "terror of the modern office" (p. 114). Modern authors employ the metaphor of metamorphosis to examine the corruption of governmental power and the emergence of right-wing populism, expanding Kafka's existential anxiety into explicitly political critique. As Mark M. Anderson (1992) notes, Kafka's work has been "transformed from a parable of modernist alienation into a political allegory of resistance" (p. 87).

2.1 Reversing the Executive: Ian McEwan's *The Cockroach* and Corporate Populism

Ian McEwan creates a scathing parody of modern British politics and populist rule in *The Cockroach* (2019) by literally reversing the Kafkaesque premise. In McEwan's novella, a genuine cockroach awakens to discover that it has changed into British Prime Minister Jim Sams, rather than a human being turning into an insect. Sams quickly learns that his whole cabinet has been replaced by fellow cockroaches who have taken on the identities of senior state officials, indicating that this change is not an accidental somatic accident but rather a planned political invasion.

McEwan parodies the rhetoric of contemporary right-wing populism using this premise. The ridiculous economic theory known as "Reversalism," which holds that the entire flow of money is reversed and that people must pay their employers to work while receiving money from retailers in order to shop, is vigorously promoted by the cockroach-led government. This economic system parodies real-world populist movements that promise radical restoration through logistically impractical or self-destructive national policies, such as Brexit. As political scientists Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) observe, populist movements often exploit "the gap between the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elite'" through policies that are symbolically potent but economically irrational (p. 6).

In terms of politics, the cockroach-turned-politician thrives by creating national crises, taking advantage of people's hidden fears, and simplifying difficult democratic discussions into divisive catchphrases. McEwan emphasizes how the insectoid worldview, characterized by a lack of human empathy, an obsession with survival, and a predilection for gloomy places, is well adapted to the needs of contemporary media-driven politics. According to the novel, authoritarian populism is a system motivated by an underlying insectoid opportunism in which politicians remove institutional safeguards while claiming to be carrying out the "will of the people." McEwan illustrates this ideological manipulation by demonstrating how the prime minister portrays any institutional or legal challenge to his damaging economic program as a betrayal of the national spirit itself rather than as legitimate democratic dissent (McEwan 2019, p. 42).

2.2 Rawi Hage's *Cockroach* and the Architecture of Survival: The Immigrant Underbelly

Rawi Hage's *Cockroach* (2008) switches the viewpoint to the other end of the socioeconomic range, in stark contrast to McEwan's emphasis on the executive corridors of power. The novel, set in Montreal during a bitterly cold winter, centers on an anonymous, poor immigrant from the Middle East who, following a failed attempt at suicide, is compelled to attend court-mandated therapy. The protagonist, who does low-paying culinary jobs and navigates a bureaucratic immigration system intended to monitor and regulate his presence, lives on the very periphery of Western society.

The protagonist's strong conviction that he is half cockroach and half man forms the central theme of Hage's story. This self-inflicted insectoid identity is presented as a precise diagnostic of his place in the host country rather than as a straightforward psychological illusion. The wealthy residents of Montreal view immigrants as an undesirable, hidden insect that lives beneath the city's surface and is only noticeable when they take out their food or clean up their trash. Hage's protagonist discovers a special kind of agency by accepting this identity. He enters the wealthy people's locked homes using his cockroach persona, sneaking through their vents to see their hypocrisies and stealing tiny objects as a form of self-reparation.

Hage's book is a potent allegory for the subaltern resistance that characterizes the "Cockroach Janata." The protagonist's capacity to avoid detection, squeeze through the gaps in a hostile urban architecture, and put up with systematic brutality is all that is necessary for his survival. His insectoid viewpoint enables him to see behind the Western state's humanitarian rhetoric and expose the racial discrimination and economic exploitation that underlie it. As postcolonial theorist Sara Ahmed (2000) notes, the figure of the immigrant is often constructed as a "stranger" who "threatens the boundaries of the nation" and is thus "regulated, contained, and often expelled" (p. 54). Hage's protagonist subverts this logic by embracing his status as the eternal outsider.

According to Hage, the cockroach is the ultimate symbol of survival since it is an unflushable creature that defies eradication by the harsh conditions of the contemporary global city. The protagonist's description of himself as "a tough creature born of filth and darkness, totally impervious to the sterile, clean institutions that aim to control or deport him" emphasizes this defiance (Hage 2008, p. 112). His antennae twitch in the dark as he scurries over the baseboards, sensing the vibrations of a world that believes it has sealed him out:

They construct their tall walls and tidy, light-filled rooms, but they overlook the fact that we own the dark and that every wall has a gap big enough for a ravenous, determined monster to pass through (Hage 2008, p. 143).

III. THE BUREAUCRATIC AND HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS

The metaphor of the insectoid and animal subaltern becomes more complex when we shift the analysis to the postcolonial environment. Public universities, regional communities, and bureaucratic organizations have long been battlegrounds where localized groups struggle to preserve their autonomy while the state strives to enforce nationalist uniformity in nations like Japan and India (Chatterjee 2004; Jaffrelot 2021).

3.1 K. Raghavendra Rao's *The Cockroach Man* and the Bureaucratic Maze

K. Raghavendra Rao's *The Cockroach Man* offers a straightforward, regional examination of how the average person manages the oppressive burden of the postcolonial state within the framework of Indian literature. Writing from a viewpoint heavily influenced by Marxist criticism and local Indian politics (Deshpande 2003; Narayan 2006), Rao creates a bizarre story in which a lower-middle-class citizen's daily existence becomes entangled with the state's bureaucratic apparatus.

The slow, grinding depreciation of human existence within the huge halls of government management is illustrated in *The Cockroach Man* using the metaphor of insects. The protagonist eventually adopts the traits of a cockroach in order to psychologically survive, ensnared in a system of never-ending paperwork, corruption, and top-down commands. Rao's cockroach-man symbolizes the quiet tenacity of the average Indian citizen—the *Aam Aadmi* (common man)—who must learn to survive on the scraps left behind by a careless and rapacious state apparatus, in contrast to the violent, power-hungry insects in McEwan's work.

The postcolonial Indian state's inability to fulfill its democratic commitments is sharply criticized in Rao's writings. Public offices, regional planning boards, and university systems are portrayed as maze-like institutions intended to wear citizens into obedience rather than as places of public service. The "Cockroach Man" turns into a metaphor for the survival tactics of the local population, who learn to evade corruption's obstacles and sustain an underground support system. Rao emphasizes how the vivid, varied desires of the local citizen are reduced by the state's enormous, uncompromising bureaucratic apparatus to a collection of dry, identical files that can be disregarded or filed away indefinitely in the shadowy recesses of government archives (Rao 1999, p. 87). As Partha Chatterjee (2004) argues, the postcolonial state operates through a "politics of the governed" in which "the legitimacy of the state is based on its capacity to deliver welfare and development, while its exercise of power is increasingly authoritarian and arbitrary" (p. 34).

3.2 Kenzaburō Ōe's *The Silent Cry*: Historical Memory and Rural Rebellion

By focusing on rural seclusion, historical memory, and the conflict between localized communities and the national state, Kenzaburō Ōe's *The Silent Cry* (1967) broadens our knowledge of subaltern resistance. The novel centers on two brothers, Mitsusaburo and Takashi, who return to their ancestral home in a remote, snow-bound village in Shikoku's forests only to discover that the village is plagued by economic stagnation and controlled by a powerful, external capitalist figure known as "the Emperor of the Supermarkets."

Ōe describes the downtrodden rural youth who band together to start a desperate, carnivalesque uprising against the corporate-state forces through animalistic and insectoid images, even though he does not utilize a physical transformation of a cockroach. Japan's metropolitan centers see the young villagers as backward, disruptive pests—an unproductive underclass that obstructs economic alignment and national progress (Ōe 1967). As literary critic Susan Napier (1996) observes, Ōe's work consistently explores "the relationship between the periphery and the center, the marginalized and the powerful, in post-war Japanese society" (p. 121).

Ōe explores the idea of a collective rebellion that reflects the spirit of the Cockroach Janata through this tiny uprising. The protagonists accept their marginalization and use their area's deep valleys and thick forests to avoid government surveillance and sabotage capitalist networks that want to take advantage of their resources. *The Silent Cry* illustrates how a community's resistance frequently takes on an erratic, clandestine character when it is deprived of its economic agency and historic identity by a predatory national policy. Localized memory can be an active location of anti-authoritarian struggle, as demonstrated by the village youth's uprising, which serves as a collective "silent cry" against the state's historical aggression.

Ōe examines this conflict by demonstrating how the state is forced to confront the historical exploitation of its own periphery when the rural community's sudden, chaotic resistance breaks through the sterile, tidy façade of national economic success (Ōe 1967, p. 204). The deep valleys and thick woodlands serve as both a defensive barrier against outside influence and a storehouse of historical memory:

The contemporary cities had long since forgotten the deep, leisurely rhythm of the valley's own period. Not only were the boys protesting a new supermarket when they marched through the old streets, singing the slogans of a century-old rebellion, but they were also appealing to the forest's sleeping soul to save their home from being destroyed by the uniform demands of national commerce (Ōe 1967, p. 267).

IV. THE CYCLICAL TRAP OF POPULIST POWER: GEORGE ORWELL'S *ANIMAL FARM*

The mechanics of political treachery and the degradation of revolutionary idealism can still be studied in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945). The idea of the book—animals overthrowing their human oppressor to create an egalitarian society founded on "Animalism"—serves as a warning about how new elites may appropriate popular movements. The process by which populist regimes seize power is reflected in the transformation of the farm from a democratic collective to a totalitarian state led by the pig Napoleon. Orwell outlines the precise rhetorical and administrative strategies employed to undermine a democratic revolution from within:

- **The Rewriting of History:** The progressive modification of the Seven Commandments on the barn wall illustrates how authoritarian societies employ false information to support changes in policy and strengthen executive authority.
- **The Creation of Internal Scapegoats:** Snowball's banishment and subsequent demonization serve as an example of how governments employ an externalized threat to divert attention from their own material shortcomings and create an environment of perpetual dread.
- **The Rise of a Privileged Bureaucracy:** The corporate-administrative stratification observed in contemporary public organizations is reflected in the pigs' shift from organizers to managers who eat the farm's excess wealth while the other animals starve.

Authoritarian actors can readily employ the identical strategies used to construct a collective centralized authority, rigid ideological enforcement, and the suspension of internal criticism during a crisis as weapons to create a new hierarchy. In the novel's concluding scenes, Orwell depicts this ultimate betrayal when the ruling class modifies the revolution's fundamental law to state that although everyone is equal, some members of the administrative class are naturally entitled to more resources and privileges than the rest of the collective (Orwell 1945, p. 112). The final modification—"All animals are equal, but some

animals are more equal than others" (Orwell 1945, p. 134)—has become an iconic critique of revolutionary betrayal and authoritarian hypocrisy.

As literary critic John Rodden (1989) argues, *Animal Farm* "has become a universal fable about the corruption of idealism by power" (p. 56). The novel's continuing relevance lies in its demonstration of how revolutionary movements can be co-opted by their own leadership, a dynamic that resonates with the challenges facing contemporary social and political movements in India and elsewhere.

V. STATE RESTRAINT AND THE RHETORIC OF PUBLIC HYGIENE

When these five texts are read collectively, a distinct pattern about how contemporary regimes react to the prospect of a dispersed, swarming opposition becomes apparent. In order to defend containment, authoritarian and majoritarian systems never address the actual political criticisms made by subaltern groups. Instead, they rely on a vocabulary of institutional stabilization, public hygiene, and security—what Foucault (1978) terms "biopower," the regulation of populations through "mechanisms of security, of regulation, of normalization" (p. 139).

This containment technique is evident in the way the state handles independent journalists, regional protest movements, and public universities in India's current political environment. The state media apparatus frequently characterizes regional activists or student organizations who mobilize against state policies as anti-national actors, internal security threats, or disruptive elements (Roy 2014; Jaffrelot 2021). This language serves the same purpose as the insect metaphors in Hage and McEwan: it reframes the dissident as a public disturbance that needs to be controlled by security personnel, removing them from the realm of acceptable democratic discourse.

States also counteract these shifts by using financial and structural levers. The state can methodically undermine the material infrastructure that enables dissenting communities to organize by cutting off funding for public education, enforcing stringent surveillance networks on campus, and linking research awards to corporate-national metrics (Menon 2012; Deshpande 2003). People are forced into a state of precarious survival by this process of structural malnutrition, which causes them to prioritize immediate personal and professional preservation over systemic analysis. As Nivedita Menon (2012) observes, the "neoliberalization of education" in India has created "a culture of competitive individualism that undermines collective political action" (p. 189).

VI. THE COCKROACH JANATA PARTY AS A MODEL FOR TRANSNATIONAL SYNTHESIS

We may create a thorough plan for the "Cockroach Janata Party" as a paradigm of resistance in modern politics by discussing these many literary viewpoints with one another. The survival tactics, ideological criticisms, and structural realities shown in international anti-authoritarian fiction are all synthesized in this metaphorical party. Several important facets of political and cultural resistance are covered by the Cockroach Janata Party's ideological framework:

6.1 Decentered Organization and Subaltern Ubiquity

The Cockroach Janata functions via a decentralized network, in contrast to established political parties that depend on formal institutional channels, highly visible leadership, and centralized command structures. This approach, which is based on ubiquity and anonymity, is inspired by the collective village mobilization in Ōe's *The Silent Cry* and the survival dynamics in Hage's *Cockroach*. The ordinary people who occupy the vital but neglected places of the nation-state—the working class, contract workers, marginalized students, and local communities—form this movement. Since the movement is decentralized, it cannot be eliminated by focusing on a single leader or closing a single office; rather, it exists wherever structural inequality fosters dissent.

This model resonates with what Hardt and Negri (2004) call the "multitude"—a decentralized, networked form of political organization that resists centralized control and co-optation. The "swarm" becomes a metaphor not just for insect resistance but for a new form of political subjectivity.

6.2 Adaptive Transformation and Tactical Adaptability

According to the metamorphosis metaphor examined by McEwan, Hage, and Rao, resistance in an authoritarian environment necessitates a change in form. The Cockroach Janata alternates between formal democratic participation, clandestine organizing, regional cultural expression, and online cooperation in order to adapt to harsh settings. The collective adjusts by using digital platforms, local artistic forms, and community networks to maintain its message when the state closes off

traditional public locations for protest. The state's centralized monitoring system finds it challenging to monitor and control the movement because of its flexibility.

6.3 The Absolute Resilience Strategy

The ability of the cockroach to endure circumstances that would kill more delicate species is what distinguishes it in literature. In terms of politics, the Cockroach Janata Party stands for a dedication to long-term survival in the face of state-mandated austerity and majoritarian rule. In local communities, underfunded public schools, and regional labour collectives, it is a style of politics that recognizes the uneven character of the struggle and chooses to withstand times of extreme state pressure while discreetly upholding its core principles. With major structural constraints on the public university system, regional identities, and democratic institutions, this literary and theoretical model sheds light on the dynamics of dissent in modern India.

VII. THE CAMPUS SPACE, REGIONAL IDENTITY, AND VULNERABLE LABOR IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

7.1 The Transformation of Campus Space

The modern Indian public university, exemplified by establishments such as Osmania University, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), and the University of Hyderabad, has emerged as a focal point for this ideological conflict. Decentralized student alliances that emulate the Cockroach Janata concept have grown on many universities as state funding declines and corporate-administrative models are implemented. In order to protest tuition rises, the casualization of academic work, and restrictions on political expression on campus, these student movements often come together across conventional caste, class, and geographic barriers. These campus collectives are tenacious in the face of institutional discipline, media misrepresentation, and security intrusions. They use artistic expression, wall graffiti, and nocturnal marches to preserve their places as hubs of democratic discourse.

As anthropologist Nandini Sundar (2010) observes, Indian universities have historically been "spaces of radical democratic politics" where "students from diverse backgrounds encounter ideas of social justice and equality" (p. 256). The current assault on these institutions, through funding cuts and surveillance, represents an attempt to eliminate the spaces where subaltern consciousness can develop.

7.2 Using Regional Identity to Prevent Uniformity

Regional movements in India use local languages, histories, and cultural practices to challenge centralized nationalist narratives, just as Ōe's *The Silent Cry* demonstrates how rural memory can oppose national corporate standardization. The protection of federal resource allocation and regional linguistic autonomy serves as a form of anti-authoritarian opposition in states in southern and eastern India. These regional groups contend that a single, centralized political or cultural framework is insufficient to administer a heterogeneous democracy. These groups prevent local democratic spaces from being assimilated into a uniform, hierarchical national identity by grounding their resistance in regional histories.

7.3 The Vulnerable Workforce's Battle

A large class of precarious workers, including gig economy drivers, contract labourers, and seasonal agricultural workers, has been produced by the ongoing structural upheaval of the Indian economy. These workers have little job security and few state protections. The Cockroach Janata's material foundation is represented by this vulnerable labour force. These workers, who operate outside of traditional union institutions, have increasingly organized localized blockades, internet advocacy groups, and decentralized strikes to seek social security and fair wages. Their resistance shows the ability of a ubiquitous, vital workforce to oppose prevailing economic systems by coordinated, dispersed action. This resistance is frequently unseen by mainstream media until it affects large urban areas. As political economist Pranab Bardhan (2010) notes, the "informalization of labour" in India has created "a new class of precarious workers who are excluded from social protections and thus forced into survival strategies" (p. 87).

VIII. THE HUMAN-ANIMAL DIVIDE'S LINGUISTIC SHIFT

The blurring of the distinction between humans and animals or insects is a recurring topic in all of these books. This line was maintained in traditional colonial literature, where depriving a colonized person of their rights and territory was justified by equating them to animals (Fanon 1963; Memmi 1965). To illustrate how current states treat their populations, this line is purposefully blurred in postcolonial and contemporary fiction.

The protagonist of Rawi Hage's *Cockroach* alternates between human and insect perspectives frequently, using this flexibility to deal with the stress of poverty and displacement. He transforms into his cockroach persona to reclaim control when he gets overwhelmed by the impersonal bureaucracy of the Canadian immigration system. As noted earlier, he declares:

My antennae twitched in the dark as I scurried over the baseboards, sensing the vibrations of a world that believed it had sealed me out. They construct their tall walls and tidy, light-filled rooms, but they overlook the fact that we own the dark and that every wall has a gap big enough for a ravenous, determined monster to pass through (Hage 2008, p. 143).

This excerpt demonstrates how an insectoid identity can become a survival tool instead of a badge of shame. The character has a unique perspective on the city thanks to his antennae and vibration-sensing abilities, which enable him to detect the gaps in an otherwise exclusive metropolitan environment.

The physical and mental transformation of the protagonist in Raghavendra Rao's *The Cockroach Man* into an insect serves as a direct reaction to the draining nature of Indian administrative life. The clerk's metamorphosis becomes a useful strategy to endure institutional neglect while trapped in a pattern of never-ending files, corruption, and shifting official mandates. The clerk can navigate the intricate web of government offices without attracting the attention of predatory administrators by shrinking, becoming quiet, and being extremely perceptive. Rao utilizes this metamorphosis to illustrate how a heartless state may crush the human spirit while simultaneously showing how the average person manages to preserve their dignity in the face of a system that is meant to wear them out.

IX. THE TRAP OF COLLECTIVE BETRAYAL AND INSTITUTIONAL POWER

Ian McEwan's *The Cockroach* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* explore how collective movements can collapse at an institutional level, whereas Hage and Rao concentrate on individual survival on the periphery. Both books serve as cautions on what occurs when a movement's guiding ideology changes from one of public service to one of individual survival. The shifting text on the barn wall in *Animal Farm* depicts the gradual corruption of the revolution and serves as a graphic illustration of how language can be used to the advantage of the powerful. The ultimate betrayal of the group's initial objectives is represented by the final modification to the commandments:

"All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell 1945, p. 134).

This expression highlights the fundamental hypocrisy of populist governments that subtly establish a new hierarchy while claiming to represent the whole populace. Language can be stripped of its meaning in order to benefit an administrative class, as demonstrated by the usage of the word "equal" to defend inequality. For organizations like the Cockroach Janata, this dynamic is a continuing problem since organizational structures designed to combat external oppression can be turned inward to develop new forms of control in the absence of continuous internal critique and open communication.

By illustrating what occurs when the insectoid mindset obtains control of the state's top positions, McEwan examines a distinct aspect of this institutional collapse. In *The Cockroach*, Jim Sams circumvents traditional democratic supervision by consolidating executive power through his popular "Reversalism" program. Sams utilizes the media to paint the judges and members of Parliament as opponents of progress when they try to contest the legitimacy of his economic reforms:

The voice of the people is unquestionable. It would be a breach of the public trust to let the self-serving arguments of a divided parliament or the tiresome technicalities of antiquated legislation postpone the magnificent restoration of our country's economy. Regardless of the barriers put in our way by those who are afraid of genuine change, we must continue (McEwan 2019, p. 89).

This discourse demonstrates how readily democratic institutions may be undermined by authoritarian leaders using democratic language. Sams elevates his administration above the law by portraying his actions as the clear manifestation of the "will of the people," thereby using the state as a vehicle for bureaucratic and corporate overreach.

X. GEOGRAPHY, SPACE, AND THE SUBALTERN REBELLION MAP

These books' spatial dynamics also show a stark contrast between the irregular geographies where resistance occurs and the orderly locations under state control. Clear order, visibility, and control are the hallmarks of authoritarian power, which may be seen in monitored public squares, commercial areas, and antiseptic government buildings. On the other hand, underfunded classrooms, overcrowded urban lanes, rural forests, and abandoned campus dorms are some of the dark, secret places where the subaltern's struggle occurs.

In Kenzaburō Ōe's *The Silent Cry*, the remote Shikoku village's topography is a major factor in the young people's uprising against the corporate powers symbolized by the "Emperor of the Supermarkets." The deep valleys and thick woodlands serve as both a defensive barrier against outside influence and a storehouse of historical memory. According to Ōe, rural areas provide a place where communities can withstand the demands of national homogeneity. Because of the valley's topography, young people can organize a disorderly, unorthodox uprising that interferes with the efficient operation of outside corporate interests.

The history of Osmania University exhibits a similar spatial split. The wide campus has traditionally been used as a safe haven for local political groups because of its ancient buildings, woodland walkways, and dispersed student housing. The intricate layout of the campus has enabled students to continue their organizing efforts despite attempts by succeeding state governments to quell student protests by deploying security troops or erecting barricades. Similar to the valley in *The Silent Cry* or the secret vents in Hage's *Cockroach*, the hostels and departmental courtyards serve as a tangible base for an alternative community that defies organization or repression by outside forces.

XI. CONCLUSION: THE DEMOCRATIC SWARM'S UNFLUSHABLE PROMISE

A common understanding of how literature can uncover and critique the mechanisms of political oppression is revealed by comparing Ian McEwan's *The Cockroach*, Ravi Hage's *Cockroach*, K. Raghavendra Rao's *The Cockroach Man*, Kenzaburō Ōe's *The Silent Cry*, and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. These writers transcend conventional realism narratives by employing animal and insect allegories to depict the material, psychological, and structural aspects of existence under majoritarian, authoritarian, and market-driven regimes. They demonstrate how the general public is frequently compelled to live an insectoid existence—one characterized by precarity, surveillance, and a never-ending battle for survival—when a state adopts austerity and top-down control.

However, this collection of works also conveys a powerful message of optimism. Through the Cockroach Janata Party paradigm, these writings offer a framework for conceptualizing grassroots opposition by changing the insect figure from a term of hate into a symbol of collective resilience. This model serves as a reminder that monolithic state organizations can never completely control or eradicate the innate adaptability and permanence of the ordinary people. The decentralized, swarming collective of common citizens persists long after corporate-bureaucratic plans have been completed, populist leaders have left the stage, and security personnel have left public areas.

Accepting the lessons of this international literary legacy is necessary to reclaim the democratic potential of public space, whether in the underfunded classrooms of public colleges like Osmania or in the larger context of modern civic society. It demands an understanding that maintaining the autonomous, frequently chaotic venues where subaltern people congregate, discuss, and organize is essential to the health of democracy. The realization that the general public is a persistent, adaptable presence is the best safeguard against the chilling effect of a hostile political environment. The democratic swarm cannot be permanently excluded, contained, or erased from the continuing narrative of human freedom, much like the hardy creatures at the center of these contemporary allegories.

As literary critic Fredric Jameson (1981) reminds us, "the political interpretation of literature" reveals "the necessarily political nature of all reading and all writing" (p. 17). The texts examined in this article collectively demonstrate that literature does not merely reflect political reality but actively intervenes in it, offering alternative visions of resistance, survival, and hope. The cockroach, once a symbol of contempt, becomes in these works a figure of democratic possibility—unflushable, adaptable, and relentlessly present in the spaces where power forgets to look.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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The Geopolitics of Food Insecurity in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*

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Abstract— This paper explores the role of leadership in perpetuating food insecurity in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*. Rooted in the escalating crisis of ecological degradation, colonial legacy, political bureaucracy, and the commodification of food systems, it demonstrates the intricate relationship between power dynamics and food insecurity in African literary discourses, with a focus on *Wizard of the Crow*. Through a critical analysis of the novel, this study examines how Ngũgĩ critiques the role of systemic injustice, political bureaucracy, and failed leadership policies in perpetuating or alleviating food insecurity. By employing geocriticism, ecocriticism, and food system theories, this research reveals the complex interplay between governance, economic policies, and food security, highlighting how authoritarian regimes and neoliberal financial institutions exacerbate food insecurity. This study demonstrates that *Wizard of the Crow* serves as a powerful critique of failed governance, ecological destruction, and social instability, offering a piercing commentary on the intersections between leadership, environmental exploitation, and the struggle for survival. Ultimately, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between power, politics, and food security in African contexts.

Keywords— Geopolitics, Food Insecurity, Power, Ecocriticism, Food System Theory.

I. INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century is marked by unprecedented challenges: climate change, commodity price volatility, persistent poverty, and widening inequality. These forces converge to make food insecurity not only a humanitarian crisis but also a geopolitical one. Prosekov and Ivanova (2018) argue that "food has become a strategic resource, comparable to oil and gas, capable of determining the stability of nations and the direction of international relations" (p. 73). In this sense, food insecurity is inseparable from questions of power, governance, and global justice.

Food has always been more than sustenance; it is a marker of identity, a symbol of power, and a determinant of survival. Mohan (2023) argues that "food is not only nutritional. It is a cultural trait of societies. Eating reflects identity and belonging. Symbolic meaning is embedded in cuisine. Food marks both survival and culture" (p. 2). In the current global context, food has emerged as one of the most crucial concerns of our time, not simply because of its biological necessity but because of the political, economic, and cultural struggles that surround its production, distribution, and consumption. Dagar et al. (2016) also observe that "food security is not only about availability but also about accessibility, affordability, and stability" (p. 5), a reminder that hunger is never merely a natural condition but a socially and politically constructed reality.

Africa provides a particularly compelling terrain for examining the geopolitics of food insecurity. Paradoxically, the continent, rich in natural resources, is plagued by chronic hunger. This paradox is not accidental but the product of historical exploitation, postcolonial governance failures, and global economic structures that perpetuate dependency. Oyeniyi (2019) notes that "food insecurity in Africa is not simply a matter of scarcity but of distribution, access, and the politics of control" (p. 14). The continent's vulnerability to climate shocks, its reliance on subsistence agriculture, and its exposure to global market fluctuations make it a microcosm of the broader challenges facing the Global South. Yet, Africa is not merely a passive victim of these forces. Its writers, intellectuals, and communities have long resisted, critiqued, and reimaged the narratives of hunger and

survival. Literature becomes a crucial site of this resistance as fiction is used to interrogate the realities of hunger, poverty, and inequality, situating these experiences within broader geopolitical contexts.

This paper argues that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* reveals food insecurity as a deliberately manufactured condition produced through authoritarian governance, spatial dispossession, ecological exploitation, and global economic dependency. By situating hunger within broader structures of injustice, the novel functions as both literary critique and political intervention, demonstrating that the struggle against food insecurity is inseparable from the quest for dignity, sovereignty, and justice. Through an analysis of the novel, this study demonstrates the complex relationships between leadership, environmental exploitation, and the struggle for survival in the African context.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the interpretation and analysis of this study, geocriticism, ecocriticism, and food system theory have been adopted. These three theoretical lenses, when brought together, provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of food insecurity as represented in Ngũgĩ's novel.

2.1 Geocriticism and Literary Cartography

Geocriticism, as articulated by Bertrand Westphal (2011), offers a framework for understanding how space is never neutral but layered, plural, and contested. Westphal argues that literary texts do not simply represent pre-existing spaces but actively produce and contest spatial meanings. This approach allows us to demonstrate that farmlands, villages, and cities in the novel are terrains where power clashes with community survival and aggravates food insecurity.

Robert T. Tally Jr.'s (2013) concept of "literary cartography" further illuminates how fiction maps the relationship between space and power. In *Wizard of the Crow*, the fictional state of Aburiria serves as a map of geopolitical struggle, where the distribution of resources, access to land, and control over agricultural production reflect broader patterns of inequality and domination. The "Marching to Heaven" project, for instance, represents a form of spatial dispossession—the appropriation of land for elite vanity projects at the expense of agricultural production and community survival.

Edward Soja's (1996) concept of "Thirdspace" provides another valuable lens. Soja argues for understanding space as simultaneously physical (the material landscape), social (the human interactions and power relations that shape space), and imagined (the symbolic meanings attached to space). In the novel, the Ruler's project to build a tower to heaven represents the imagined space of authoritarian ambition, while the suffering agricultural communities represent the physical space of deprivation, and the resistance movements represent the social space where alternative spatial imaginaries are forged.

2.2 Ecocriticism and Environmental Justice

Ecocriticism, as defined by Cheryll Glotfelty (1996), examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment. The field, as developed by scholars like Lawrence Buell (1995, 2005), treats nature as central to literary analysis and considers ecological crisis as a moral imperative demanding critical attention.

Rob Nixon's (2011) concept of "slow violence" is particularly relevant to this study. Nixon argues that environmental destruction often occurs gradually and invisibly, making it difficult to represent and resist. In *Wizard of the Crow*, the degradation of agricultural land, the pollution of water sources, and the erosion of food sovereignty are forms of slow violence that disproportionately affect the poor and marginalized. Ngũgĩ's novel makes visible this slow violence, revealing how environmental exploitation is not an accidental consequence of development but a calculated extension of power.

Cajetan Iheka (2018) argues that "authoritarian and capitalist elites degrade landscapes for profit, dispossessing communities of their means of sustenance and exposing them to famine and displacement" (p. 92). This observation resonates with Ngũgĩ's portrayal of how the Ruler's regime systematically exploits environmental resources for political gain, leaving ordinary citizens to bear the consequences of ecological collapse.

2.3 Food System Theory and Entitlement

Food system theory examines the complex networks of production, distribution, and consumption that determine access to food. Amartya Sen's (1981) entitlement theory is foundational to this approach. Sen argues that famines result not from absolute food shortages but from failures in access and distribution—people starve not because food does not exist but because they lack the means to obtain it.

Harriet Friedmann (1982) and Philip McMichael (2009) have extended this analysis by examining the global food system, showing how neoliberal policies, structural adjustment programs, and corporate control over agriculture have undermined food sovereignty in the Global South. In *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngũgĩ dramatizes this reality, showing how external financial institutions dictate agricultural priorities, deepening dependency and exacerbating hunger.

Food system theory thus illuminates the erosion of food sovereignty as export crops are prioritized over subsistence farming, weakening local autonomy and deepening reliance on imports and external aid. This reflects what McMichael (2009) terms the "corporate food regime," in which global corporations and international financial institutions shape agricultural policies to serve their interests rather than those of local communities.

III. POLITICAL BUREAUCRACY AND THE CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

Political bureaucracy lies at the core of contradiction in Ngũgĩ's *Wizard of the Crow*. Set in the fictional African state of Aburiria, the novel portrays a regime driven by greed, corruption, and absurd political maneuvering that affects food security in the country. Through satirical allegory, Ngũgĩ reveals how authoritarian governance aggravates hunger and environmental degradation while ignoring the suffering masses (Iheka 2018, p. 142). Political decisions are made and politicians implement policies that do not benefit a majority of their people, revealing the absurdity in the regime's detachment from reality.

3.1 The Marching to Heaven Project and Spatial Dispossession

This detachment is evident when the Ruler ignores the suffering of his people but concentrates on the absurd project of building a modern-day Tower of Babel. Even the decision-making process captures the level of difficulty this project will generate and its effect on the people. A proportion of the difficulty level is captured when "the ministers forced themselves out of their different postures and dragged their bodies to get chairs for the visitors and for themselves, inwardly grateful to the Bank officials for interrupting seven days of fatigue, thirst, hunger, and lack of sleep" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 562). Instead of looking into the crisis at hand, the Ruler wasted no time; he asked his Minister of Finance and the Guardian of the National Treasury to summarize their deliberations on the role of Marching to Heaven to the economies of Aburiria, Africa, and the world at large (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 122). This ironic situation, where even the elite are not exempted from the issue of hunger, is the resultant effect of their self-aggrandization and the degree to which man can be self-centred. They spend seven sleepless days kneeling only to be asked to deliberate on the benefit of the project to the people.

This action illustrates how resources are funneled into vanity infrastructure rather than addressing the fundamental needs of the people, including food security. While the people perish from hunger and starvation, the Ruler and his ministers only concentrate on the benefit this structure will bring to the nation, which of course, they know has no concrete benefit. This self-centered nature is even aggravated when the ministers further spend exorbitantly either on their physical appearances, which are all geared towards lip praising, or on chasing and seeking financial support from western aids. Money is spent on plastic surgery which could have been spent on improving the standard of living of the people under their control as ministers. At the end, the situation of the people continues to aggravate as hunger becomes a part and parcel of their existence. We realize that power changes hand but new geopolitical forces are born and new cycles of hunger become evident through political choices like the Marching to Heaven Project and implementations of policies that have no positive role on the nation, connecting physical space and political tyranny.

The Ruler's obsession with the Marching to Heaven project is analogous to the bad political choices implemented by leaders in most underdeveloped nations. It further demonstrates authoritarian spatial control, as Westphal (2011) argues that dictatorships reshape landscapes to reinforce their power. Ngũgĩ's satirical presentation explains why the Ruler, instead of looking for a way out for his people to come out of hunger and starvation, resorts to an absurd project whose major aim was making his country the envy of the world, never minding that his people had no food. This satire exposes leadership as problematic with deeper undercurrents on human existence. Space under such authoritarianism becomes a tool for political vanity rather than functional survival (Westphal 2011). As Iheka (2018) states, "authoritarian and capitalist elites degrade landscapes for profit, dispossessing communities of their means of sustenance and exposing them to famine and displacement" (p. 92).

3.2 The Ruler's Court: Performance and Absurdity

Similarly, we realize that the way power is structured in African contemporary society reveals that a particular class is completely excluded from the scheme of things because they are socially excluded, physically and psychologically alienated. The decision for the construction of the tower did not take into consideration the hungry masses. All the leaders want is for the

Ruler to have a one-on-one discussion with God. These power structures do not only end with the elites but also come down to the common man. Those in power do not care how the common man feels. The only language they understand is how to use power to marginalize and socially isolate those being ruled.

Kamiti recalls his childhood days when even as children, they were already exposed to the effect of bureaucracy:

Just outside the village was a big orchard of plums, pears, mangoes, oranges, tangerines, and lemons, and whenever we passed anywhere near this garden of Eden, the landowner would set his dogs on us children so that we would not steal his fruit. Some of the children did actually find a way of climbing over the fence; they would come back with their pockets bulging with fruit. Still, we did not like his chasing us with dogs on a public path, and we hated even more that he took us all to be thieves deserving of punishment whether we had stolen anything or not (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 117).

Food here becomes an instrument of suppression as the landowner did not spare kids but sent his dogs to chase any kid using that road because of his fear that they might steal his fruits. Those who did not steal are being suppressed by the landlord because he feels he has the power to do that as he believes this is a way to stop prospective thieves from his orchard. He fails to identify that they are just kids, which makes his act very frustrating. Children who are already hungry are chased about and forced to yearn for even more. This explains why the children had to resort to magic to punish their suppressor, thus blocking other potential threats to their safety.

In addition, agriculture, which is a major preoccupation of the people of Aburiria, also dwindled due to bureaucratic tendencies as arable land gets dry and food becomes an illusion for the people. Instead of thinking of ways to better the situation of the suffering masses, the Ruler and his ministers plunge themselves into more absurdist procedures that continue to aggravate hunger in the nation. The ministers too have become puppets in the hands of the Ruler. This is captured in:

In his honor? Why honor him? "Because long before he became a minister, he had already shown his faith in French technology by choosing Paris rather than London for the elongation of his ears." For a while the Ruler was silent, as if contemplating a dawning thought. "Does he go there alone, secretly perhaps?" "I don't know." "Thank you, Titus," he said, almost affectionately. "You can now go back to your work." Soon the Ruler started getting reports that some army officers had received invitations for cocktails and dinners at Western embassies. Coming on the heels of his encounter with the diplomats, he decided that enough was enough; he must find a way to remind these Westerners that in Aburiria he was still the man, regardless of the loans for Marching to Heaven, and there was nothing these arrogant bastards could do about his slaughter of his own people. He issued an ultimatum followed by an order for the armored division to clear the People's Assembly (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 851).

The tendency of authoritarian leaders to prioritize ostentatious projects over urgent socio-economic issues reinforces the systemic neglect that fuels food insecurity. As a leader, the Ruler's priority should have been on the outcome of the visit of the Global Bank as well as its benefits to the people. Instead, the Ruler becomes obsessed about his ministers being honoured when he is still in power. This exposes the effect of absolute power which corrupts the individual.

3.3 Political Factionalism and Sabotage

The Ruler is used to being the center of attraction to the point that when he did not appear on television, "people confidently asserted that, yes, something had to be wrong" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 669). This explains why, in order for him to secure his position as the main focus, he encourages the rift between the ministers as they turn to serve only him and not the nation. The ministers now see each other as enemies, which also led to the creation of 'camps'. The effect of such camps is sabotage, as nothing beneficial for the nation can be implemented with a deep rift like this. To this effect, the ministers now rely on fault finding and disgracing one another. This is vividly captured through the scene below:

Sikiokuu cast a victorious glance at Machokali as if to say, You want a piece of this? I am not finished with you yet. Machokali tried his best not to panic, but his crestfallen look belied his attempts at indifference. "It is with deep regret that I announce that the person in question is none other than Vinjina, Tajirika's wife, Tajirika the chairman of Marching to Heaven, and as everyone knows, is a great pal of our friend here," he said, nodding toward Machokali, expressing more sorrow than anger at this treachery and ingratitude. "The wife of the chairman of Marching to Heaven?" Big Ben Mambo, heretofore a staunch Machokali ally, asked, preparing to jump ship. "Yes, one and the same," Sikiokuu said, and sat down, lowering his head in sorrow yet again, confirming the awful truth. Silence filled the room; Machokali felt it creep under his skin. His first inclination was to fall to the ground and ask for mercy, but he knew that by doing so he would be stepping into the trap that Sikiokuu had laid for him. His second impulse was to jump up and be the first to denounce Tajirika: demand his immediate

arrest and summary execution... Machokali cursed himself for his own negligence. Tajirika had tried to reach him... but Machokali, busy as he was trying to delay the departure of the Global Bank missionaries, had put them on as social calls. Had he returned them, he would now have the facts of the situation instead of being at the mercy of his enemy (Ngũgĩ 2006, pp. 299-300).

The rift instigated by the Ruler encourages Sikiokuu to use Vinjinia's ordeal as a means of stepping on Machokali while the people of the nation continue to starve with jobless youths everywhere. Furthermore, these capitalistic tendencies intensify as the next step adopted by the nation is the manipulation of information to maintain the Ruler's favour. This shows how bureaucracy has become a tool for authoritarian control where even the information disseminated is completely censored. Officials resort to fabricating reports and statistics to justify oppressive policies. Instead of looking for ways to improve the situation at hand, they all engage in activities which are non-beneficial to the common man, indicative of the lack of a drive to solve the problems plaguing the people, which is hunger and unemployment.

3.4 Urban-Rural Spatial Disparities

Another important issue on political bureaucracy is seen through Aburiria's urban-rural spatial disparities, similarly portrayed through Robert T. Tally Jr.'s notion on literary cartography. While bureaucratic elites flourish in cities, rural populations suffer under policies that exploit the land. Political decisions are made on land without verification. In this light, Ngũgĩ exposes how authoritarian regimes manipulate agricultural policies, often prioritizing political loyalty over actual economic viability. Farmers, instead of being supported, are exploited, while the government's economic failures lead to widespread scarcity. The bureaucratic elite, shielded from the suffering of ordinary citizens, engage in self-serving schemes that deepen food insecurity. "The land groaned under the weight of policies that never saw the farmer but demanded from the earth what it no longer had to give" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 297).

The disconnection between governance and ecological reality clearly illustrates how bureaucratic decisions contribute to environmental exhaustion. The land has been overused such that it is no longer productive, thereby aggravating the nature of hunger in the community, exemplifying what Tally (2013) terms cartographic oppression (p. 45). The totalitarian regimes have mapped out social hierarchies onto geographic space, creating visible injustices in land use. Ngũgĩ's narrative reflects this imbalance, where urban spaces serve political elites while agricultural communities face depletion and economic neglect.

3.5 Neoliberal Financial Institutions and Structural Dependency

Moreover, Ngũgĩ's narrative further interrogates the role of neoliberal financial institutions in worsening economic conditions. Neocolonial financial institutions set in as examples of such policies that are hardly ever beneficial to the common man. The Global Bank's involvement in Aburiria, for instance, mirrors historical structural adjustment programs imposed on African nations. One scathing remark within the novel illustrates this dynamic: "For every loan, a pound of our flesh. For every grant, a pint of our blood" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 213).

The contrapuntal ideology behind foreign loans is elaborately captured in this quotation. What makes it rather ironical is the fact that these loans were meant to alleviate Africa from poverty and enable the continent to grow, which of course, is contrary to the reality. The reality is that these loans plunge the country deeper into dependency and a constant state of seeking assistance, which always leaves the country worse off than when the loans were given. The desire to gain this loan from the Global Bank has made the people to become stooges. Just like the Ruler and the politicians who do not want anything to jeopardize the relinquishing of the loan, the masses also believe that their situation can earn them a share of it. The loans are believed to be some sort of saving grace to the nation. This is captured in:

There were always beggars loitering around those kinds of hotels at all hours of day and night. But that night they were there in unusually large numbers, looking for all the world to see like wretchedness itself. The blind seemed blinder than usual, the hunchbacked hunched lower, and those missing legs or hands acted as if deprived of other limbs. The way they carried themselves was as if they thought the Global Bank had come to appreciate and even honor their plight. So they sang, you are the way; we are the world! Help the poor! Help the poor! in different languages because the delegates were assumed to have come from all corners of the globe (Ngũgĩ 2006, pp. 102-114).

This act of demonstration to arouse sympathy has become the order of the day. The poor have resorted to demonstrating their wretchedness as a means to speak for themselves since those in power cannot really relate to their plight. Contrary to their view, this exposes the lawless situation afflicting the nation as well as the idea of poor leadership skills of those in control—a country being reduced to beggars just for the solicitation of funds. This exposes the lawless nature of the nation; the rulers beg

in suits while the ruled beg in rags. This exploitative nature indicates that the people are not only exploited psychologically but also physically and economically. Manly men who should have engaged in agricultural production for the benefit of the nation have all indulged in begging. This external economic intervention further demonstrates how global financial structures help worsen local agricultural crises, rather than resolving them. In essence, it is a literary indictment of governance failures that contribute to famine, environmental degradation, and economic disparity.

3.6 The Performance of Bureaucracy

Also, bureaucratic laws which are supposed to function according to established rules and procedures, ensuring consistency and predictability, are completely a sham in *Wizard of the Crow*. The appointment of ministers in Aburiria is the sole duty of the Ruler, who can appoint and dismiss at will. The alteration of body parts appears to be the criterion for appointments in ministerial positions. Nyawira even mocks Kaniuru when he tries to woo her back while projecting himself as a loyal supporter of the Ruler's party to get his nose done since "Machokali has had his eyes enlarged, Sikiokuu his ears, and Big Ben Mambo his mouth, or rather his tongue. Who better than you to sniff out enemies of His Royal Mightiness?" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 136). The bureaucratic stand in this nation is evidently brought out as based on followers. Those who alter their body parts are seen as the top tier. "But the Ruler misread the signified and gave him the Ministry of Information. This was not bad, and Mambo marked his elevation to a Cabinet post by changing his forenames and called himself Big Ben, inspired by the clock at the British Houses of Parliament" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 15).

This also highlights the performative nature of bureaucracy where officials engage in excessive formalities and rituals that serve no practical purpose and goes to expose how bureaucratic inefficiencies serve as a tool for consolidating power rather than fostering development. The Ruler manipulates these structures to consolidate power, while illustrating how political disorder prevails in postcolonial nations through political sabotage and demonstrates the disconnectedness between leadership and the actual need of the people.

IV. POLITICS AND THE PRECARIETY OF FOOD SYSTEMS

The capitalistic nature of post-colonial Africa is elaborated through failed governance and political mismanagement which fuels ecological destruction and social instability while exposing the connections between leadership, environmental exploitation, and the struggle for survival. During the nationalist struggle in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the African masses, African politicians, and African writers came together against their common enemy, the white man. The impression created at the time was that the colonial ruler was solely responsible for their predicament, plight, and sufferings. During the quest for a nation, nationalism was misconstrued as an ideology. When power finally left the colonial rulers for the Africans, the situation only moved from bad to worse. The masses became excluded from socio-political and economic affairs (in this case food security), marginalized, economically exploited, and socially excluded. While the ruling class uses its own power through politics to oppress and subjugate those with dissenting voices and opinions, the oppressed villagers' reaction is somewhat violent. This power dialectic and dynamic between the two classes constitutes the power conflict in African literature.

4.1 Food as a Tool of Political Control

The consequences of political mismanagement are manifested through severe food insecurity. Inflation makes basic goods unaffordable, and farmers struggle under harsh conditions while elites enjoy excessive feasts. Ngũgĩ illustrates this disparity when government officials dine luxuriously while citizens scavenge for scraps, emphasizing that "The only ones who never know hunger are those who feast on the labor of the poor" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 312). This analogy of Lazarus and the rich man is clearly emphasized. While the elites dine, the masses stay at the gate begging for scraps from the table to be tossed to them.

Authoritarian governance weaponizes food distribution, turning scarcity into a tool of control as "the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture turned food into a commodity subject to the whims of global markets" (Bello 2009, pp. 19-20). In authoritarian contexts, this commodification is compounded by repression as forces of law and order are placed at the gate to chase the beggars away. This demonstrates that even the food which is not needed by elites cannot be tossed away to those who are in need of it. This justifies that the policies put in place exempt the poor, irrespective if they are good or bad, thereby portraying food scarcity as a tool of political control; keeping people desperate enables the regime to ensure their silence. The suffering of the masses therefore becomes a stark representation of failed leadership skills.

4.2 The Dictatorial Nature of the Ruler

African leaders who have metamorphosed into colonial cronies are traced to Ngũgĩ's *Wizard of the Crow*. After independence, the politicians promised a better life for the masses, but independence becomes worrisome as the promises were never met and expectations were crushed. The political landscape is dominated by the Ruler who began ruling the country "before the world began and would end only after the world has ended" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 6). His despotic reign characterized by corruption and favouritism plunges the nation to be driven by self-interest rather than public welfare. His grand ambition, the Marching to Heaven project, is a massive tower meant to symbolize his dominance, however also representing the absurdity of unchecked power.

The Ruler's dictatorial nature is seen through his reaction to defiance. If attempted, the perpetrator or such a person or group of people pays dearly. In the face of opposition, he does not fail to exercise his authority. This can be seen through the imprisonment of his wife Rachel. She is locked up and psychologically traumatized as the scene of her defiance is recreated, so that she remembers for good that what she just did was unacceptable. This is also elaborated when the Wizard of the Crow is treated with disdain and portrayed thus:

The Wizard of the Crow had surrendered to the agents of the regime outside All Saints. She felt as if she had been hit on the head with a club. Had he given up hope, or what? She felt worse when later she got news from Maritha that not even Vinjina knew where they had taken him. Have they disappeared from him the way they did Machokali? (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 868).

Politics and power now revolve on the Ruler, who controls the country through a system of brutal political patronage revolving around the plundering of public funds. Those who are politically favoured have access to public funds through their wish to consolidate personal wealth and political power, which creates unequal relationships in the process. In the story, the project "Marching to Heaven" explores the extent to which African leaders can go to immortalize themselves. "The Ruler was the sole voice of the people and they love it so" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 24). His self-immortalization introduces a lot of hate from the youths, whose only job now is to look for ways to disrupt his plans.

The movement decided that whenever they wanted to have a meeting, they would form a queue. They would use the queues for purposes of political mobilization. Members decided that, come what may, they would disrupt the Ruler's dedication as they had his birthday (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 150).

With such strategies, that was how the desire for a better nation was born. Instead of constantly showing up in gatherings at different occasions, which were often misrepresented as supporting the Ruler's great plan, they would also make use of the privileges created by the Ruler and his acolytes to expose the nation. The queues which the rulers have taken to showcase the people's desire and excitement for the project become the meeting point of the opposition since gatherings have been banned in society.

4.3 The Movement for the Voice of the People

The Ruler and his cohorts are leaders who epitomize the neocolonial approach to suppression and dehumanisation of individuals. Tajirika, who is the person in charge of the Marching to Heaven project, focuses on looting the entire treasury: "The first loot would go to buying foreign currencies to be stashed in Swiss banks, adding to what is already there" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 646). With their interactions with these foreign investors and investments, the officials get engaged in lavishing parties, forgetting about the plight of the masses and the youth. Some of them now dressed like beggars shout out songs to end the loans from the West.

Almost as if in answer to the prayers of the media, a group of beggars started shouting slogans beyond the decorum of begging. Marching to Heaven is Marching to Hell. Your Strings of Loans Are Chains of Slavery. Your Loans Are the Cause of Begging. We Beggars Beg the End of Begging (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 93).

The immediate cause of this resistance from the masses is because of the excesses indulged by the government since the Matching to Heaven project was launched. Instead of them struggling to improve the situation in society, the ruler and his officials have instead indulged in more merriment and feasting, which incurs more loans for the country. The 'beggars' now understand that it is only through their rioting that the rulers can regain understanding of the state of events in the nation.

Furthermore, Tajirika made a new banking opening suggestion for the Ruler, who agreed to it; thus, "the idea of the Mwathirika Banks was so appealing that the Ruler insisted that Vinginia, Tajirika's wife, become the nominal founder and managing director, while the Ruler's sons, its board of directors" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 647). The action of the Ruler to appoint his son as the

Managing Director is a pointer of his autocratic leadership; the masses have been subjugated; they don't checkmate credibility anymore as the state now becomes a family business as he affirms "a crook after my own heart, the Ruler muttered to himself, mesmerized by the simple beauty of Tajirika's plan and he was glad that he had appointed him governor" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 648). Political corruption has caused problems in Aburiria. The Ruler also appointed Titus Tajirika as chairman of the Marching to Heaven birthday gift legacy project, comprised of members of the Ruler's cabinet. The masses were not happy about it, while Kamiti and Nyawira organized the Movement for the Voice of the People and the group stood firm to ensure that this project became unrealized.

4.4 The False Promise of Multiparty Democracy

Ngũgĩ exposes how Titus Tajirika feels very happy to be the chairman and how livelihoods will change for him. This is a sign of political corruption and an unequal relationship, failing to consider the masses, who should be cared for. Tajirika's wife, Vinjina, is furious about his sudden wealth. "He had told her that this was just the beginning of better days to come. The morrow would bring even more money, for many people were coming to see him. When the Global Bank releases its loans and construction begins, my money will go through the roof" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 173). Tajirika is very concerned about his self-desire against the Aburiria people. He fails to realize that the people are not happy with the state of events in the country. With youths who are jobless and educated youths who have now been reduced to the level of beggars, there is bound to be resistance from the masses.

Looting and stealing public funds in the name of politics have become a lifestyle of those in authority, while the masses are suffering. Tajirika does not care about the impact of the project anymore; it is on contract bidders, those for consultation just to keep stealing. A government for the people is now family affairs. However, ministers like Machokali and Sikiokuu have lost their positions in the government with the rise of Tajirika to prominence. Since they are imperialist representatives in the government, they all have a negative impact on the Aburiria people.

The inability to govern in Africa is a concern; after the autocratic Ruler died, "he ceded all his powers to the new Ruler of Aburiria, Emperor Titus Vespasianus Whitehead" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 753), who functions equally like his predecessor. It shows that African Rulers are more interested in socio-political corruption and class dialectics that destabilize our society from growing. The Ruler's dictatorial government does not serve the will of the people. There are countless issues of political corruption and unequal relationships among the Ruler's cabinet.

International communities are not benefiting from dictatorship either, as the unveiling of the multiparty system gives birth to baby democracy. "At the foot was the inscription in large Aburirian national colours: BABY D. Behold the Baby Democracy, he called" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 698). The autocratic nature of the Ruler now gives birth to multi-party-political parties in Aburiria, creating more segregation and political corruption. The fact is that the new political dispensation in Aburiria and Africa has not resulted in any genuine changes or benefits for the masses. It is just part of the global system of fake freedom, which recycles the same old faces. Across Africa, this is exactly what is experienced.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o counters the multi-party system as a weak and recycling system that will further destroy the Aburirian. This comes to pass when Titus Tajirika, who finds favour with the Ruler, eventually stages a coup and becomes the new Ruler. In the same vein, Nyawira and Kamiti, who both act as the Wizards of the Crow, seem to lay their hope and faith in the intellectuals, the youths, and the artists, as people who can make positive changes in Aburiria. And Africa needs this activism to regain success devoid of socio-political corruption.

4.5 The Promise of Alternative Knowledge Systems

Ngũgĩ's deployment of Kamiti, Nyawira, and other members of the Movement for the Voice of the People can deconstruct post-colonial reality and provide much-needed leadership. In the character of Kamiti, the novel also proposes the embrace of a broader consciousness in seeking solutions to the problems of Africa. He declares: "I want to learn more about the prophets and the teachers from the East, like Buddha, Jain's Mahavira, Guru Nanak of the Sikhs, and Confucius of China" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 210).

One of the key findings in this discussion is how literary texts unmask the failures of political leadership, demonstrating that governance is often entangled with self-serving bureaucracy that exacerbates systemic crises. In *Wizard of the Crow*, leadership becomes a grotesque spectacle, reinforcing the disconnect between power and the needs of the people. We also discovered that food insecurity, as a direct consequence of policy failures and environmental mismanagement, emerges as a central theme in this work. The systematic displacement of communities and the erosion of food sovereignty reflect broader geopolitical

struggles, positioning African nations within exploitative global trade networks that prioritize profit over sustainability. Through Ngũgĩ's literary imagination, *Wizard of the Crow* illuminates how food insecurity is not merely a byproduct of natural scarcity but a politically manufactured condition.

4.6 Colonial Legacies and Environmental Exploitation

Colonial legacies, though often discussed in historical and economic terms, remain deeply embedded in the socio-political realities shaping contemporary governance. The enduring effects of colonial policies, particularly in agricultural and resource management systems, are manifested in *Wizard of the Crow*, where postcolonial identity is marked by displacement, economic precarity, and the lingering grip of Western intervention. The novel interrogates how postcolonial states struggle to assert autonomy while still operating within frameworks of dependency that sustain global power hierarchies.

Despite these challenges, African literary responses do not merely dwell on oppression; they offer narratives of resistance, cultural reclamation, and political agency. Indigenous knowledge systems and oral traditions serve as counter-discourses that challenge hegemonic structures and propose alternative models of sustainability that preserve histories erased by neocolonial violence. The novel promotes a collective, revolutionary vision of ecology and "assumes an alignment between the fight for environmental preservation and anti-colonial struggle" (Okuyade 2011, p. 17).

As Okuyade (2011) puts it, "the wilderness becomes a place of retreat where reconnection with goodness and life's essence is made" (p. 22). This retreat into nature illustrates belonging, or "communion with each other and nature" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 205), allowing characters to become closer to themselves, to each other, and to the natural world during their escape into the forest outside Eldares:

Love was everywhere: in the tree branches where the nests of weaverbirds hung...Love was there among the creeping plants that twined around the tree trunks; yes, in the blackberries, some of which they plucked and fed to each other...Love was everywhere in this forest, but neither Nyawira nor Kamiti mentioned a word (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 206).

V. RESISTANCE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY

Despite these challenges, resistance emerges. The Wizard of the Crow, a symbolic and mystical figure, represents the fight against tyranny. Characters like Kamiti and Nyawira become catalysts for change, using subversive tactics to expose government corruption. Their struggle showcases Ngũgĩ's belief that dictatorship ultimately breeds its own downfall, as captured in the line: "Fear is the dictator's finest weapon, but hope is his fiercest enemy" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 401). Ngũgĩ suggests that, even under oppression, citizens have the power to reclaim their rights.

In *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngũgĩ decries the mismanagement of the state's resources through multinational corporations (MNCs) to expose the root cause of hunger as a result of failed leadership. He portrays how the masses are politically victimized and socially excluded from the nation's wealth and power as land and resources are depleted, leaving negative consequences on the people. The air is polluted just like the land and food becomes very scarce as little or nothing is projected for local farming when the MNCs are leased such lands. The acquisition of these farmlands by foreigners only seeks to meet the growing markets in their countries of origin, and not for the Aburirian community.

Ngũgĩ projects Kamiti's use of China and India to draw a stand for Africa to copy how they too can be freed from imperialism. Kamiti and Nyawira, as Wizards of the Crow, use the African belief system through herbs and cure people instead of globalization which keeps African nations indebted. Politics and dialectics run through Africans as a people; however, the imperialists made it an upgraded form of political corruption and unequal relationships in a different dimension.

Stressing various instances in the novel, Africans have understood that socio-political corruption and class dialectics are barriers to African development. Nyawira posits: "I believe that blacks have been oppressed by whites; females by males; peasants by landlords; workers by the lords of capital" (Ngũgĩ 2006, p. 428). This shows that the issue of political corruption and unequal relationships was happening before, but at this stage, it is much more advanced than before. Kamiti and Nyawira made remarkable impacts for Africa to be in the best state of equality, fairness, oneness, and a classless society. Through these satires and social critiques, *Wizard of the Crow* exposes how political failures lead to food insecurity, leaving Aburiria's citizens trapped in cycles of poverty and hunger. Ngũgĩ uses storytelling to urge reflection on governance and economic policies, warning against the dangers of unchecked power, reinforcing the idea that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

The perception of a nation's food security by both the rulers and the ruled has placed many African countries in a dilemma and this poses a challenge to nation-building. The fundamental problem of governance in African contemporary societies is the

concept of "you eat, or you are eaten"—that is, if one does not eat, he or she will be eaten up. This gastronomic mode of existence has resulted in a lack of patriotism and faith that puts the nation in a dilemma. This egocentric and egoistic way of life of both the rulers and the ruled has narrowed down their perception and conception of a nation. While the ruling elite sees the nation as its plantation where it can feed fat, it is also reminded of the various promises this ruling class made during the campaign for self-government and independence. This dialectic in perception and conception of socio-political and economic power has always created conflicts and contradictions in African contemporary politics.

Due to the colonial powers' exploitation of natural resources, various colonial development strategies have failed to prioritize the environment. It caused disastrous environmental problems in a vastly colonized world (Maryon-Davis 2019). Resources that should be allocated to agriculture and food production are instead funneled into this vanity project, worsening economic conditions for ordinary citizens, with corrupt ministers running rampant, competing to outdo one another in servitude to the Ruler, rather than addressing the country's food shortages.

VI. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* reveals that food insecurity is deliberately produced through authoritarian governance, ecological disruption, and global economic dependency. Hunger is consistently depicted as a political instrument rather than an accidental consequence of crisis. Several key findings emerge from this analysis.

6.1 Spatial Dispossession

Spatial dispossession emerges as a major finding. The "Marching to Heaven" project illustrates how fertile land is appropriated for elite vanity, displacing communities and undermining agricultural productivity. This manipulation of geography demonstrates how authoritarian ambition reshapes landscapes to enforce inequality. As Westphal (2011) argues, dictatorships reshape landscapes to reinforce their power. Ngũgĩ's narrative reflects this imbalance, where urban spaces serve political elites while agricultural communities face depletion and economic neglect.

The novel demonstrates that space is never neutral but is actively produced and contested. The Ruler's project to build a tower to heaven represents the imagined space of authoritarian ambition, while the suffering agricultural communities represent the physical space of deprivation, and the resistance movements represent the social space where alternative spatial imaginaries are forged.

6.2 Ecological Violence

Ecological violence is another significant result. The novel highlights deforestation, soil exhaustion, and pollution as consequences of exploitative development. These environmental disruptions intensify deprivation among the poor while shielding elites, situating hunger within broader ecological collapse. The erosion of food sovereignty is evident in the prioritization of export crops over subsistence farming.

This finding resonates with Nixon's (2011) concept of "slow violence," which argues that environmental destruction often occurs gradually and invisibly. In *Wizard of the Crow*, the degradation of agricultural land and the pollution of water sources are forms of slow violence that disproportionately affect the poor and marginalized. Ngũgĩ's novel makes visible this slow violence, revealing how environmental exploitation is not an accidental consequence of development but a calculated extension of power.

6.3 Global Economic Dependency

Structural adjustment programs and neoliberal globalization weaken local autonomy while deepening reliance on imports and external aid. Communities lose control over their sustenance while international actors dictate agricultural priorities, which are sustained through asymmetrical power relations. This reflects McMichael's (2009) concept of the "corporate food regime," in which global corporations and international financial institutions shape agricultural policies to serve their interests rather than those of local communities.

The novel dramatizes Amartya Sen's (1981) entitlement theory, which argues that famines often result from failures in access and distribution rather than absolute shortages. The characters in *Wizard of the Crow* starve not because food does not exist but because they lack the means to obtain it, caught in a system where political elites control access to resources.

6.4 Food as a Tool of Political Control

Elites exploit scarcity as leverage, while global institutions reinforce dependency through trade regimes and aid flows. Citizens experience hunger as both deprivation and domination, caught in unequal relations at local and global levels. The novel demonstrates that food has become a strategic resource capable of determining the stability of nations and the direction of international relations (Prosekov and Ivanova 2018).

The suffering of the masses becomes a stark representation of failed leadership skills. Authoritarian governance weaponizes food distribution, turning scarcity into a tool of control. This justifies that the policies put in place exempt the poor, irrespective if they are good or bad, thereby portraying food scarcity as a tool of political control.

6.5 Hunger as a Site of Struggle

Despite deprivation, hunger is portrayed as a site of struggle where communities contest domination through satire, collective action, and the reclamation of food as identity and dignity. This positioning of hunger as both a weapon of control and a terrain of resistance demonstrates the novel's function as both critique and intervention.

The Movement for the Voice of the People represents a form of resistance that challenges the dominant narratives of development and political legitimacy. Characters like Kamiti and Nyawira become catalysts for change, using subversive tactics to expose government corruption. The novel suggests that, even under oppression, citizens have the power to reclaim their rights.

VII. CONCLUSION

The relationship between authoritarian governance, ecological collapse, global economic dependency, and asymmetrical power relations are inseparable from the deeply entrenched structures that perpetuate food insecurity in *Wizard of the Crow*. This study demonstrates that hunger is a weapon of domination, sustained by spatial dispossession, environmental violence, and asymmetrical power relations.

Through geocriticism, ecocriticism, and food system theory, the analysis situates hunger within broader structures of injustice while highlighting resistance politics as a site of struggle and identity. Ngũgĩ's narrative functions as both literary critique and political intervention, exposing the entanglement of hunger with space, ecology, and global capitalism. The novel demonstrates that the struggle against food insecurity is part of the broader quest for dignity, sovereignty, and justice in Africa and beyond.

In dramatizing hunger as both engineered and contested, *Wizard of the Crow* contributes to a deeper understanding of food insecurity as a multidimensional crisis and a terrain of transformation. It also serves as a critical intervention that challenges dominant narratives of development, resource control, and political legitimacy.

To sum it up, Africans have an unwanted, poor livelihood in various nations due to corrupt leadership and the looting of national treasuries. The poor masses have been subjugated into unequal relationships, which has deprived them of enjoying equal privileges with those in power. As such, genuine decolonization is a falsehood, as imperialism now functions as neocolonialism. To this effect, leadership should prioritize the well-being of the people rather than personal grandeur. In essence, *Wizard of the Crow* is not just a tale; it is also a wakeup call to societies facing similar struggles to sit up and work towards policies that can better improve the political, social, and economic standards of their nation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This research was conducted independently, without any financial, institutional, or personal relationships that could be perceived as influencing the findings, interpretations, or conclusions presented in this article. The research received no external funding but was independently conducted.

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Women's Condition in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract— This study critically analyses women's condition in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Set against the backdrop of the Victorian era, a period defined by strict social norms and profound gender inequalities, the novel sheds light on women's living conditions through the protagonist's journey from a marginalized orphan to an independent woman. Drawing on feminist and literary theories, this research explores how the narrative portrays female oppression through restricted educational access, economic dependence, and rigid societal expectations. Furthermore, it highlights the various strategies used by female characters to assert their identities and independence. The analysis contrasts Jane's trajectory toward autonomy and love with the experience of Bertha Mason, who embodies an alternative, more tragic facet of Victorian womanhood. The findings reveal that Brontë uses her narrative as a means of depicting the hardships faced by women, positioning Jane's resilience, moral strength, and persistent desire for equality as a powerful symbol of resistance against patriarchal norms. Ultimately, this paper demonstrates that *Jane Eyre* not only critiques the historical condition of women but also advocates for female emancipation through education, self-determination, and personal integrity.

Keywords— Women, Oppression, Independence, Feminism, Victorian Society.

I. INTRODUCTION

The condition of women has long been a major concern in both literature and society. Throughout history, women have faced numerous forms of discrimination, including limited access to education, economic dependence on men, and strict social restrictions. During the nineteenth century, particularly in Victorian England, women were expected to conform to rigid norms that confined them to domestic roles and denied them any significant opportunity for personal development or public recognition. Society imposed a clearly defined image of femininity based on submission, obedience, and silence. Literature from this period both reflected and questioned these realities, making it a privileged space for examining gender inequality.

Although *Jane Eyre* is frequently regarded as a landmark novel of female emancipation, it also portrays women who remain deeply constrained by patriarchal authority and social expectations. The heroine's journey raises fundamental questions about freedom, identity, and equality. This contradiction leads to a central research question: How is the condition of women portrayed in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and what does it reveal about the social realities of Victorian society?

It is within this social and historical context that Charlotte Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre*, one of the most influential novels of Victorian literature, published in 1847. The novel narrates the life of Jane, an orphan who struggles to overcome social, economic, and gender barriers in her quest for dignity, independence, and self-respect. Through Jane's experiences, Brontë exposes the difficulties faced by women in nineteenth-century England while simultaneously presenting a heroine who refuses to submit entirely to social conventions. This research, entitled "The Condition of Women in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*: A Critical Analysis", aims to examine the representation of women in the novel and to analyse the various forms of oppression and emancipation experienced by its female characters.

In order to answer this research question, the study is organized into three chapters. The first chapter presents the research situation, including the research area, literature review, and main research questions. The second chapter focuses on the

theoretical framework and methodology adopted for the study. The third and final chapter is devoted to textual analysis and the interpretation of the findings.

II. THE RESEARCH SITUATION

2.1 Research Area

Far from a mathematical analysis, this piece of scholarship is a literary work that focuses on a close analysis of Charlotte Brontë's fictional work. Known as one of the key figures of British literature, she has been distinguished through her specific way of depicting the different social irregularities faced by women during the Victorian period, ranging from gender issues to women's marginalization. Thus, this study examines how women are represented in literary works, especially during the Victorian period. The nineteenth century was marked by strong social inequalities between men and women. Literature of that time often reflected these inequalities, but it also served as a means to question them. In this regard, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë provides a relevant framework for analysing the condition of women. This research therefore combines literary analysis with gender perspectives in order to better understand the position of women in society as portrayed in the novel.

2.2 Literature Review

Several scholars have analysed *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë from different perspectives, especially in relation to feminism, identity, and the condition of women in the nineteenth century.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), argue that the novel presents a tension between repression and self-expression. According to them, female characters reflect the difficulties faced by women in a patriarchal society. They also interpret Bertha Mason as a representation of suppressed anger and rebellion. Their analysis helps to better understand the psychological struggles experienced by women in the novel and the conflict between obedience and freedom.

Elaine Showalter, in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), focuses on the development of female identity in literature. She explains that women writers often use fiction to express personal experiences and to challenge traditional gender roles. This perspective is useful in analysing how Jane Eyre builds her identity despite social limitations and expectations imposed on women during the Victorian era.

Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), emphasizes the importance of education for women. She argues that education is essential for women's independence, dignity, and self-respect. This idea is reflected in *Jane Eyre*, where education plays a key role in Jane's personal development and allows her to gain a certain degree of autonomy.

Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex* (1949), explains that women are often considered as "the Other" in society. According to her, women are socially constructed as inferior and dependent on men. This concept can be applied to the novel, where female characters struggle to affirm their identity and to be recognized as equal human beings. Beauvoir's theory is important for understanding Jane's desire for equality and self-definition.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985), analyses Bertha Mason from both feminist and postcolonial perspectives. She argues that Bertha represents not only female oppression but also colonial marginalization. According to Spivak, the novel reflects the silencing of certain women whose voices are excluded from society. This interpretation broadens the understanding of oppression in *Jane Eyre*.

These different contributions provide a better understanding of the condition of women in *Jane Eyre* and highlight the relevance of feminist criticism in the analysis of the novel.

2.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

2.3.1 Research Questions

The main questions guiding this research are:

- **Q1:** How does Brontë depict Victorian women's condition throughout *Jane Eyre*?
- **Q2:** In what ways are women oppressed in the novel?
- **Q3:** How do social class and gender influence women's lives?

2.3.2 Research Hypotheses

In response to the above questions, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

- **H1:** *Jane Eyre* presents women as oppressed human beings dominated by men in a patriarchal society.
- **H2:** Women are socially and economically dependent on men.
- **H3:** *Jane Eyre* challenges traditional gender roles.

2.3.3 Objectives of the Research

The primary objective driving this research is to depict the unpleasant condition of women through an in-depth analysis of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. This study also intends to examine the perpetual struggles faced by British women through the character of Jane without ignoring the themes of oppression and resistance. Highlighting the evolution of Jane as a woman is obviously a tangible proof of Victorian women's determination for self-emancipation.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This section presents the theoretical orientation of the study as well as the main concepts used to analyse the condition of women in *Jane Eyre*.

3.1.1 Theoretical Foundations of Research

In the framework of this research, two literary theories have been applied: Feminist Literary Theory and Marxist Literary Theory.

Feminist literary theory finds one of its principal foundations in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). In this influential work, Beauvoir argues that women have historically been defined as inferior to men and treated as "the Other" within patriarchal societies. Feminist criticism therefore seeks to examine the representation of women in literary texts, expose gender inequalities, and analyse the mechanisms of female oppression and resistance. Elaine Showalter further developed feminist literary criticism in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), where she explored the evolution of women's writing and the construction of female identity in literature. This theory is particularly relevant to the present study because *Jane Eyre* portrays a woman's struggle for autonomy, dignity, and equality.

The study also draws on Marxist literary theory, which originates from the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, notably *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Das Kapital* (1867). Marxist criticism examines the influence of social class, economic power, and material conditions on human relationships. In literary studies, Terry Eagleton contributed significantly to the development of Marxist criticism through works such as *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976). This perspective helps explain how class structures and economic inequalities shape the experiences of literary characters. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane's position as a governess illustrates the effects of social hierarchy and economic dependence, making Marxist theory useful for understanding class inequality in the novel.

3.1.2 Additional Supporting Scholarship

This study is also informed by critical and literary responses that situate *Jane Eyre* within its own historical reception and its afterlife in later fiction, offering two further angles on the novel's treatment of women. When the novel first appeared, it provoked strong reactions precisely because of its heroine's independence. In a widely read notice for the *Quarterly Review*, Elizabeth Rigby (1848) condemned Jane as the embodiment of an undisciplined, rebellious spirit and denounced the novel as an anti-Christian composition, objecting above all to a heroine who judges for herself rather than submitting quietly to her station. Read today, this hostile contemporary verdict is itself useful evidence: it shows from outside the text how sharply Jane's assertiveness violated the behavioural norms expected of Victorian women, confirming what the novel argues from within.

The character of Bertha Mason has likewise continued to provoke critical and creative response well beyond Brontë's own century. Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) reimagines Bertha's earlier life under her birth name, Antoinette Cosway, giving voice and history to a figure who remains silent and marginal throughout *Jane Eyre*. Rhys's novel falls outside the primary text examined here, but its enduring influence confirms that Bertha's confinement and silence, discussed further in Chapter Three, have long been recognized as one of the novel's central unresolved tensions rather than a peripheral detail.

3.1.3 Clarification of Key Concepts

Before proceeding to the core of the topic, it is worth clarifying some key concepts that may help understand this study. First and foremost, feminism can be defined as a movement and a critical approach that seeks to understand and challenge gender inequality. Feminism intends to reject the supremacy of men in patriarchal societies.

However, patriarchy is a social system in which men hold power and dominate women in different aspects of life. This system does not facilitate women's emancipation. In such societies, men have total control over women. In such societies, women are voiceless and have no right to protest. Their place is generally in the kitchen or in the matrimonial homes where they have to struggle against all odds. For the purpose of this work, patriarchy is depicted as an absolute system that makes women's lives unpleasant and miserable. Moreover, female autonomy stands for the ability of a woman to make her own decisions and live independently.

3.2 Methodology

This research relies on several information gathering tools. First, close reading is used to examine the novel carefully and identify important themes related to women's condition. Secondly, textual analysis helps to interpret characters, symbols, dialogues, and narrative techniques used by Charlotte Brontë. Finally, library research makes it possible to collect secondary materials such as books, academic articles, and literary criticism related to feminism, Victorian society, and gender studies. These different tools contribute to a deeper understanding of the novel and support the interpretation of the data.

The method used in this research is a qualitative one. It consists in interpreting the content of the novel in relation to the research questions. The analysis focuses on themes, characters, and narrative elements. Particular attention is given to the experiences of female characters and the way they respond to social constraints.

IV. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Representation of Women in Jane Eyre

The representation of women in *Jane Eyre* reveals both the restrictions imposed by Victorian society and the ways in which women attempt to negotiate their place within it. Rather than presenting a single model of femininity, Charlotte Brontë offers a variety of female figures whose experiences reflect different aspects of women's condition.

4.1.1 Jane Eyre's Quest for Independence

Jane Eyre is portrayed as a woman who constantly seeks independence in a context where female autonomy is limited. From her childhood, she refuses injustice, especially in her confrontation with Mrs. Reed. This early resistance already shows her strong sense of dignity.

As she grows older, her independence becomes more thoughtful and principled. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that female characters in *Jane Eyre* embody a tension between repression and self-expression (Gilbert and Gubar, p. 336). This idea is clearly reflected in Jane's decision to leave Thornfield after discovering Rochester's secret. Even though she loves him, she refuses to sacrifice her moral values.

In addition, Rich interprets Jane as a woman in search of identity in the absence of emotional security (Rich, p. 89). This perspective helps to explain why Jane insists on defining herself on her own terms. She does not reject love, but she refuses to lose herself in it. The following excerpt gives more details:

I had my own reasons for being dismayed at this apparition; too well I remembered the perfidious hints given Mrs. Reed about my disposition; the promise pledged girl by Mr. Brocklehurst to apprise Miss Temple and the teachers of my vicious nature. All along I had been dreading the fulfilment of this promise, -I had been looking out daily for the "coming man" whose information respecting my past life and conversation was to brand me as a bad child for ever: now there he was. (Brontë, p. 92)

Jane's independence is therefore not absolute, but it is significant. She represents a woman who is aware of her worth and determined to protect it.

4.1.2 Female Oppression in Victorian Society

Despite Jane's strength, *Jane Eyre* clearly exposes the oppressive conditions faced by women in Victorian England. Women are expected to conform to strict social norms and are often denied both freedom and authority.

The novel's first extended scene of punishment, Jane's confinement in the red-room at Gateshead, establishes this pattern of enclosure before she ever leaves her aunt's house. Locked away as a child for defending herself against her cousin John Reed, Jane experiences the room not simply as punishment but as an early lesson in the limits placed on a dependent, powerless girl within her own family. Her own reaction captures this imbalance precisely: "Unjust! unjust!" she protests inwardly, recognizing even as a child that she has been condemned as "a discord in Gateshead Hall," powerless to alter a judgment she knows to be unfair (Brontë, p. 2). Gilbert and Gubar treat the red-room as the first in a series of enclosures that structure the entire novel, anticipating Bertha's later confinement at Thornfield (Gilbert and Gubar, p. 336). Read this way, Jane's earliest experience of oppression is not merely personal cruelty on the Reed family's part, but a foretaste of the broader constraints placed on female autonomy throughout the novel.

Showalter points out that nineteenth-century society imposed rigid expectations on women's behaviour (Showalter, pp. 13-15). Bertha Mason, having been confined and silenced, is a palpable example. Her situation showcases an extreme form of oppression. Jane's experience at Lowood School also reflects institutional control over women. The strict discipline imposed by Mr. Brocklehurst shows how authority is used to shape female behaviour. As Poovey argues, Victorian society often relied on moral and religious systems to regulate women's lives (Poovey, p. 126).

4.1.3 Education and Female Empowerment

Education plays an essential role in Jane's personal development and contributes greatly to her search for independence. In Victorian society, women generally had limited access to education, and many of them were expected to focus mainly on domestic responsibilities. However, in *Jane Eyre*, education appears as a means through which women can improve their condition and gain a certain degree of autonomy. Although Lowood School is presented as a strict and sometimes oppressive institution, it nevertheless provides Jane with intellectual discipline, moral instruction, and practical skills that help shape her identity.

Moglen argues that education in *Jane Eyre* contributes to the formation of a self-aware and reflective personality (Moglen, p. 152). This idea is evident in Jane's capacity to analyse her experiences and make independent decisions throughout the novel. Her education allows her to become a governess, which provides her with financial support and prevents complete dependence on others. Unlike many women of her time, Jane is able to earn her own living and maintain a sense of dignity.

Furthermore, education strengthens Jane's confidence and her ability to express herself freely. Armstrong explains that nineteenth-century domestic fiction often emphasized women's moral and intellectual capacities (Armstrong, p. 196). This perspective can be applied to Jane, whose intelligence and critical thinking distinguish her from other female characters. Her conversations with Rochester, for example, show that she values intellectual equality in relationships.

4.2 Social Constraints and Gender Roles

Victorian society is organized around strict social and moral expectations that define how men and women should behave. These expectations create limitations for women and influence their personal relationships, opportunities, and social positions. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë demonstrates how gender roles shape women's lives and restrict their freedom. Women are expected to be obedient, modest, and dependent on male authority. Any attempt to challenge these norms is often criticized or discouraged by society.

Showalter explains that nineteenth-century women were frequently confined to domestic roles and denied equal opportunities in education, employment, and public life (Showalter, p. 100). This reality is reflected in Jane's experiences throughout the novel. As a child, she is constantly reminded of her inferior position within the Reed family. Later, as a governess at Thornfield, she occupies an uncertain social position because she is neither a servant nor a member of the upper class.

Moreover, women's social value is often linked to marriage and morality. Victorian society expects women to marry in order to secure financial protection and social respectability. However, Brontë questions these expectations through Jane's refusal to sacrifice her principles for comfort or social acceptance. Jane rejects relationships that threaten her dignity, even when they could provide economic security. Gender roles also affect women psychologically. Female characters such as Bertha Mason and Miss Temple illustrate different responses to social pressure. Bertha represents rebellion against oppression, while Miss Temple symbolizes moral discipline and respectability. Through these contrasting figures, the novel shows the complexity of women's experiences in Victorian society. In this way, *Jane Eyre* criticizes the rigid gender roles imposed on women and reveals how these expectations limit female freedom, identity, and personal fulfilment.

4.2.1 Marriage and Dependence

In Victorian society, marriage was often considered the main objective for women because it provided financial security and social stability. Women generally depended on men economically, which made marriage an important social institution. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë examines the relationship between marriage and female dependence while also questioning traditional expectations associated with it.

Davidoff and Hall explain that middle-class women were largely confined to the domestic sphere, where their identities were closely connected to their husbands (Davidoff and Hall, p. 180). This situation reduced women's autonomy and reinforced male authority within the family. In the novel, several female characters illustrate this dependence. Bertha Mason, for example, is completely controlled by Rochester and deprived of freedom. Her condition reflects the extreme vulnerability of women within patriarchal marriage structures.

However, Jane refuses to accept marriage at the expense of her dignity and moral values. When she discovers that Rochester is already married, she decides to leave Thornfield despite her strong love for him. This decision demonstrates her moral independence and her refusal to become socially and emotionally dependent. Jane also rejects St. John Rivers' proposal because she understands that a marriage without love would destroy her emotional identity.

Eagleton argues that economic conditions strongly influence relationships in the novel (Eagleton, p. 15). Jane's inheritance changes her social position and allows her to return to Rochester as an equal rather than as a dependent governess. Financial independence therefore becomes an important factor in achieving equality within marriage. Through Jane's experiences, Brontë redefines marriage as a relationship that should be based on mutual respect, emotional connection, and equality rather than financial necessity or social obligation. The novel therefore criticizes traditional forms of female dependence while suggesting the possibility of more balanced relationships between men and women.

4.2.2 Class and Gender Inequality

4.2.2.1 The Position of the Governess

The interaction between class and gender is central to Jane's experience. As a governess, she occupies an intermediate position that isolates her socially. Jane's role as a governess places her between two worlds. She is educated but does not belong to the upper class. This creates a sense of distance between her and the people she works for. Armstrong's critical study highlights how such positions reveal tensions within society (Armstrong, p. 196). Jane is present in social spaces but not fully accepted, which reflects the rigidity of class structures.

4.2.2.2 Social Marginalization and Identity

Jane's position as a governess places her in a socially marginalized situation that deeply affects her identity. Although she is educated and intellectually capable, she does not belong to the wealthy upper class. At the same time, she is separated from servants because of her education and professional role. This intermediate social position creates isolation and uncertainty in her relationships with others.

Throughout the novel, Jane is constantly reminded of her inferior social status. Mrs. Reed treats her as an outsider within the family, and even at Thornfield, Jane remains conscious of the social distance between herself and Rochester. These experiences contribute to her strong desire for dignity and self-respect. Rather than accepting humiliation, Jane insists on recognizing her own worth despite her limited social position.

Poovey explains that Victorian society maintained social order by controlling women's behaviour and reinforcing class distinctions (Poovey, p. 126). This perspective helps to understand why Jane often feels excluded from spaces dominated by wealth and privilege. Nevertheless, she refuses to define herself entirely through social hierarchy. Jane's struggle for identity is therefore closely linked to her marginalization. Instead of allowing society to determine her value, she gradually constructs her own sense of self through education, moral integrity, and personal reflection. Her resistance to inferiority demonstrates her inner strength and independence.

In this respect, *Jane Eyre* presents identity as a complex process shaped by both gender and class inequalities. Jane's experience reveals the emotional and psychological consequences of social marginalization while also emphasizing the importance of self-definition and resilience.

4.3 Towards Female Emancipation

4.3.1 Resistance to Patriarchy

Jane's life can be seen as a form of resistance to male authority. She encounters several figures who attempt to control her choices and define her role in society. However, she consistently defends her right to think and act independently. Rich (p. 89) interprets this resistance as a search for self-definition and personal autonomy, evident in her repeated refusal to compromise her principles even when doing so costs her emotional security or social comfort.

St. John Rivers represents a markedly different register of male authority than Rochester, one grounded in religious duty rather than romantic passion, and Jane's refusal of his marriage proposal shows that her resistance is not confined to romantic entanglements alone. St. John frames marriage as a missionary partnership and presents Jane's refusal as a betrayal of God's purpose for her, applying a moral pressure that Jane finds, in some ways, harder to resist than Rochester's more overtly emotional appeals. Jane names the danger directly: "If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now," she tells him, recognizing that a marriage entered without love would erase her as completely as any other form of submission (Brontë, p. 35). Her refusal of St. John is therefore as significant an assertion of self-definition as her earlier departure from Thornfield. Taken together, these two refusals suggest that Jane's resistance to patriarchy is directed not at any single man but at the underlying expectation, whether romantic or religious in form, that a woman's identity should be absorbed into a man's purpose. Her resistance shows that women can challenge patriarchal power through self-respect, determination, and the courage to make independent decisions.

4.3.2 Assertion of Identity and Equality

Jane's journey is also marked by a strong assertion of identity and a desire for equality. Throughout the novel, she refuses to accept the idea that social class or gender determines a person's value. She repeatedly affirms that she possesses the same feelings, intelligence, and dignity as men. This is particularly evident in her relationship with Rochester, where she insists on being treated as an equal rather than as a subordinate, declaring outright:

"Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! I have as much soul as you, and full as much heart!" (Brontë, p. 23)

As the story progresses, she becomes steadily more confident in expressing her opinions and defending her beliefs, an extension of the same movement from repression toward self-expression already traced above (Gilbert and Gubar, p. 336). Her financial independence further strengthens her position and allows her to make choices freely. When she finally reunites with Rochester, their relationship is based on greater balance and mutual respect. Through Jane's personal growth, Brontë suggests that women can achieve self-realization and claim equality despite the restrictions imposed by Victorian society.

4.4 Limits and Ambiguities of Female Emancipation

4.4.1 Compromise in Marriage

While the novel suggests progress, it also reveals certain limits. Some critics argue that Jane's final marriage represents a compromise rather than complete emancipation. Although Jane achieves financial independence before marrying Rochester, her story still concludes within the traditional institution of marriage. From a feminist perspective, this ending may suggest that a woman's fulfilment remains linked to a relationship with a man. At the same time, the marriage differs from conventional Victorian expectations because Jane enters it as an independent individual. Rochester's physical condition after the fire also changes the balance of power between them. Therefore, the ending can be interpreted both as a victory for female autonomy and as a partial acceptance of traditional social values (Gilbert and Gubar, p. 336; Eagleton, p. 15).

4.4.2 Persistence of Social Constraints

Persistence and social constraints go hand in hand. Most of the time, social constraints compel individuals to be persistent. Though everyone wants a better life for themselves, it is worth mentioning that some people face miserable situations. Even Jane has been constrained to live in Lowood for several reasons. The following excerpt from the novel under study emphasizes how complicated and risky that environment was. But thanks to Jane's persistence, she has spent eight years there:

"And you came from!"

"From Lowood school in Shire/"

"Ah! A charitable concern. How long were you there!"

"Eight years"

"Eight years! You must be tenacious of life. I thought half the time in such a place would have done up any constitution! No wonder you have rather the look at another world." (Brontë, p. 186)

Despite Jane's achievements, the social structures that limit women's freedom remain largely unchanged. Victorian society continues to impose expectations regarding female behaviour, marriage, and social status. Jane succeeds mainly because of her exceptional determination, education, and inheritance rather than because society becomes more equal. Other female characters, such as Bertha Mason, do not experience the same opportunities for liberation. Their situations illustrate the persistence of oppression and exclusion within the social system. Furthermore, women are still expected to conform to moral standards that are often stricter than those applied to men. The novel therefore presents emancipation as a difficult and incomplete process. While Jane manages to improve her personal situation, the broader systemic social inequalities affecting women continue to exist. This suggests that female emancipation in *Jane Eyre* is significant but remains limited to the realities of Victorian society (Poovey, p. 126).

V. CONCLUSION

This research work examines the women's condition in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* through a critical analysis of some major themes and characters. It explores how the novel reflects the realities of women's lives in Victorian society and the possibilities for their emancipation. The analysis reveals that women in the novel face multiple limitations such as social expectations, economic dependence, and restricted access to power. Through characters like Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason, the text explores the spectrum of the female experience, ranging from submission to resistance.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of education as a tool for empowerment. Jane's intellectual development allows her to gain a certain level of independence, which distinguishes her from many other female characters. The research also demonstrates that gender inequality in the novel is closely linked to class structure. Marriage, often presented as a necessity for women, functions as a form of dependence rather than a bond based on mutual respect.

Although the novel reflects the limitations of its time, it also portrays a heroine who resists oppression and affirms her identity. Jane's journey suggests that emancipation is not achieved through rebellion alone, but through self-awareness, moral strength, and the ability to make independent decisions. *Jane Eyre* remains a significant literary work for understanding the condition of women in the nineteenth century. Not only does it expose the challenges faced by women, but it also proposes a model of resilience and self-determination worth exploring.

The enduring relevance of the novel lies in its nuanced portrayal of a woman's struggle for autonomy and dignity in a society that systematically denied both. Jane's story continues to resonate with contemporary readers because it speaks to ongoing questions about gender equality, personal integrity, and the possibility of love without subordination. As a work of literature, *Jane Eyre* not only critiques the historical condition of women but also advocates for female emancipation through education, self-determination, and personal integrity.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Alimentary Politics and Gendered Power in Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*

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Abstract— This paper is a close literary and socio-cultural analysis of food, hunger, and power in Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2013). It explores how alimentary practices such as the preparation of food, its distribution, withholding, and symbolism function as a mode of domination within the domestic sphere of Angami Naga society. Drawing upon feminist food studies, postcolonial theory, and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus and social capital, the paper argues that Kire deploys the politics of the kitchen and dining not merely as indigenous cultural backdrop but also as the very site where patriarchal authority is conceived, reproduced, internalized, and enforced—paradoxically by women themselves. The central irony of the novel is that the household, which is run by a "grandmother," constitutes a "terrible matriarchy" and is shown to rest fundamentally on economies of hunger: who gets to eat first, who receives the big pieces of meat, and who labors to feed others while depriving herself. The protagonist Dielieno's navigation of this hierarchy reflects how food scarcity or abundance are not merely material conditions but also mechanisms of gender formation in a deeply biased and unequal society. By placing Kire's text in dialogue with theories of culinary capital and nutritional inequality, this paper attempts to examine food in *A Terrible Matriarchy* as a simultaneous weapon of control, a site of resistance, and an embodiment of indigenous women's subjectivity.

Keywords— *Alimentary Politics, Feminist Food Studies, Postcolonial Feminism, Culinary Capital, Hunger.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Few practices in everyday life appear as mundane as the serving of a regular meal. Yet in the novel, *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Kire makes the act of ladling food into bowls the opening image of an entire narrative of subjugation. The novel's first chapter opens with the grandmother Vibano distributing meat to her grandchildren and serving the choicest portion to Dielieno's brother, making explicit that "there are different portions for boys and girls." This scene, positioned at the very threshold of the narrative, functions as a synecdoche for everything that follows: the division of a household along the lines of gender, the reproduction of hierarchy through a living being's most basic need, and the mechanism by which women become the agents of their own devaluation.

The novel's opening line sets the emotional architecture that food will sustain throughout. "My grandmother didn't like me. I knew this when I was about four and a half" (Kire 1). This declarative statement of the child's rejected personhood is first confirmed not through words of cruelty but through the daily act of the table. It is in the biased distribution of food—where the best piece of meat goes to the boys and the girl receives less—that Dielieno learns her place in the household's moral economy. Through these daily rituals, Dielieno learns her place in the household's moral economy. Food, here, becomes the medium through which love and its contingencies are communicated before language is adequate to name them.

Kire's novel *A Terrible Matriarchy*, first published by Zubaan in 2007 and republished in 2013, occupies a significant position in Indian English Literature as the first novel in English by a Naga writer to foreground the lived, domestic realities of Naga women and their shared experiences. While the critical conversation around the text has productively addressed its

Bildungsroman structure, its negotiation of tradition and modernity, and the concept of internalized patriarchy, one dimension that deserves critical attention is the specific role of food—right from its preparation to distribution, denial, and its symbolism as an apparatus of power. This paper aims to explore that gap as its starting point.

The concept of "culinary capital," developed within feminist food studies and given added force by Bourdieu's framework of "cultural capital," refers to the social and symbolic value conferred through control over food production, distribution, and consumption. In this framework, the power to determine who eats first and what they eat is never merely practical—access to nourishment is access to social recognition. Denial of food, whether overt or structural, is a form of social death enacted repeatedly, domestically, and in Kire's novel, at the hands of another woman.

II. CONTEXTUALIZING THE TEXT: NAGA SOCIETY, GENDER, AND ANGAMI WORLDVIEW

Easterine Kire, born in 1959 in Kohima, Nagaland, is not only the first published novelist from the Naga community but also a foundational figure in the emergence of a distinctly northeastern Indian literary voice. Her works consist of novels, poetry, fiction, children's literature, and cultural documentation. Kire's works clearly reflect her desire to protect, interrogate, and preserve the indigenous oral traditions, histories, and social realities of the Naga community. Writing from what Kire has described as triple marginalization—as Naga, as woman, and as tribal indigenous person—Kire maps this intersection into her fictions with extraordinary precision.

A Terrible Matriarchy is set among the Angami Naga, the group to which Kire herself belongs. The Angami are patrilineal, which means property and social authority are inherited by the male heir. This male inheritance bars women from inheriting land or money, a structural reality that is the ground from which gendered alimentary hierarchies grow. In such a society, the worth of women is primarily measured through domestic labor and their reproductive capability. This makes the control over food and its distribution one of the few domains of power available to older women, and this power, paradoxically, is exercised in favor of the very patriarchal order that subjugates them.

In the novel, Dielieno is sent to live with her grandmother at the age of five so that she can be raised properly. "You are not raising her properly. She will leave tomorrow for Mother's house and I don't want to hear any more arguments about this" (Kire 10). The name Dielieno itself in Angami refers to errand girl, which means that her identity is inscribed from birth as one of duties and function. Vibano's stated function in taking Lieno is to mould her into a good Naga wife and mother, and the kitchen is the main site of that moulding. The title's bitter irony resides precisely here: the household is matriarchal in the sense that its dominant personality is a female, yet it is terrible because that female authority is entirely devoted to the reproduction of patriarchal values with food as one of its primary instruments.

III. MEAT, MASCULINITY, AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE TABLE

Kire depicts food as the nutritional and symbolic economy of the Naga household and not merely as a foodstuff. It is a marker of social value and a language through which gender roles and hierarchies are communicated and consolidated. The novel's opening meat-distribution scene establishes the notion that food distribution is governed not by need but by whether the receiver is a girl or a boy. According to this notion, the body of the male child is understood to deserve more, to warrant more, and to be more valuable in its claim upon the household's resources.

This language of food is made explicit in Vibano's direct edicts throughout the novel. Her maxim that "a male child is to be brought up very carefully. When he is grown, he will take care of all of us" (Kire 238) operates as ideological justification for the food inequality in the house. It runs on the belief that boys are the future of the household; they are its heirs, its protectors, and its economic agents. Their bodies and needs are privileged in the distribution of food. The girl's body, however, is seen as a future wife's body, and she is destined to leave; investment in it is, therefore, not worth the household's best resources.

What makes Kire's treatment particularly acute is her attention to how Dielieno receives this learning not as an abstract teaching but through daily lived experiences. She is not directly taught that her brothers are more valuable; she feels it, in the inferior piece of meat on her plate, in the empty lap of her grandmother which is only meant for her grandsons, and in the money that is only given to her brothers as a token of love. Dielieno's body learns its subordination before her mind can articulate it.

Traditionally, in Angami houses, meat was associated with feasting, as a representation of communal hospitality, and as a matter of prestige signifying the economy of the village. The significance of meat extended beyond everyday household chores. These traditional aspects do not disappear in the domestic sphere Kire portrays; they are confined and domesticated within the grandmother's kitchen, where the hierarchy of pieces at the family table is a small replication of the hierarchy of prestige that

structures Angami society. When the grandmother, Vibano, gives her grandson the choicest cut, she is in some sense enacting a larger social cosmology.

Kire also draws attention to how the categorization of food extends beyond the binary of meat and no meat to function as a moral taxonomy. A critical distinction in the novel falls between women who can cook food and women who brew rice beer. Those who cook food are seen as respectable, whereas those who brew the rice for beer are considered despicable. This categorization makes the chore of making food a measure of feminine virtue, adding another layer to the alimentary structure of the household. Women are not differentiated from men through food alone; they are also compared and differentiated from each other, sorted into hierarchies of respectability that further fragment any potential collective solidarity.

IV. THE KITCHEN AS CLASSROOM: FOOD, DISCIPLINE, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY

If the dining table functions as the site where unequal patterns of consumption are enacted, the kitchen becomes the space in which the ideology sustaining those inequalities is cultivated. Vibano leaves little room for ambiguity when she insists that girls are expected to "marry and have children and be able to cook and weave clothes and look after the household." Rather than presenting these responsibilities as one possible life trajectory, the novel frames them as the only socially acceptable future available to a girl. Kire places this prescription in devastating juxtaposition with Lieno's internal aspiration: "I could not fall asleep for a long time. I thought about school and how nice it would be to learn to write and sing and draw as my brothers did" (Kire 25). This contrast exposes the gulf between the life imposed upon Lieno through patriarchal expectations and the life she quietly desires for herself. The grandmother's vision of domestic womanhood thus stands in direct opposition to Lieno's yearning for education, creativity, and self-determination.

The kitchen is thus a pedagogical institution at the household scale. Borrowing from Althusser (1971), it can be understood as a miniature ideological apparatus where dominant social values are reproduced through everyday domestic practices. Within this space, Lieno undergoes a continuous process of instruction in cooking, weaving, and household management. These activities are not presented merely as practical competencies but as natural extensions of femininity and essential preparation for her prescribed future. Bourdieu's notion of habitus, which refers to the deeply ingrained habits, dispositions, and perceptions that individuals acquire through socialization within a particular social context, is particularly relevant in explaining this process. Through repeated domestic practices, Lieno gradually internalizes a gendered habitus that shapes her perceptions of what is normal, what is desirable, and what is socially acceptable. Consequently, long before she is capable of questioning these expectations, the domestic sphere has already disciplined her body and consciousness into accepting patriarchal norms as natural.

What gives the kitchen its particular power is that it is also the site of the most essential form of human care: the preparation of nourishment. Lieno is taught that cooking is love, that feeding the family is the highest form of female virtue. By equating domestic work with affection, the novel reveals how patriarchal culture transforms unpaid household labor into a moral obligation rather than a social expectation. This emotional framing discourages resistance, as any rejection of domestic responsibilities can easily be interpreted as rejection of love itself, inviting accusations of selfishness and a failure to be an ideal woman. This dimension of food labor is, thus, recruited into the service of women's unpaid and unacknowledged domestic labor.

The contrast between Dielieno's access to school and her own confinement to the domestic sphere dramatizes the zero-sum quality of this system: every hour spent in the kitchen is an hour not spent at school. The allocation of time in the house mirrors its allocation of food: boys receive more valuable resources such as education and better pieces of meat, whereas girls receive what is left of them. Kire shows this not as exceptional cruelty but as the unremarkable functioning of a system that has normalized the extortion of female labor and denied their development.

V. VIBANO AND THE TERRIBLE LOGIC OF INTERNALIZED PATRIARCHY

The most provocative element of Kire's novel lies in the bitter irony of its title—*A Terrible Matriarchy*. The primary agent of Dielieno's subjugation is not a man but a woman, her own grandmother Vibano. Vibano, in the domestic sphere, is an absolute authority. She decides who cooks, who cleans, who eats what, and who is allowed to go to school. Her authority within the domestic domain is primary and immediate. Yet every decision she makes reinforces, instead of challenging, the patriarchal order that subordinates women. As Elwin observes, the first wife in a Naga household traditionally occupies the position of domestic head and exercises considerable authority over everyday family affairs (Elwin 450). Kire complicates this cultural

reality by showing how Vibano's authority, rather than questioning patriarchal norms, becomes the very mechanism through which they are preserved and transmitted across generations. Her power exemplifies the workings of internalized patriarchy, where female authority reinforces, rather than resists, structures of gendered subordination.

Dielieno's mother illuminates the structural roots of Vibano's worldview. Vibano's ideals were formed in a system in which "a woman without a male heir would receive shelter from her in-laws, yet her daughter was ineligible to inherit the father's property or status." Vibano's domestic tyranny is born not of malice but, as the text suggests, of a belief in the absolute necessity of preserving traditions that she experienced as a girl child, endured as a woman, and now administers as an elder. She aims to pass on the same patriarchal norms in the name of tradition when she ladles the best piece of meat into her grandson's bowl. She is not consciously against any woman but rather acting in accordance with a social system she herself has internalized.

This is the phenomenon that scholars have termed "internalized patriarchy," or in Bourdieu's framing, the symbolic violence through which the dominated come to participate in their own domination. Vibano does not see herself as an agent of oppression but rather as a guardian of tradition. She believes that she is equipping Lieno for the only life that this society will let a woman live peacefully. Her control of the kitchen and the table is, as per the novel, not simply power but compensatory power, as the household is the only domain of authority she has ever been permitted. This power is then exercised with the ferocity of someone who has had everything else taken away.

Kire's narrative makes it clear that Vibano's own suffering as a woman in a patriarchal society has not produced solidarity with Dielieno, but its opposite. Vibano's internalization of the system's values is so deep that the onset of menstruation in the young girls of the house is called a curse. This is perhaps the most devastating fragment of the novel: the grandmother who dispenses lesser portions of meat is also the grandmother who has come to see female life itself as a deficiency, a curse, a problem to be managed rather than an individual life to be nourished.

Kire does not let the reader resort to blaming men for Dielieno's suffering, nor does she allow the comfort of exonerating Vibano on the basis of her own victimization. Instead, the novel holds both truths simultaneously. Vibano is a product of the oppression of the system and also becomes the agent of that oppression. Her power over food is real, and its effects are excruciating. Kire's treatment of both angles and her refusal to simplify is one of the novel's greatest literary achievements.

VI. HUNGER AS CONSCIOUSNESS: RESISTANCE, REFUSAL, AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE BODY

Food in *A Terrible Matriarchy* is primarily a weapon of control as well as the site of resistance. Dielieno's hunger—her unsatisfied appetite due to insufficient food, her figurative hunger for education, for freedom, for a life more than just the domestic sphere—becomes the novel's primary catalyst for conscious awareness. Dielieno does not just want more meat or more time at the table; she wants the right to be a full subject rather than living a deprived life of fragments. This is evident from Dielieno's words: "Well I don't care to be a good woman. I shan't ever be a good woman, whatever that is" (Kire 37).

The novel's most poignant image of this doubled hunger comes in Dielieno's childhood inability to sleep after Vibano's statements about girls' proper destiny. Lying awake, Dielieno thinks not of food but of school, of learning to write and sing and draw like her brothers. The hunger for knowledge and freedom runs parallel with the hunger for food and nourishment. Food and education are the prime necessities of Dielieno, and she is denied adequate resources in both.

Kire's treatment of resistance through food is notably unsentimental. Dielieno does not go for dramatic confrontations at the dining table; she does not refuse to eat in protest or try to oppose the hierarchy through a single act of defiance. Her resistance is incremental, almost invisible, enacted through persistence in attending school, through the interior life of her consciousness as rendered by the novel, and through the small acts of non-compliance that do not hint at overt rebellion. This reflects the reality of resistance within patriarchal domestic structures: it is more often a matter of small refusals and persistent presence than heroic confrontations.

The novel also deploys moments of collective female food preparation as quiet forms of solidarity that challenge the grandmother's control over food. When women cook together, share meals during community events, or support each other outside the strict hierarchy of the household, they create an alternative social space based on mutual care rather than authority. Kire does not idealize these moments or suggest that they completely overcome patriarchal dominance. Instead, she portrays them with warmth and sincerity, showing that even small acts of cooperation and shared nourishment can become meaningful and can be a limited, small act of resistance.

The novel's engagement with the spiritual world adds another dimension to this hunger. Dielieno observes, "Isn't it strange that dreams always come true especially if they are dreams of death in the family?" (Kire 143). This sensitivity to the spirit world, to the communications that arrive through channels outside the physical world, suggests that the spiritual realm is a place where Vibano cannot control or ration. In her dreams, Dielieno receives what the dinner table withholds: a sense of her own place in a larger order and a connection to the ancestors and the invisible world that does not pass through the grandmother's hands.

VII. HUNTING PATRIARCHY: DEATH, SPIRITS, AND THE POLITICS OF UNFULFILLED HUNGER

One of the novel's most striking ideas is that patriarchal power extends beyond the living world into the realm of the dead. Kire writes, "and the most feared of spirits were those of old women" (Kire). This arresting sentence performs several functions simultaneously. It confirms the oral and cosmological world in which the novel is embedded. It suggests that women's power—the capacity to disturb and disrupt—is recognized precisely in the form of a feared ghost. And, most pointedly in the context of food politics, it implies that the authority, recognition, and power over their own nourishment denied to women in life returns in death as something terrible and uncontrollable.

The figure of the feared old woman's spirit can be read as the return of the repressed. The power that the system denied Vibano and women like her during their lifetimes—the power to refuse, to demand, to take the best choice of meat cuts for themselves—re-emerges after death in a form that cannot be managed by the household's food-dispensing rituals. In many indigenous cultures, feeding the ancestors is a way of placating them, of extending the economy of nourishment beyond the boundary of the living. That the most feared spirits are of old women suggests that the ancestors most in need of placation, most likely to be unsatisfied, are those who spent their lives dispensing sustenance they were themselves denied.

This reading is reinforced by the novel's broader treatment of death and memory. The spirit that returns, unsatisfied, is the spirit of one who could not live out their life to the fullest. The women of Kire's Nagaland, cut short not by premature death but by the premature death of aspirations that the grandmother's domestic regime enforces, are in a spiritual sense already haunting the household. This signifies that their unfed hunger persists.

VIII. POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES: SITUATING KIRE IN CRITICAL DISCOURSE

Placing *A Terrible Matriarchy* within the broader field of postcolonial feminist writing on food and power illuminates both its specificity and its connections to a global archive of women's literary engagement with alimentary politics. Across South Asian women's fiction, the kitchen has long served as a site where gender, class, caste, and colonial legacies intersect. Kire's intervention is distinguished by its specific grounding in the indigenous Naga experience, at a triple remove from the dominant Indian literary mainstream: tribal, northeastern, and feminine.

Sachdeva and Rani (2023) rightly invoke Virginia Woolf's observation in *A Room of One's Own* that writers seldom spare a word for what was eaten, and trace how food mediates gender discrimination from Woolf's luncheon parties to Vibano's kitchen. The present paper builds on this foundation by extending the analysis to the specifically Bourdieuan dynamics of habitus formation: the grandmother's kitchen does not merely reflect existing inequality but actively produces the gendered subject through daily alimentary ritual.

Reading Kire alongside Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's foundational question "Can the subaltern speak?" raises a subsidiary question particularly pertinent to *A Terrible Matriarchy*: can the subaltern eat? Spivak argues that the subaltern subject is systematically denied the epistemic conditions under which she can make herself heard within dominant discourses (Spivak 271–313). Kire's novel asks a more material version of the same inquiry: under what conditions does the gendered and marginalized subject receive adequate sustenance—physical, intellectual, emotional—to sustain a fully human life? The answer is grim within the patriarchal household as Vibano administers it: the girl child does not eat enough, in either the literal or the figurative sense. She cannot speak, and she cannot eat, and these two deprivations, Kire's novel suggests, are aspects of the same structural exclusion.

The concept of culinary capital is particularly relevant here. Vibano's mastery of the kitchen, her authority over the household's food supply, is real but bounded: it operates within and for the patrilineal order, not against it. Her culinary capital is the capital of the warden, not the liberated subject. It confirms the system even as it gives her a form of power within it. As Counihan argues, food is both a means of differentiation and a channel of connection (Counihan 12), and in Vibano's household, differentiation overwhelmingly dominates, with connection offered only to male grandchildren as a mechanism of securing their future loyalty.

IX. THREE GENERATIONS, THREE HUNGERS: NINO, VIBANO, AND DIELIENO

One of the structural achievements of Kire's novel is its multi-generational scope. The novel is not only Dielieno's story but the story of three generations of Naga women, each shaped by the same alimentary and patriarchal order but positioned differently within it. Reading the three women together—Vibano the grandmother, Nino the mother, and Dielieno the granddaughter—reveals how the food politics of the household are reproduced, mutated, and tentatively challenged across time.

Nino, Dielieno's mother, occupies the most passive position in the household's alimentary hierarchy. She has no name of her own in the novel's social fabric beyond her relational identity as wife and mother. She is thoroughly defined by her function, so much so that her individuality is only seen in fragments. The fear she carries in Vibano's presence, her careful management of her own behavior so as not to invite her mother-in-law's disapproval, reflects the full internalization of a system in which a woman's continued access to the household's resources—including food and shelter—depends on her compliance with gender norms.

Vibano, as we have seen, exercises the only form of power available to her through the administration of the household's food resources. But Kire is careful to show that this kind of power is ultimately hollow. Vibano's preferred grandson becomes an alcoholic; the family's male heirs do not, in fact, take care of everyone as her ideology promised; and the women who survive and flourish at the novel's end—Dielieno and Vimenuo—are the very women who refused to be entirely contained by the politics of kitchen and patriarchy.

Dielieno's partial victory at the novel's end, when she becomes a teacher, fulfilling the education that the kitchen's curriculum tried to replace, is framed not as a triumph over tradition but as a persistence through it. She has been fed inadequately at the grandmother's table, but she found alternative sources of nourishment and sustained herself through school and her own stubborn will. Her decision to forgive Vibano on her deathbed reflects not an acceptance of her grandmother's actions but a refusal to inherit the bitterness produced by an oppressive system. Through this act, Kire suggests that breaking the cycle of resentment is itself a meaningful form of resistance.

X. KIRE'S LITERARY CONTRIBUTION: A TERRIBLE MATRIARCHY AS AN ALIMENTARY ARCHIVE

The enduring significance of *A Terrible Matriarchy* lies in its ability to foreground the experiences of Naga women as an important body of cultural and literary knowledge. By bringing these experiences into critical discourse, Kire makes them accessible for scholarly interpretation and broader literary engagement. The novel argues that the lives of Naga women are not marginal but fundamental to the preservation of Naga society, the shaping of cultural identity, and a meaningful understanding of how gender inequality operates within a particular socio-cultural context.

By making food the central framework of her narrative, Kire aligns herself with a feminist literary tradition that views the domestic sphere as a crucial site for understanding social power. The novel demonstrates that food is far more than a basic necessity—it is a means through which hierarchies, values, and identities are created and maintained. Decisions about who receives nourishment and in what measure reflect broader questions of dignity, belonging, and human worth. Thus, when the grandmother consistently reserves the choicest pieces of meat for her grandsons, she is not simply expressing personal preference but reinforcing a patriarchal worldview that shapes the values and consciousness of the next generation.

As an archive, the novel preserves details of Naga domestic food culture—such as the specific cuts of meat, the preparation of rice, the brewing of rice beer, and the ceremonial meals that mark life transitions—with the meticulous care of a writer who understands that these details are at risk of being lost. In this sense, Kire's food writing performs a conservationist function alongside its critical one. The very alimentary practices that the novel critiques as vehicles of inequality are also the practices through which indigenous Naga identity is enacted, and Kire documents them with the precision of someone who wants them to be remembered even as she insists on their transformation.

XI. CONCLUSION: CONSUMING AND BEING CONSUMED

The politics of food in *A Terrible Matriarchy* ultimately reveal a fundamental paradox at the heart of women's experience in patriarchal domestic structures. The person who produces the food does not eat as well as the person who merely receives it. This paradox—that those who feed others are themselves hungry—runs through the entire novel as both material fact and metaphor. Vibano's kitchen becomes a space where meals ensure the family's survival, yet their unequal distribution strengthens

gendered hierarchies. In this sense, women are not only the producers of food but are also consumed by the unpaid labor, expectations, and domestic roles that reduce them to function rather than acknowledging their individuality.

Kire's novel does not end in liberation. It ends in a provisional, hard-earned opening toward a different future for Dielieno. The Bildungsroman does not resolve into easy feminist triumph. What it offers instead is something more concrete: a precise and honest account of what it costs to grow up as a female in a domestic economy organized around the differential worth of male and female bodies, and what it means to keep going, in the face of that cost, to want something more than what the household table has to offer. Dielieno's childhood insight, "My grandmother didn't like me. I knew this when I was about four and a half" (Kire 1), becomes, as the novel proceeds, not a wound but a knowledge. She realizes that the world's arrangement of nourishment is unjust and that this injustice can be survived, named, and refused.

By approaching food as a central literary and analytical framework, this study has demonstrated that *A Terrible Matriarchy* by Easterine Kire deserves an important place not only in the canon of Northeast Indian English literature but in broader conversations about feminist food studies, postcolonial domestic fiction, and the literary representation of indigenous women's experience. Kire's novel illustrates that a chore as simple as the distribution of food within a household can reflect deeper social values concerning power, belonging, and human worth. Through the everyday rituals of the Naga kitchen, Kire exposes the structure of inequality that shapes the lives of Naga women. Thus, we can conclude that in Dielieno's persistent, aching hunger for something more, Kire writes one of her most quietly devastating critiques.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Courage and Enchantment in Concert: A Thematic Study of C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*

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Abstract— C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* underlines moral growth by means of courage and temptation. This paper investigates how Lewis employs these motifs to provide moral and spiritual direction across the seven volumes of the series. Through Aslan, the Pevensie siblings, and Prince Caspian, Lewis reveals courage, selflessness, and tenacity. The temptations of Edmund, Eustace, and Digory reveal the hazards of greed, power, and moral uncertainty. Each book's bravery and temptation are investigated to see how they shape the journeys and narrative of the protagonists. Edmund's lies and atonement in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* show how courage and pardon transform lives. Prince Caspian and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* stress moral perseverance through internal and external struggles. Jill and Eustace's struggle to rescue Prince Rilian in *The Silver Chair* shows their resilience as well as the attraction of suffering and luxury. Lewis writes engaging stories with timeless human nature ideas, contrasting courage and temptation. Using *The Chronicles of Narnia* to highlight bravery and temptation, the paper next examines how these topics remain pertinent in contemporary literature and life.

Keywords— Bravery, temptation, character development, ethical guidance, moral integrity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, readers of C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* have been captivated by its intricate narrative, imaginative universe, and substantial moral messages. Lewis skillfully incorporates the themes of bravery and temptation into the framework of each novel, ultimately serving to guide the narrative. These topics not only serve as the driving force behind the narrative but also play an essential role in the growth of characters and the dissemination of the series' most important moral and spiritual lessons. By utilizing the heroic deeds of leaders like Aslan, the Pevensie siblings, and Prince Caspian, Lewis demonstrates the qualities of bravery, selflessness, and resiliency in the face of challenges. On the other hand, the temptations that characters such as Edmund, Eustace, and Digory experience bring to light the perils of wealth, power, and moral weakness.

This paper investigates how C.S. Lewis uses the themes of bravery and temptation throughout the seven volumes of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, paying particular attention to specific incidents and their impact on character development. We are able to acquire a greater awareness of the moral and spiritual teachings that Lewis delivers in his stories through the study of these issues, and we are also able to appreciate the continuous significance of these concerns in modern literature and life. *The Chronicles of Narnia* encourages readers to reflect on their own lives, which in turn motivates them to resist temptations that have the potential to change their course of action and to demonstrate bravery when confronted with challenging circumstances. It is abundantly clear that these topics continue to be relevant, as evidenced by the series' enduring popularity, which has enthralled readers of all ages and has remained a cherished classic in the field of children's literature. In addition to offering a

timeless analysis of the human spirit and the moral decisions that determine our identities, *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a testament to the virtues of bravery and the perils of falling into temptation.

This paper argues that Lewis uses the dialectical tension between courage and temptation across the series to construct a comprehensive moral framework that illustrates the necessity of virtue, the reality of moral choice, and the transformative power of redemption. Through the progression of characters across the seven volumes, Lewis demonstrates that courage is not the absence of fear but the triumph over self-interest, while temptation functions as the crucible in which character is forged and moral identity is revealed.

II. THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

2.1 Courage: Aslan's Sacrifice and the Pevensies' Bravery

Through the bravery of the Pevensie children and the selflessness of Aslan, the story of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* presents a significant examination of the concept of bravery. These events, which reflect the Christian metaphors common in C.S. Lewis's work, show how moral strength, compassion, and acts of heroism are all connected.

In light of Edmund's treachery, Aslan's willingness to sacrifice his life is the most courageous act he ever performs. Because he is innocent, Aslan freely observes the rules of Deep Magic in order to make up for Edmund's treachery, which ultimately prevents Edmund from being executed. The self-sacrifice that Aslan made exemplifies his extraordinary bravery, his profound compassion, and his unwavering dedication to doing what is right. According to Aslan, "the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards" (Lewis 1950, p. 159) in the event that a voluntary victim who had not committed any acts of treason was executed in place of a traitor. Lewis's detailed depiction of the degradation and suffering that Aslan endures at the hands of the White Witch and her henchmen makes it clear that his bravery is accompanied by suffering. It is through this act of sacrifice that the concepts of atonement and ultimate victory over evil are captured.

Additionally, the Pevensie children exhibit bravery throughout their voyage, particularly at the pivotal encounter with the army of the White Witch. Despite their initial reluctance, Lucy and Susan demonstrate their unwavering dedication by assisting Aslan throughout the most challenging time of his life and then by providing emotional support to those who were injured after the battle. Unusually embracing a leadership role, Peter shows bravery in his confrontation with Maugrim, the wolf: "Peter felt he was going to be sick; he did not feel particularly brave. Still, that had no bearing on what he had to accomplish" (Lewis 1950, p. 126). Edmund's transformation is similarly remarkable; he charges into battle to destroy the witch's wand, thereby redeeming himself with bravery. Through the use of these illustrations, it is demonstrated that bravery in Narnia is not the absence of fear but rather the determination to do justly in the presence of dread.

2.2 Temptation: Edmund and the White Witch's Allure

C.S. Lewis addresses the moral failings of human nature and the consequences of giving in to temptation through Edmund's struggle with ambition and avarice in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. The underlying theme of temptation is best illustrated by Edmund's attraction to the White Witch.

The first conversation that Edmund has with the White Witch highlights the sly and cunning nature of temptation. The Witch uses Turkish Delight, which is a symbol of luxury and unbridled desire, to ensnare Edmund. "The more he ate, the more he longed... In addition, he was unaware that this was an enchanted Turkish treat, so anyone who tried it wanted more" (Lewis 1950, p. 38). Consequently, Edmund is even more captivated by her influence as a result of the fascinating essence of Turkish Delight, which encapsulates the overpowering appeal of material desires. Through the use of his anxieties and the competition he has with his siblings, the Witch entices Edmund with the promise of power. She praises him with the possibility of kingship and elevates him beyond his siblings by saying, "You are the most beautiful and the most intelligent young man I have ever met. I would like to have a beautiful young man whom I could raise as Prince and who would become King of Narnia once I am gone" (Lewis 1950, p. 39). Edmund's perception of the witch's true nature and goals is obscured as a result of this appeal to his ego, which underscores the fact that temptation frequently masquerades as good behavior.

Nevertheless, as Edmund's voyage progresses, the consequences of succumbing to temptation become increasingly apparent. His early drive for wealth and dominance, while leading to treachery and pain, also establishes the foundation for future atonement. In the process of coming to terms with the witch's wickedness and the hollowness of her promises, Edmund realizes that giving in to temptation only causes harm to himself and others. By examining moral fallibility and salvation through

Edmund's temptation, Lewis brings to the attention of readers the importance of resisting the allure of impulses that lead to self-serving behavior.

III. PRINCE CASPIAN

3.1 Courage: Caspian's Valiant Struggle to Reclaim His Throne

Throughout the course of *Prince Caspian*, bravery emerges as a primary driving force behind the protagonist's efforts to reclaim his rightful realm and restore Narnia to the glory it once possessed. It is a testament to Prince Caspian's bravery and his commitment to justice that he is willing to lead the Old Narnians in their fight against King Miraz, despite the fact that the odds are stacked against him.

The moment Caspian discovers the true history of Narnia, which his uncle Miraz has kept hidden from him his entire life, his bravery becomes evident. As a result of being influenced by tales of Aslan and the Old Narnians, Caspian begins to question his upbringing and begins to rebel against his allegiance to the leader of Telmarine. Despite their fractured state and long history of failing, he bravely takes on the task of uniting the Old Narnians: "We have lived too long in secret, and the hour has struck. If Narnia is to be free again, we have to be audacious and act" (Lewis 1951, p. 89). Caspian's ability to inspire loyalty among several factions, including dwarfs, centaurs, and intelligent animals, demonstrates his moral strength and leadership.

Caspian's bravery is demonstrated by his decision to engage King Miraz in close quarters fighting. Caspian admits, despite his youth and inexperience in comparison to Miraz and his veteran army, the conflict is necessary to restore justice in Narnia. When faced with uncertainty, he finds strength from the legacy of the Pevensies and Aslan's guidance. He says, "I will not watch Narnia suffer under tyranny. If it is necessary for me to gamble everything, then so be it" (Lewis 1951, p. 132). It is not the absence of fear that demonstrates bravery in Caspian's journey; rather, it is the determination to do justly in the face of danger. The fact that Caspian is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of the Old Narnians is evidence of his integrity and his belief in the justness of the cause.

3.2 Temptation: Doubt and Power

In *Prince Caspian*, temptation manifests itself as the struggle against self-doubt and the allure of power through the characters. C.S. Lewis makes use of these concepts to emphasize the moral integrity of Prince Caspian in contrast to the destructive ambition of King Miraz, highlighting the inner difficulties that are associated with leadership and responsibility.

The most illustrative example of the bad outcomes that might result from unbridled ambition is King Miraz. The fact that he successfully ascended to the throne through dishonesty and brutality illustrates his descent into immorality. In order to achieve dominance, Miraz eliminates any potential danger, including the Old Narnians and Caspian's father, in a meticulous manner. His desire to have complete control over everything motivates him to do this. The fact that he turned down the legitimate demands of other people demonstrates the corrupting impact of ambition. In his speech, Miraz reveals his arrogance by saying, "The boy is nothing but a relic from a bygone age. Narnia belongs to the strong; I shall see it molded in my image" (Lewis 1951, p. 67). His never-ending pursuit of power ultimately leads to his downfall, which serves as a somber lesson on the consequences of giving in to such temptation.

Prince Caspian, on the other hand, is confronted with the internal temptation of self-doubt, particularly in light of his leadership role in the war against Miraz. Caspian's periods of doubt mirror his awareness of the magnitude of the work that lies ahead of him and his fear of failing. He once asks, "How can I, a young man who has never been in a battle, hope to lead Narnia to victory? What would happen if I failed to meet their expectations?" Caspian, on the other hand, is able to overcome this doubt by having faith in Aslan and seeking advice from his friends, including the Pevensies and the Trufflehunter. Miraz, on the other hand, is unable to fight gloom and keep his moral integrity. Lewis uses these many characters to examine the consequences of temptation, whether it is power obsession or paralysis through ambiguity. In the end, these tests mold Caspian into a leader who is both fair and courageous.

IV. THE VOYAGE OF THE DAWN TREADER

4.1 Courage: Reepicheep and the Journey East

Throughout the course of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, each character displayed bravery in a variety of different ways, although none more so than Reepicheep, whose unyielding determination to reach Aslan's Country is a beacon of courage and

faith. This is due to the fact that the heroes travel to the easternmost point of the earth and face both moral and physical challenges.

The story depends much on Reepicheep's bravery. Driven by his desire to reach Aslan's Country, the brave mouse has a relentless belief in the justness of his goal. Often inspiring others, his boldness manifests in his clear declaration of readiness to travel alone if necessary:

"I have made my own plans. As long as I am able, I travel eastward in the Dawn Treader. When she lets me down, I swim east in my coracle. When she submerges, I shall swim east with my four limbs. When I am no longer able to swim and if I have not yet arrived at Aslan's Country, I will dive underwater with my nose in the direction of the sunrise" (Lewis 1952, p. 228).

This remark exemplifies his bravery since it demonstrates that he is willing to risk his life in order to accomplish what he has set out to do.

Each of the other characters demonstrates bravery throughout the course of their risky voyage. "Courage, dear heart," a voice murmurs, restating Lucy's faith and bravery (Lewis 1952, p. 146). Lucy demonstrates resilience at the Magician's House by confronting her worries and the seduction of vanity while she is reading the magic book. During the course of the journey, both Edmund and Eustace develop a greater sense of bravery. Eustace, in particular, undergoes a transition from a self-centered youngster to a person who is humble and courageous. This transformation is confirmed upon his atonement as a dragon. Based on these models, C.S. Lewis asserts that bravery encompasses both physical and moral dimensions. The characters' bravery encompasses not only the conquering of external threats but also the confronting of their own inner concerns and limitations, highlighting the concept of human development through the performance of courageous deeds.

4.2 Temptation: Challenges and Trials

During the course of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the crew is subjected to tests that evaluate their moral integrity and willpower, and temptation influences them to a significant degree. By conquering such hurdles and confronting their own limitations, these events demonstrate how people develop as individuals.

A powerful illustration of the way in which Eustace's avarice and egocentrism led him to succumb to temptation is the transformation of Eustace into a dragon. Eustace succumbs to his hunger for riches and domination when he finds a dragon's treasure: "Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon itself" (Lewis 1952, p. 108). Due to the fact that it is a physical manifestation of his inner flaws, his transformation compels him to confront his own tendency toward avarice and loneliness. Through the occurrence of this episode, Eustace acquires humility and selflessness, which consequently marks the beginning of his transformation into a more moral person.

Lucy's obsession with the spellbook is another Magician's House temptation. Due to the fact that the book contains a spell that gives her the ability to become the most beautiful woman in the world, she experiences feelings of insecurity and envy, particularly with regard to her older sister Susan. On the other hand, she does not accept the appeal after hearing Aslan's voice, which says, "Courage, dear heart" (Lewis 1952, p. 146). The moral fortitude that Lucy possesses and her capacity to prioritize morality over petty ambitions are both highlighted in this scene. On the Island of Dreams, the group confronts their deepest fears and faces temptation. Their bravery is undermined by the desire to escape their obligations, despite their trust in Aslan. During these exchanges, C.S. Lewis evaluates a person's character based on the temptation they face. The struggles that each character goes through highlight the primary spiritual symbolism of the story, which is that overcoming temptation facilitates the development of one's moral character and prepares one for the journey to Aslan's Country.

V. THE SILVER CHAIR

5.1 Courage: Jill and Eustace's Mission to Rescue Prince Rilian

Due to the fact that Jill and Eustace are embarking on a perilous journey to rescue Prince Rilian from his captivity, *The Silver Chair* places a significant emphasis on fearlessness. They face physical danger, betrayal, and uncertainty during their journey; nonetheless, they are able to persevere because of their confidence in Aslan's leadership and their strengthening of their own inner strength.

Beginning with the fact that she takes on the burden of remembering the four signs that Aslan provides to lead their hunt, Jill demonstrates a great deal of bravery from the very beginning. Despite the fact that she was initially afraid and uncomfortable,

Jill demonstrates resilience as she endures the difficulties that they encountered on their voyage. The fact that she disobeys the Green Lady's enchantment and continues on with the quest is a particularly clear indication of her determination in the Underworld. The moment Rilian begs her to destroy his silver chair, she is able to overcome her anxiety and do her work. She also adds, "We have to trust Aslan's signs, no matter what" (Lewis 1953, p. 196).

Eustace demonstrates a tremendous deal of bravery, which is a continuation of his transformation that occurred previously in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. In addition to the physical challenges he must overcome, such as enduring severe storms and traversing Ettinsmoor, he must also overcome moral challenges such as hopelessness. When Eustace encounters Prince Rilian and the Green Lady, who are both under the influence of the witch, he stubbornly fights the witch's attempts to mislead and fool them, and his bravery is put to the test to a significant extent: "We know who we are, and we serve Aslan. Your magic cannot turn the truth" (Lewis 1953, p. 202). Lewis emphasizes the need for faith and determination in order to overcome internal as well as external obstacles through the use of bravery. The fact that Jill and Eustace remained true in the face of danger and dishonesty highlights their moral development and growing dependence on Aslan. Since they act in the face of uncertainty and fear in order to accomplish their goal, their courage is proactive rather than merely reactive.

5.2 Temptation: The Allure of Comfort and Hopelessness

At the same time that Jill, Eustace, and Puddleglum are confronted with the illusions of the Lady of the Green Kirtle and the suffocating temptation of Underland, these tests evaluate their faith and tenacity. C.S. Lewis examines the appeal of comfort and suffering in *The Silver Chair*, demonstrating how these factors could inspire people to abandon their calling.

Aiming to cause the characters to experience a false sense of security and cooperation, the Lady of the Green Kirtle makes use of enchantment as a strong enticement. Her magic creates an otherworldly mist that hides their sense of vision, drawing them to embrace the Underland as their reality. At this point of dishonesty, she questions the existence of Narnia, Aslan, and the sun, therefore reducing their convictions to simple illusions: "There never was any world except mine... Neither Narnia nor Overland nor the sun" (Lewis 1953, p. 191). This enchantment takes advantage of their exhaustion and brief pessimism in order to entice them to give up on their objective and enjoy a comfortable life under her influence.

The fierce opposition that Puddleglum brings to the table is a paradigm rejection of this attraction. This courageous act releases the magic and fuels their will, despite the fact that the possibility of their existence exists only within his imagination. He boldly states his confidence in Aslan and Narnia, saying:

"Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things... Then all I can say is that the invented things appear a lot more crucial than the actual ones" (Lewis 1953, p. 192).

The Underland provides a reprieve from the challenges that the journey has presented by appealing to the protagonists in a sinister manner. The dreary atmosphere encourages pessimism; however, the group fights hopelessness by following Aslan's signals and the aim of saving Prince Rilian. By utilizing these temptations to study the spiritual conflicts of doubt and complacency, Lewis emphasizes that true courage lies in rejecting false comforts and steadfastly following one's values.

VI. THE HORSE AND HIS BOY

6.1 Courage: Shasta's Search for His True Identity

Courage is a prominent theme in *The Horse and His Boy*, particularly in the context of Shasta's journey to discover his true identity and fulfill his destiny. From the moment Shasta makes the decision to leave the terrible life he has lived in Calormen and travel a perilous path to reach Narnia and free himself, his bravery is evident. As he confronts fear, uncertainty, and the unexpected, his efforts demonstrate both physical bravery and a growing fortitude within him.

In the beginning, Shasta demonstrates bravery when he listens in on his adopted father, Arsheesh, negotiating to sell him to the Tarkaan. Shasta, who has a limited understanding of the world, decides to flee with a firm determination: "He had not yet learned that if you do one good deed, your reward usually is to be set to do another and harder and better one" (Lewis 1954, p. 8). This event marks the beginning of his journey of self-discovery as he explores a foreign world accompanied only by Bree, the talking horse.

Shasta faces a range of challenges throughout the journey, testing his bravery. From evading the Tarkaan's search to traversing the challenging desert walk, he always manages to triumph over his fears. One of the most significant events that takes place during his solo journey across the mountains is when he experiences extreme loneliness and hopelessness and finally encounters

Aslan's guiding presence. "Who are you? He mumbled something. The Voice described him as 'one who has waited long for you to speak'" (Lewis 1954, p. 175). This meeting confirms Shasta's fate as the forgotten prince of Archenland, enabling him to continue his progress.

The bravery that Shasta displays is not just physical but also moral. Beginning as a timid child, Shasta matures into a courageous leader who, at last, accepts his own identity and becomes willing to take risks for the sake of others. In the story of Shasta, Lewis emphasizes the transformative force of bravery and the necessity of bravery in the process of self-discovery and the achievement of one's mission.

6.2 Temptation: Anxiety and Doubt

The Horse and His Boy explores the issue of temptation through the protagonists' experiences of fear and doubt, testing their willpower as they navigate the story. Due to the fact that Shasta and Aravis are confronted with circumstances in which temptations compromise their intended purpose, it is imperative that they have faith and perseverance in order to triumph over feelings of inner conflict.

The journey that Aravis takes demonstrates the allure of developing feelings of regret and melancholy regarding her past. From the beginning, Aravis, who was a Tarkheena and had been brought up in a lavish environment, considered her arranged marriage to be a more significant injustice than her participation in the cruel Calormene regime. During the course of the journey, she starts to confront the repercussions of her actions, particularly the fact that she abandoned her servant, who was forced to endure hardships at her expense. The judgment of Aslan manifests itself as an assault by a lion: "I have been humbled, and I deserved it" (Lewis 1954, p. 189). Aravis reflects on surrendering, considering whether or not she is worthy of taking it. Her conflict highlights the fact that self-doubt can be the result of fear of judgment and shame; Aslan's discipline is proof of grace and the prospect of being forgiven.

Shasta also succumbs to the allure of uncertainty, especially in his isolated moments. Not only is he separated from his comrades, but he is also burdened with the responsibility of notifying King Lune about the impending attack by the Calormene. He is filled with fear and trepidation. Nevertheless, his conversations with Aslan provide a new perspective on his uncertainties. "I was the lion that pushed you to team with Aravis. Among the dwellings of the dead, I was the cat that consoled you" (Lewis 1954, p. 175). This realization turns his anxiety into confidence by reassuring him that a higher purpose directed the hardships he faced. Because the development of the characters is dependent on resisting these temptations, the themes of trust, endurance, and the restorative power of Aslan's guidance are emphasized. Lewis uses the difficulties of uncertainty and fear to demonstrate how frequently temptation resides within the person.

VII. THE MAGICIAN'S NEPHEW

7.1 Courage: Digory and Polly's Adventures in Narnia

Particularly in the experiences of Digory and Polly as they witness the birth of Narnia and negotiate ethical and physical challenges, courage is a major theme in *The Magician's Nephew*. Their journey requires bravery in the face of unknown lands, magical forces, and moral dilemmas. Digory, in particular, demonstrates courage by confronting the witch Jadis and setting out to get the silver apple for his sick mother.

Digory's bravery comes into question when he and Polly unintentionally awaken Jadis in Charn. Digory suffers a duality of fear and obligation upon the discovery of her terrible powers: "He was nauseated by the atrocities Jadis had committed and, perhaps, somewhat nauseated by the prospect of her potential actions" (Lewis 1955, p. 52). Despite his anxiety, his ability to resist her influence marks his development from a shy young man into a paragon of moral fortitude. Jadis makes comments that play on Digory's deepest fears, saying, "Consider how fervently she desires it..." (Lewis 1955, p. 166). Digory's fortitude goes beyond simply surviving the physical journey to include conquering egotistical tendencies and trusting Aslan's wisdom.

The ultimate test of Digory's bravery comes when Aslan orders him to find an apple from a distant garden in order to protect Narnia. There are many dangers on this journey, the most notable of which is the temptation from Jadis. Jadis tries to force him to grab the fruit for his own benefit in order to heal his mother. As a result of her assistance in putting Digory in harm's way, Polly demonstrates bravery. Her unwavering commitment and sharp intelligence, particularly in comparison to Jadis, highlight the importance of bravery in the presence of others. The journey that Digory takes demonstrates that true bravery is derived from compassion, conviction, and moral rectitude. C.S. Lewis defines bravery as the ability to act wisely in the face of anxiety rather than as the absence of fear.

7.2 Temptation: Forbidden Knowledge and Power

In *The Magician's Nephew*, C.S. Lewis examines the issue of temptation through the seduction of forbidden knowledge and authority. Digory and Uncle Andrew are confronted with challenges that force them to choose between moral integrity and personal gain. Their interactions with magic and the witch Jadis bring to light the perils of unbridled ambition and the corrupting power that can be brought about by power.

Seeking magic for self-serving reasons rather than enlightenment, Uncle Andrew embodies the attraction of forbidden knowledge. He ignores moral concerns because he wants to be better than everyone else, which makes him obsessed with the rings that allow Digory and Polly to travel between worlds. He defends his careless experiments by saying, "Individuals like myself, endowed with concealed knowledge, are liberated from ordinary regulations as we are detached from mundane pleasures" (Lewis 1955, p. 23). Especially in calling Jadis to London, this vanity clouds his awareness of the dangers he causes. His fate—becoming a shy and weak servant to the very forces he sought to rule—showcases the consequences of using knowledge for egotistical ends.

On the other hand, Digory, who is tasked with retrieving the silver apple from Aslan's orchard, encounters a more complicated but equally perilous temptation. Jadis, who is aware of Digory's strong desire to heal his sick mother, extends an invitation to him to consume the fruit for his own benefit, saying, "Think about how desperately she wants it... If you truly liked her, you would not have any doubts about them" (Lewis 1955, p. 166). As a result of this episode, Digory is forced to confront his impulses as well as the ethical repercussions of his decisions. In contrast to Uncle Andrew, he does not take any action; rather, he relies on the knowledge that Aslan possesses rather than his own instincts. The manner in which he behaves lends credence to Lewis's viewpoint that genuine strength is derived not from the pursuit of power for one's own profit but rather from faith and obedience. Through the use of these various pictures, Lewis serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of unfettered ambition and the allure of utilizing authority without the proper responsibility. At long last, the narrative demonstrates that the pursuit of control is not the source of knowledge; rather, it is humility and faith in a higher moral framework that are the sources of knowledge.

VIII. THE LAST BATTLE

8.1 Courage: The Fight Against the Calormenes

Courage is a significant factor in *The Last Battle*, particularly when it comes to the opposition that King Tirian and his devoted followers face against the powerful army of the Calormene. During the most difficult time in the story, the bravery of Narnia's last defenders highlights the importance of loyalty, faith, and sacrifice.

King Tirian is a symbol of courageous leadership; he maintains his steadfast resolve in the face of the unavoidable demise of Narnia. His decision to go into combat demonstrates his unwavering commitment to truth and justice. Despite the fact that they are vastly outnumbered, he refuses to be passive after discovering the false Aslan and the dishonesty spread by Shift the Ape. He says, "By the Mane of Aslan, this is disgraceful! Let no Narnian support these nasty falsehoods" (Lewis 1956, p. 34). The fact that he understands that their fight is one of dignity rather than simply one of survival motivates him to inspire his supporters to fight injustice rather than giving in to hopelessness.

Among Tirian's companions, Jewel the Unicorn and the children Eustace and Jill show outstanding bravery. "If Aslan bestows upon me my voice, I shall use it for him," Jewel says; "if he bestows upon me strength, it is his strength with which I contend" (Lewis 1956, p. 120). Jewel's loyalty is unwavering to the very end. Though young and inexperienced in battle, Eustace and Jill voluntarily assist the Narnians, proving that heroism goes beyond simple physical strength and includes a dedication to justice. Tirian and his soldiers are unflinching even though defeat is almost certain. Their resistance reflects Lewis's belief that true bravery comes from a resolve to fight for justice in the face of insurmountable obstacles rather than triumph. The ultimate fight represents a moral struggle that emphasizes the continuous influence of faith and dedication among certain defeat, transcending simple military involvement.

8.2 Temptation: Despair and Deception

Particularly via Shift the Ape's manipulation and the false Aslan illusion, C.S. Lewis explores the enormous temptations of despair and dishonesty in *The Last Battle*. These temptations show how dishonesty and hopelessness could erode moral integrity and cause destruction, therefore testing the faith and strength of Narnia's people.

As he creates a fake Aslan to rule Narnia, the sharp and self-serving ape Shift captures the seductiveness of lies. Declaring, "I, Shift, the most sagacious of creatures, am the spokesperson for Aslan," he takes advantage of the naivety and faith of the Narnians (Lewis 1956, p. 26). Tash disturbs the true faith of Narnia by combining the respect of Aslan with the Calormene deity, therefore causing much uncertainty and enslavement. His dishonesty thrives since it offers authority and convenience, therefore satisfying the need for consistency even at the price of accuracy.

It is apparent that King Tirian's struggles as he watches Narnia collapse demonstrate the allure of hopelessness. He gives in to hopelessness for a brief moment as he witnesses the destruction of his dominion and the betrayal of his inhabitants, asking, "Is this the end of all life? How useful is bravery in this day and age?" (Lewis 1956, p. 78). His pessimism encapsulates the greatest temptation to abandon one's faith in the face of profound obscurity. In spite of this, he ultimately decides against it, opting to fight despite the fact that he is approaching an almost certain defeat. This decision serves to underline Lewis's viewpoint that genuine faith is put to the test in difficult circumstances.

The Dwarfs experience melancholy differently, but it still affects them. In light of the fact that they have been misled in the past, they raise objections to Aslan's return and declare, "The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs" (Lewis 1956, p. 148). Their lack of trust demonstrates how hopelessness can result in self-imposed isolation because it prevents them from making amends for their wrongdoing. Using these circumstances as a basis, Lewis issues a warning against the dishonest characteristics of lying and pessimism. Especially when faced with challenging circumstances, genuine faith and bravery are demonstrated by the fight against falsehood and the maintenance of confidence in goodness.

IX. CONCLUSION

C.S. Lewis skillfully weaves together the concepts of temptation and bravery throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia* to produce a complex narrative that imparts moral and spiritual truths appealing to readers of all ages. Lewis makes use of these concepts across the seven works in order to assist his characters in maturing, giving them the opportunity to question their beliefs, and ultimately guiding them toward atonement.

Characters like Aslan, the Pevensie children, and Prince Caspian frequently showcase the concept of heroism throughout the story. These characters demonstrate bravery, sacrifice, and resiliency when confronted with adversity. Their daring actions demonstrate the transformative power of bravery and the necessity of supporting justice because they reflect hope and inspiration among those who witness them. The theme of temptation is investigated through the challenges that characters such as Edmund, Eustace, and Digory face, confronted with the temptations of avarice, power, and ethical infirmity. These temptations test their willpower, ultimately assisting them in maturing and making amends; they serve as a reference point for pivotal moments in their journeys.

Edmund's betrayal and subsequent atonement in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* illustrate the transformative power of pardon and the necessity of atonement. The transformation of Eustace into a dragon in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* highlights the perils of avarice as well as the transformative power of self-awareness and the progression of human development. In addition to providing timeless reflections on the human condition, the skillful combination of courage and temptation that Lewis employs results in the creation of engaging stories.

The Chronicles of Narnia inspires readers to reflect on their lives, show bravery in the face of challenges, and reject distractions that could derail their path. It is abundantly evident that these topics continue to be relevant, as evidenced by the series' enduring popularity, which has enthralled readers of all ages and has remained a cherished classic in the field of children's literature. The series demonstrates that courage is not the absence of fear but the triumph over self-interest, while temptation functions as the crucible in which character is forged and moral identity is revealed.

Through the progression of characters across the seven volumes, Lewis constructs a comprehensive moral framework that illustrates the necessity of virtue, the reality of moral choice, and the transformative power of redemption. *The Chronicles of Narnia* stands as a powerful testament to the virtues of bravery and the dangers of giving in to temptation, provoking an exploration of the human spirit that is timeless and the moral judgments that determine our identities.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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English in Everyday Life: An Analysis of English Language Skills through Daily Conversation among Students

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Abstract— English is an important skill for students in the globalized world because it is used as an international language in many areas, such as education, technology, business, and communication. However, many students still struggle to use English actively, especially in speaking skills. One way to improve this ability is by making it a habit to use English in everyday conversations. This study aims to examine students' English language skills by looking at how they use English in daily conversations and to identify factors that affect the effectiveness of its application. The research uses a descriptive qualitative method with data collection techniques including observation and documentation. The research subject consists of students who have experience using English in daily communication activities, whether in school, family, or social interactions. The data collected was analyzed to find out the relationship between the intensity of English language use in daily conversations and the development of students' English language skills. The research results show that using English regularly in daily conversations has a positive impact on improving speaking ability, vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, and understanding of language structure. In addition, the habit of communicating in English has been shown to help students feel more confident when expressing their opinions and interacting with others. The factors that help improve this ability include a strong study motivation, a supportive environment for using English, access to learning materials, and regular practice done consistently. Using English in everyday conversations can be an effective way to help students improve their language skills continuously and apply them in real-life situations.

Keywords— English language skills, daily conversation, students' speaking ability.

I. INTRODUCTION

English has increasingly become the dominant medium of international communication in academia, business, and social life. As a global language, English proficiency is considered a critical skill for students aiming to participate in the modern world (Crystal, 2003; Purba et al., 2026). In Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory foreign language at all educational levels, yet many students continue to struggle with practical communicative competence despite years of formal instruction.

One of the most significant opportunities for authentic language practice lies in daily conversational interaction. Conversations serve as a natural laboratory for language use, providing learners with real-time practice that integrates multiple skills simultaneously. According to Nunan (1991), conversational interaction is central to second language acquisition (SLA) because it requires learners to negotiate meaning, adjust their speech, and employ communication strategies in spontaneous contexts.

The present study seeks to analyze the English language skills displayed through daily conversations among students at the Boarding School of Baitussalam, Simalungun, North Sumatra. This study examines the quality of students' communication in real life. Researchers can see to what extent students are able to use English in real communication situations. The research also aims to identify the barriers they face in using English and to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning process

implemented. The results of this analysis are expected to form the basis of developing more effective learning strategies to improve students' English communication skills in daily life and to meet the demands of globalization.

Specifically, this study examines the quality of students' speaking and listening skills, the grammatical and lexical features of student conversations, and the contextual factors that facilitate or hinder language skill development through daily interaction.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 English Language Skills in an EFL Context

In language learning, language skills are generally divided into four components: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These four skills do not stand alone—in real conversations, they are interrelated and complementary (Tarigan, 2015; Sinaga et al., 2025). However, in the context of everyday conversation, speaking and listening skills are certainly the most dominant.

In the context of Indonesia as an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) country, speaking skills are often considered the "pinnacle" of English language proficiency. Unlike ESL (English as a Second Language) countries where English is used as a daily language, in Indonesia English is only encountered in a limited way—primarily in classrooms, digital media, and certain professional contexts (Suyanto, 2010; Herman et al., 2026; Sitepu et al., 2026). This limited exposure makes developing speaking skills a challenge.

Research by Widiati and Cahyono (2006) conducted at several schools in Java found that students tend to be more confident in reading and writing skills than speaking. They concluded that the lack of opportunities to speak outside the classroom was one of the main factors limiting the development of Indonesian students' oral communication skills. In language learning, language skills are generally divided into four components: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These four skills do not stand alone—in real-life conversations, they are interrelated and complementary (Tarigan, 2015). However, in the context of everyday conversation, speaking and listening skills are certainly the most dominant.

2.2 Daily Conversation as a Language Learning Space

Talking is not just a way to communicate—it is also a very effective tool for learning. When two or more people talk, there is a process of negotiating meaning, correcting, and adapting language, which indirectly helps improve the linguistic skills of everyone involved. This view aligns with what Krashen (as cited in Suyanto, 2010) called "comprehensible input"—language input that is understandable and serves as the main fuel for language acquisition.

In sociolinguistic studies, Chaer and Agustina (2010) explain that verbal interactions in everyday life gradually shape a person's communicative competence. This process does not happen all at once, but through repeated experience with the language. The more someone participates in English conversations, even in informal settings, the more likely their language skills will improve.

Nurhayati (2016) found that students who actively use English in informal communication with their peers show a more significant improvement in speaking skills compared to those who only rely on classroom learning. This finding shows that the space for learning English should not be limited to just formal classroom settings.

2.3 Challenges of Indonesian Students in English Conversation

Speaking English in front of classmates, especially spontaneously, is a challenging experience for many Indonesian learners. This phenomenon, known in literature as foreign language anxiety, can make individuals feel nervous when speaking or listening. Hewi Murdaningsih (2014) notes that learners with significant language anxiety may avoid using English altogether, even if they have a good grasp of the language.

Moreover, anxiety is often compounded by an insufficient vocabulary. According to Lubis (2012), it is common for students to halt their speech mid-conversation, not because they lack comprehension but because they cannot find the right words in English. As a result, they may switch to using Indonesian or their native dialect during discussions. Furthermore, student dialogue frequently involves code-switching, a subject that has been deeply investigated and is not always unproductive.

Muslich (2010) suggests that this can be used as a planned communication tactic instead of an unintentional one. This occurrence is well recognized. Individuals may use it to clarify their message, strengthen their rapport with listeners, or express ideas that may not be easily translated into English.

2.4 The Influence of Environment and Motivation in Language Learning

The setting in which learning occurs significantly impacts language skill development. Suyanto (2010) states that environments encouraging the use of the target language—both in tangible and social aspects—can greatly enhance how often and how well students practice the language. A program that promotes the use of English outside the classroom can foster a much more beneficial learning atmosphere than one that restricts English usage to classroom activities only.

Motivation is another crucial element. Santoso (2018) researched in various schools in East Java and found that learners with strong integrative motivation—reflecting the intention to communicate successfully with native English speakers—improved their speaking abilities at a faster rate than those who learned English only for academic achievements or examinations.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Approach and Design

This research adopted a qualitative descriptive method. This method was chosen because the purpose of this study was not to quantify or compare, but rather to understand and explain a phenomenon in greater depth—in this context, how female students use English in their daily interactions. As Moleong (2017) noted, qualitative research allows researchers to capture the details and complexities of data that cannot be seen through numbers alone (Sihotang et al., 2026).

3.2 Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at the Boarding School of Baitussalam, Simalungun, North Sumatra. The school is an Islamic boarding school where students live on campus full-time, creating a unique environment for language practice. The school promotes English use through various programs and activities, though the extent of daily use varies among students.

The study involved 16 female students in the 11th grade of social studies at Baitussalam Islamic Boarding School, aged 15-16, who were selected as participants. This selection was deliberate because the 11th graders are seniors who have lived at Baitussalam Islamic Boarding School for a long time. Therefore, they are more comfortable and less reluctant to speak with their peers. The study focused on female students because the Islamic boarding school operates as a single-gender institution, with separate sections for male and female students, and the researcher had access to the female section of the school. Before the study began, all participants were given an explanation of the research objectives to facilitate their understanding.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected over two days, April 16-17, 2026, from 07.00-08.45 AM, utilizing three complementary methods:

- 1) **Participant Observation:** Researchers directly observed female students' interactions in various informal settings—such as the cafeteria, dormitory, sports field, and study groups. Field notes were used to record the patterns, frequency, and quality of English use observed.
- 2) **Direct Conversations:** Conversations were conducted with three selected pairs (a total of six female students), each lasting approximately 5-10 minutes. These sessions aimed to instill spontaneity in the students' everyday English, identifying the challenges they faced and their motivations.
- 3) **In-Depth Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with each of the three selected female students (one from each pair), lasting between 10-15 minutes. A semi-structured interview method was used to allow researchers to explore information more openly. The focus of the interviews included hobbies, interests, experiences learning English, and the students' perspectives on the use of English in everyday life. Data from these interviews were used to complement and strengthen the findings obtained from observations and conversations.

TABLE 1
IMPLEMENTATION OF RESEARCH TIME

No	Materials	Time
1	Direct Conversations	07.00-07.30
2	In-Depth Interviews	08.00-08.45

TABLE 2
OVERVIEW OF DATA COLLECTION

Techniques	Participant	Duration	Data Type
Participant Observation	12	2 days	Field Notes
Direct Conversations	6	10 minutes each	Field Notes
In-Depth Interviews	3	10-15 minutes/person	Interview Notes

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected through observations, conversations, and interviews were analyzed using a qualitative analysis method consisting of three steps: data simplification, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data simplification step, the researcher selected and grouped data related to the research theme. The data was then presented in narrative form for ease of understanding. The final step was drawing conclusions based on the patterns and findings emerging from all the analyzed data.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Key Language Skills in Daily Interactions

From the analysis of direct interactions, it is clear that speaking and listening skills are the most dominant in the students' daily activities. These two skills almost always appear in every conversation session observed, while reading and writing skills only emerge unexpectedly, such as when students read text messages or take short notes.

What is interesting is the interaction between these skills within a single conversation. While a student speaks, she also listens to the other person's response, responds verbally, and sometimes looks at the text written on her phone screen. This multitasking language process provides invaluable practice for developing language skills.



FIGURE 1: Direct Conversation with Partner A



FIGURE 2: Direct Conversation with Partner B

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION OF THE OCCURRENCE OF LANGUAGE SKILLS IN DAILY CONVERSATION

Language Skills	Proportion (%)	Ability Level	The Main Challenges Encountered
Speaking	35%	Intermediate	Fluency & Pronunciation
Listening	27%	Intermediate	Understanding Rapid Speech
Writing	8%	Basic-Intermediate	Grammar & Coherence
Reading	30%	Intermediate	Vocabulary Inference

4.2 Factors Influencing Daily English Use

Interview results revealed several key factors that influence how often and how well female students communicate in English in their daily lives.

- **The first factor, often highlighted, is peer influence.** As many as 76% of respondents stated that the English-speaking habits of their closest friends significantly influence their language use. Female students who interact with friends who are accustomed to using English in casual situations tend to speak English more often. This finding aligns with a study by Santoso (2018) on the role of internal motivation and the positive influence of the social environment in the language learning process.
- **The second factor is self-confidence.** Many female students reported feeling more comfortable speaking English in small, familiar groups than in larger settings. Hewi Murdaningsih (2014) refers to this as a reflection of situational language anxiety—where the level of anxiety changes depending on the context and the people involved.
- **The third factor is the availability of English-language media.** Around 68% of respondents stated that regularly watching films, listening to podcasts, or following English-language social media content helped them expand their vocabulary and acquire a more natural pronunciation. This aligns with Nurhayati's (2016) view on the importance of authentic language exposure outside of formal learning environments.

V. DISCUSSION

5.1 Challenges in Implementation

5.1.1 Grammatical Accuracy and Richness of Vocabulary

Analysis of the transcripts revealed a fairly consistent pattern of grammatical errors across participants. The most common errors were in the use of tenses—particularly the simple past and present perfect—reflecting the fundamental differences between the tense systems of English and Indonesian. In Indonesian, there are no tense-dependent verb tense changes, so female students often "forget" to modify verb tenses when speaking English. This pattern of tense errors aligns with findings by Lubis (2012), who noted that such errors are not caused by ignorance of rules but by failure to automatically internalize them in spontaneous speech.

Besides tense issues, errors in subject-verb agreement were also very common—for example, saying "she go" instead of "she goes." Lubis (2012) found a similar pattern in his research and concluded that these errors were not caused by ignorance of the rules, but because they had not yet been automatically internalized in spontaneous spoken language use. From a vocabulary perspective, the average female student uses approximately 1,200 to 1,500 active words in everyday conversation.

General vocabulary predominates, while academic or specialized vocabulary appears less frequently. However, it is worth noting that many female students creatively employed periphrastic strategies—explaining something in different words when they could not find the right words. This strategy demonstrates good communication skills.

5.1.2 Pragmatic Competence and Code Switching

In terms of pragmatic competence—the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts—female students generally demonstrated a good understanding of how to politely begin and end conversations, as well as maintaining turn-taking. The use of small talk expressions such as "how are you" or "what's up" also felt natural and did not seem awkward.

Code-switching occurred in approximately 31% of all recorded interactions. This finding aligns with the findings of Muslich (2010) and Chaer and Agustina (2010): code-switching in the context of female EFL students in Indonesia is not merely a sign

of weakness, but rather a more flexible communication strategy. Some female students even used it strategically—for example, switching to Indonesian to convey humour or sarcasm that would feel more "real" if spoken in their native language.

5.2 Steps to Overcome the Challenges

Based on the challenges discussed above, several pedagogical strategies are proposed to address grammatical inaccuracies, limited vocabulary, and pragmatic difficulties faced by female EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students in Indonesia.

5.2.1 Addressing Grammatical Inaccuracy through Corrective Feedback and Explicit Instruction

One of the most effective ways to reduce grammatical errors—particularly tense-related mistakes resulting from first language influence—is the implementation of focused corrective feedback. Teachers are encouraged to combine recasting techniques during communicative activities with explicit grammar instruction in dedicated grammar review sessions. Recasting involves the teacher repeating a student's incorrect utterance in its correct form without interrupting the flow of communication, allowing students to receive an accurate language model without experiencing embarrassment or losing confidence.

To help students internalize grammatical rules automatically, regular practice through communicative drills, role-playing activities, and task-based learning is strongly recommended. Repeated and meaningful use of language structures in authentic contexts is more effective than isolated grammar exercises in supporting long-term language acquisition. Activities such as storytelling and interview simulations provide students with meaningful, low-pressure opportunities to practice using the past tense and present perfect naturally.

Additionally, teachers can encourage students to keep an error journal to record the grammatical mistakes they frequently make. This practice can raise learners' awareness of their errors and promote self-monitoring skills, particularly for mistakes caused by first language transfer, such as the omission of verb inflections that indicate tense.

5.2.2 Expanding Vocabulary through Extensive Reading and Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Considering that the participants in this study largely relied on a limited range of general vocabulary—which is insufficient for academic or professional purposes—a structured vocabulary development program is necessary. Students should be encouraged to engage in extensive reading using graded readers and accessible authentic texts related to their interests and fields of study. Consistent reading exposes learners to new vocabulary in meaningful contexts, which is more effective than simply memorizing isolated word lists.

The use of digital tools, such as flashcard applications that employ spaced repetition systems, can help strengthen long-term vocabulary retention. Students are advised to review newly learned words at increasingly longer intervals so that the vocabulary can be transferred from short-term to long-term memory. Beyond memorization, students should also understand how words are used in authentic contexts, including their meanings and appropriate usage in sentences and discussions.

Furthermore, the periphrastic strategies observed in this study—where students creatively used paraphrasing when they lacked specific vocabulary items—represent a positive communicative resource that should be further developed. Teachers can enhance this ability by teaching paraphrasing techniques, synonym identification, and collocational patterns as part of a comprehensive vocabulary learning program.

5.2.3 Enhancing Pragmatic Competence through Contextual and Sociocultural Learning

Although students demonstrated reasonably strong pragmatic skills in conversation, particularly in managing turn-taking and initiating small talk, adopting a more systematic approach to pragmatic instruction would help them improve their communicative abilities in more complex social situations using English. Pragmatic competence does not develop automatically; rather, it must be taught deliberately through exposure to authentic communicative contexts and reflection on language use.

Classroom activities such as discourse completion tasks, video analysis of native and non-native speaker interactions, and simulations of social situations can increase learners' awareness of speech acts, politeness strategies, and language variation. Role-playing activities that encourage students to adjust their language use across different contexts—formal, informal, and academic—can help bridge the gap between classroom language learning and real-world communication needs.

Teachers are also encouraged to introduce students to a variety of English accents and speaking styles through authentic multimedia materials. This exposure can help learners become more comfortable with the diversity of English used worldwide rather than constantly comparing themselves to an idealized native-speaker standard.

5.2.4 Reframing Code-Switching as a Bilingual Resource

The 31% rate of code-switching observed in this study should not be viewed as a teaching failure but rather as evidence of effective bilingual competence. Flexible shifts between languages can serve as a legitimate and useful communicative strategy, particularly in multilingual environments such as Indonesian EFL classrooms. Teachers are encouraged to adopt an approach that recognizes the strategic value of code-switching while still providing structured opportunities for students to strengthen their English communication skills.

Practical interventions may include the gradual introduction of "English-Only Zones" during specific classroom activities, accompanied by reflective discussions that help students analyze when and why they choose to switch languages. This approach can increase learners' awareness of their language choices while fostering confidence and fluency in English over time. At the same time, teachers should avoid imposing strict penalties or negative evaluations for code-switching, as doing so may create anxiety and discourage student participation. Instead, a gradual and supportive transition toward more active English use—viewed as an expansion of communicative competence rather than the elimination of the native language—is more likely to result in positive and sustainable progress.



FIGURE 3: Documentation with the Students after Socialization

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted at only one institution—a single Islamic boarding school in North Sumatra—which limits the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts in Indonesia. Second, the sample size was relatively small (16 participants), and the study focused exclusively on female students, so the findings may not reflect the experiences of male students or students in co-educational settings. Third, the qualitative nature of the study means that findings are interpretive and context-specific. Fourth, the data collection period was brief (only two days), which may not capture the full range of students' language use patterns. Finally, the presence of researchers during observation may have influenced students' behavior (the observer effect). Future research with a broader scope and longitudinal methods would significantly enhance our understanding of how everyday interactions contribute to the development of students' English skills in Indonesia.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

This study shows that everyday conversation is more than just a casual social activity—it is a significant venue for language practice. In their daily interactions, the female students combined multiple English language skills, with speaking and listening being the most prominent. Although grammatical errors and limited vocabulary persisted, these did not become barriers to communication—the students cleverly employed various techniques to maintain fluent conversation.

Another important aspect of this study is the extent to which factors outside the classroom environment influence language development. Friends, the atmosphere of the study program, self-confidence, and exposure to English-language media were shown to play as important a role as formal classroom instruction. This serves as a reminder that effective English language learning must go beyond what occurs in the classroom.

The research results show that using English regularly in daily conversations has a positive impact on improving speaking ability, vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, and understanding of language structure. In addition, the habit of communicating in English has been shown to help students feel more confident when expressing their opinions and interacting with others. The factors that help improve this ability include a strong study motivation, a supportive environment for using English, access to learning materials, and regular practice done consistently.

7.2 Recommendations

- 1) **For Teachers and Administrators:** Create a positive atmosphere and encourage the use of English in a relaxed setting, such as through an English Corner, English Day, or English conversation groups outside of class time. Provide structured opportunities for students to practice speaking in low-anxiety environments. Consider implementing peer-mentoring programs where more proficient students can support their peers in developing speaking skills.
- 2) **For Students:** Do not wait until your language skills feel "adequate" before starting to speak. Consistent speaking—even with mistakes—will actually improve your language skills. Language anxiety can be overcome with regular practice and a supportive environment. Actively seek out opportunities to use English, both inside and outside the classroom, and do not be afraid to make mistakes as part of the learning process.
- 3) **For Future Researchers:** This study was conducted at only one institution and was qualitative in nature. Further research with a broader scope and longitudinal methods would significantly enhance our understanding of how everyday interactions contribute to the development of female students' English skills in Indonesia. Future studies could also compare different types of educational institutions (boarding schools, day schools, public schools) or examine the role of technology in facilitating daily English conversation practice.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Dalit, Tribal, and Indigenous Literature in Translation

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Abstract— *This paper examines the idea of New Literature in English and its relationship with post-colonial studies, with special focus on Dalit and Tribal literature in English translation. It explains why these literary traditions are considered forms of new literature and how translation into English creates wider recognition and academic visibility. Translation gives marginalized communities a voice and becomes a means of asserting identity, rights, and existence. It also creates space for these texts beyond their original linguistic and cultural contexts.*

Dalit literature represents the experiences of oppression, discrimination, struggle, resistance, and the demand for equality. Writing itself becomes a political act and an important part of Dalit activism. Similarly, Tribal literature reflects tribal history, culture, traditions, exploitation, and struggles for survival and rights. Much of Tribal literature existed for centuries in oral form before being written down. Some tribal communities developed their own scripts, while others adopted scripts from neighboring languages. Therefore, Tribal literature may also be understood as a form of translation from oral to written traditions.

The paper further discusses how Dalit and Tribal literature differs from mainstream literary traditions in language, themes, and aesthetics. Their translation is not merely cultural exchange but also a political and social intervention that challenges dominant systems. In India, Tribal literature should not be viewed as a single homogeneous category; rather, it is an umbrella term that includes diverse Adivasi, indigenous, and native literary traditions across regions and languages.

The concept of New Literature in English overlaps with categories such as Indigenous Literature, Aboriginal Literature, Commonwealth Literature, and Post-Colonial Literature. Literature written in regional languages becomes part of English studies mainly through translation, and today translated works occupy an important place in English literary studies and academic discussions.

Keywords— *New Literature in English, Post-Colonial Literature, Dalit Literature, Tribal Literature, Adivasi Literature, Indigenous Literature.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Translation of marginalized discourses has emerged as a significant area of interest in contemporary Translation Studies. Translation, as a process, cannot be understood merely as the transfer of linguistic elements from one language to another; rather, it is a political act shaped by social, cultural, and economic factors. Dalit literature, as an important branch of Indian literature, has gained increasing recognition in recent years and has become one of the most frequently translated literary discourses in India. Since these writings assert the identity and existence of marginalized communities, translation must strive to recreate the ideological and experiential dimensions of the original text.

This raises a fundamental question: Who has the authority to translate texts that emerge from marginalized communities? The present study attempts to address this question with reference to Chinua Achebe's celebrated essay, "Thoughts on the African Novel" (1975). Language serves as a medium of communication and facilitates the development of creativity, innovation, and intellectual expression. However, in subaltern discourses, language also becomes a crucial site of resistance, as colonization often begins through linguistic domination.

Traditional Indian social structures relegated Dalits to the status of untouchables and excluded them not only from mainstream society but also from literary and linguistic spaces. They were confined to serving the upper castes without recognition of their humanity and cultural identity. The traditions, customs, and value systems of dominant communities often perceived Dalits as subaltern subjects and reinforced their social isolation. Against this backdrop of marginalization, Dalit voices have emerged to articulate authentic experiences of pain, humiliation, and resistance, thereby constructing a distinct identity of their own.

Dalit literature represents centuries of historical oppression, exclusion, segregation, and deprivation. In this context, an important debate arises regarding authorship and authenticity: Should Dalit experiences be represented only by Dalit writers, or can non-Dalit writers also narrate these realities? Similar concerns extend to the field of translation. The translation of Dalit texts raises questions about representation, ownership, and the ethics of interpretation.

Dalit discourses often encounter processes of compartmentalization within literary canons dominated by privileged linguistic and cultural traditions. Such structures have historically denied Dalits access to narratives of prosperity, dignity, and power, while continuously reinforcing stereotypes associated with deprivation and social stigma. Language itself can function as a mechanism of exclusion by preserving hierarchies that marginalize already oppressed communities. Dalit literature is fundamentally concerned with the lives and struggles of marginalized communities. It examines the specific challenges faced by oppressed groups and explores their responses to social injustice. When such texts, originally produced in regional languages, are translated for wider audiences by individuals who may not share the same social experiences, the process inevitably involves different political and ideological considerations.

Translation is often viewed as a means of transmitting knowledge across linguistic boundaries. However, in the context of Dalit literature, translation cannot be reduced to the simple sharing of experiences with a different readership. Dalit texts engage directly with histories of caste-based oppression, discrimination, and exclusion. They embody acts of resistance and expressions of anger against entrenched social inequalities. Therefore, translating Dalit literature involves not only linguistic competence but also cultural sensitivity and ethical responsibility.

Undoubtedly, the translation of Dalit literature from vernacular languages can expand its reach and enhance its visibility on national and global platforms. Nevertheless, the question of the translatability of lived experience remains significant. The experiences of oppression endured by Dalits may not be fully accessible to translators who have not encountered similar realities. The processes of encoding and re-encoding these experiences across languages may result in the dilution or distortion of their original force.

Translation can be defined as the communication of meaning from one language to another without compromising the emotional and cultural integrity of the source text. Since translation is deeply embedded in cultural contexts, culture-specific expressions often resist direct equivalence in another language. This challenge becomes even more pronounced in marginalized literatures, where linguistic practices and cultural experiences are distinct from those of dominant groups. The frustration, trauma, and humiliation that characterize many Dalit narratives may therefore remain unfamiliar to translators and readers outside these communities. Issues of identity and self-representation consequently become central to the translation of Dalit texts. Historically, mainstream literary traditions have offered little space for Dalit voices, while dominant-caste writers frequently represented Dalits through stereotypical and distorted perspectives. As a subaltern discourse, Dalit literature documents the social realities of Dalit communities and establishes an alternative literary practice rooted in lived experience.

II. THE QUESTION OF AUTHENTICITY AND REPRESENTATION

A similar concern can be observed in Adivasi literature. Literary representations of tribal communities, often produced by outsiders, have tended either toward romanticization or toward reductive portrayals of suffering. Reacting against such misrepresentations, Narayan, a member of the Malayarayar tribal community in Kerala, authored *Kocharethi* (2011), regarded as the first authentic novel written by an Adivasi writer in South India. At a time when tribal communities across India were struggling to preserve their land and cultural identities, the novel highlighted the multiple forms of marginalization imposed by the state, social institutions, and organized religion.

Reflecting on his motivation for writing, Narayan observed that existing representations of tribal communities contributed to their further marginalization. Consequently, he chose to write about his own life, upbringing, and culture, drawing upon experiences he knew intimately. Through its integration of history and culture, *Kocharethi* portrays struggles related to land ownership, displacement, and the preservation of myths, rituals, customs, and belief systems.

Literature possesses both social and political significance. It provides critical perspectives on everyday realities and enables readers to engage with the threats and challenges encountered by marginalized communities. The very term "Dalit literature" evokes a consciousness that distinguishes it from dominant literary traditions. By opposing feudalism, capitalism, and caste-based discrimination, Dalit literature advocates equality, dignity, justice, and human rights.

The suffering endured by Dalits over centuries finds powerful expression in their literary works. Translators must therefore develop an awareness of the political and ethical dimensions of these texts while addressing readers in the target language. Their methods of representation inevitably shape readers' perceptions of Dalit experiences.

In this context, the role of translation in a globalized world becomes increasingly complex. Translating Dalit literature into globally dominant languages may enhance visibility; however, it may also compel translators to conform to linguistic norms that reduce the distinctiveness and emotional intensity of the original texts. Translation, therefore, emerges as a culturally and politically mediated practice that has the potential both to challenge and to reproduce existing power structures.

As translation continues to gain recognition as an influential discourse in the contemporary world, it becomes necessary to acknowledge its role in redefining literary traditions and creating new spaces for marginalized voices. Nevertheless, the translation of Dalit literature remains a formidable challenge because it involves negotiating histories of cultural and linguistic colonization against which these literatures have long struggled.

This paper argues that the translation of Dalit and Tribal literature is not merely a technical linguistic exercise but a profound political and ethical act. The translator must navigate complex questions of representation, authenticity, and power while remaining sensitive to the historical and cultural specificities of the source text. The act of translation becomes a site of negotiation between dominant and marginalized discourses, and the translator's choices inevitably shape how these texts are received by broader audiences.

III. TRIBAL LITERATURE: ORAL TRADITIONS AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Tribal cultural traditions have long been subjects of curiosity, speculation, and fascination. Tribal communities are often perceived as inhabitants of remote and inaccessible regions, leading to the construction of an image of them as mysterious and distinct from mainstream society. Until recent times, tribal populations had limited interaction with people living in the plains. Their social organization, cultural practices, and simple way of life have frequently been contrasted with those of so-called "civilized" societies.

Tribal communities are often described as possessing innocence and purity, yet lacking access to the intellectual and material advancements associated with modern civilization. Borrowing Matthew Arnold's phrase from *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), they may be viewed as "sweetness without light," suggesting that while their close relationship with nature and egalitarian socio-cultural values are admirable and worthy of emulation, they are often perceived as being less developed according to the standards of modernity. Consequently, administrators, policymakers, and scholars have frequently emphasized the need to protect, guide, and assimilate tribal communities into the mainstream.

Government policies have also tended to regard tribal populations as descendants of ancient human societies and have introduced various welfare programmes aimed at their social and economic development. However, many initiatives intended to preserve and safeguard tribal culture and literature have overlooked the fact that these cultural practices are deeply rooted in oral traditions. These traditions, transmitted from one generation to another through spoken narratives, songs, myths, and rituals, constitute the foundation of tribal identity and collective memory. Today, such oral traditions face the serious threat of disappearance and extinction.

The tribal population of India constitutes a significant segment of the country's demographic structure. Historical evidence suggests that tribal communities inhabited the Indian subcontinent long before the arrival of Aryan-speaking groups. The contributions of tribal communities to Indian civilization are reflected even in ancient literary texts. The two great Indian epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, bear testimony to the role and participation of tribal groups in various aspects of social and cultural life. These references underscore the enduring presence and importance of tribal communities in shaping the historical and cultural heritage of India.

A major portion of tribal literature consists of songs, chants, and oral performances presented during significant life events and ritual occasions such as birth, death, and religious ceremonies. A closer examination of these performances reveals that several tribal rituals possess structural features similar to those found in classical epics. One such example is the ritual practiced by the

Dhangar community, a nomadic tribe predominantly found in Maharashtra. This ritual, known as Vaik or Khel (play), is performed as an act of devotion to their deity, Biroba.

The ritual is a complex artistic expression that integrates song, dance, narration, trance, and prophecy. It begins with the symbolic coronation of Biroba as king. Devotees carry tall, decorated sticks representing the divine palace of the deity and bring them to the temple where the ritual is conducted. A group of singers, accompanied by a chorus, performs *vowi*—traditional narrative songs that describe the various stages of the deity's marriage ceremony, beginning with the turmeric ritual and culminating in the wedding and coronation of the newly married god as the ruler of the world.

Dance performances form an integral part of the ritual and serve as preludes that sanctify and prepare the ceremonial atmosphere. Among the Khutekars, one of the subgroups of the Dhangar community, the dance is performed by two individuals at a time. In contrast, among the Hatkars, another Dhangar subgroup, a collective performance involving twenty to twenty-five men is common. The Dhangar community itself comprises more than twenty-two subgroups. These dances, known as *Gajanritya* (*gaja* meaning elephant), derive their name from movements resembling those of an elephant and are accompanied by rhythmic drumbeats. In the Hatkar tradition, the group dance is further enriched by songs sung by women.

Between these dance sequences, performers—usually two in number—narrate episodes that celebrate the courage, wisdom, heroism, and virtues of legendary figures or deities. These narratives often highlight the protective role of divine beings in safeguarding livestock, preserving the well-being of the community, and, at times, ensuring the survival of humanity itself.

The ritual then progresses to its central phase, during which the priest invokes the spirit of the deity and enters a trance-like state to establish communication with the divine. In this altered state of consciousness, the priest symbolically unites his soul with the deity's totem, often represented by a snake, and performs a hallucinatory dance synchronized with the rhythm of drumbeats. A group of singers assists the priest in attaining this trance by performing a *vowi*, a lengthy narrative song that invokes the deity with an appeal such as: "O Mother, O my Mother, please come and help me convey your message to the people."

The supernatural presence of the deity is further affirmed through ritual tests of endurance. These tests involve striking the priest's body, including the stomach, neck, and back, with a bamboo stick or sword. Despite the intensity of these acts, the priest remains unharmed, reinforcing the community's belief in divine intervention and protection.

The ritual concludes with the delivery of prophecies concerning the forthcoming year. These predictions typically address matters of practical importance, including the prospects of rainfall, the health and productivity of livestock, agricultural yields, market conditions related to animal trade, the possibility of natural calamities, public health concerns, and occasionally major socio-political changes. Such prophecies have traditionally served as sources of guidance and reassurance for farmers and rural communities.

The overall structure of this ritual closely resembles that of a literary epic. Similar to the invocatory passages found in epic traditions, the priest and a group of elder performers invoke the divine spirit, seeking its presence and assistance. The invocation song addresses the deity as a nurturing mother, expressing devotion and dependence: "O Mother, my Mother, do not forsake me. I am your child; you are my protector. Appear before us and safeguard our ancestral means of livelihood."

Furthermore, the ritual incorporates elements commonly associated with epic narratives, including supernatural intervention, trance experiences, magical occurrences, and heroic journeys. The descent of the deity's spirit from the celestial realm to the earthly domain symbolically mirrors the epic hero's journey through cosmic or subterranean spaces. Like many epics, the ritual ultimately culminates in the welfare of humanity, as the divine prophecies provide solutions and guidance for addressing worldly concerns. For generations, these prophetic utterances have functioned as guiding principles for farmers and ordinary people alike, reflecting the enduring social and cultural significance of tribal oral traditions.

IV. SONGS AND PERFORMANCE AS HISTORICAL RECORDS

Songs and dances are the essence of tribal oral lore. They are vehicles for establishing communication with mythic ancestors. Lyrical songs are either sung on special occasions such as marriage and death or performed for entertainment in village dormitories. These songs are usually accompanied by drum and flute. They are not merely mediums of entertainment but are vehicles to record tribals' historical experiences and convey tribal philosophy of life.

The life cycle songs are performed on special occasions such as marriage, birth, and death to inculcate moral and ethical values among tribal lineages. In a way, the songs of tribal communities are the constitutions that govern tribal society. Binti, the

Santhal marriage songs, for example, narrate episodes that explain how humans existed on the earth, whereas the creative songs describe "the growth of the tribe's population, their migration through different places such as Hihidi and Pipidi, the wars they had to wage with local inhabitants, and finally came to the land where they live now" (Devy 2006, p. 7). In short, the songs are historical narratives that trace the origin and development of tribal groups. Since these songs are transferred as a word of mouth, the full versions of many songs are missing. If not cherished and preserved, the incomplete versions will also perish with the death of aged performers and singers.

This oral tradition represents a form of cultural translation—the transmission of knowledge, history, and values from one generation to the next through performance and memory. The transition from oral to written forms, when it occurs, represents another layer of translation, as the dynamic, performative qualities of oral literature are rendered into static written text. This process inevitably involves choices about what to preserve, what to omit, and how to represent oral forms in written language.

The recognition, documentation, and promotion of tribal literature are essential for developing a deeper understanding and appreciation of India's pluralistic identity. Moreover, these literary expressions play a crucial role in safeguarding the collective memory and cultural knowledge of tribal communities. In an era marked by rapid modernization and globalization, concerted efforts are required to preserve and disseminate these invaluable cultural traditions so that they continue to enrich the nation's literary landscape and inspire future generations.

V. THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

The translation of Dalit and Tribal literature raises profound questions about ethical responsibility and the politics of representation. As Gayatri Spivak (1993) argues in "The Politics of Translation," the translator of marginalized literatures must engage not only with linguistic differences but also with the cultural and historical specificities that shape the source text. Translation in this context becomes an act of surrender to the other, requiring the translator to inhabit the space of the source language and culture.

Lawrence Venuti (1995), in *The Translator's Invisibility*, argues that translation in the Anglophone world tends to domesticate foreign texts, making them conform to target-language norms and expectations. This process of domestication can be particularly problematic in the context of Dalit and Tribal literature, where the distinctiveness of the source text—its linguistic particularities, cultural references, and emotional intensity—may be flattened or erased in translation.

The translation of marginalized literatures therefore requires what Ato Quayson (2003) terms "Calibrations"—a reading practice that operates at the confluence between art, aesthetics, and the social. Translators must calibrate their approach to account for the social and political contexts of the source text, recognizing that these texts emerge from histories of oppression and resistance.

Furthermore, the question of who can translate Dalit and Tribal literature remains unresolved. Does the translator need to share the social identity of the author? Can a non-Dalit translator adequately convey the experiences of caste oppression? These questions do not have easy answers, but they must be grappled with seriously by anyone undertaking the translation of marginalized literatures.

VI. DALIT LITERATURE AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Dalit literature emerged as a distinct literary movement in the mid-twentieth century, with roots in the broader Dalit movement led by figures such as B.R. Ambedkar. The literature is characterized by its commitment to social justice, its articulation of Dalit experiences, and its critique of caste-based oppression.

Writers such as Arjun Dangle, Sharankumar Limbale, and Namdeo Dhasal have been instrumental in establishing Dalit literature as a significant force in Indian literary culture. Dangle's anthology *Poisoned Bread* (1992) brought together translations of Dalit writings from across India, introducing these texts to a broader readership. Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* (2004) provides a theoretical framework for understanding the distinctive features of Dalit literary aesthetics.

Dalit literature challenges mainstream literary traditions in several ways. It rejects the aesthetics of detachment and universality that characterize much of mainstream Indian literature, insisting instead on the primacy of lived experience. It foregrounds themes of oppression, humiliation, resistance, and survival that are often absent from dominant literary traditions. And it employs linguistic strategies—including the use of Dalit dialects, slang, and oral forms—that challenge the linguistic norms of standard literary language.

The translation of Dalit literature thus requires translators to engage with these distinctive features, finding ways to convey the political intensity and linguistic particularity of the source text in the target language. This is a formidable challenge, but it is essential if Dalit literature is to reach the wider audiences it deserves.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Dalit and Tribal literature in India function as invaluable repositories of diverse cultural heritage and distinctive worldviews. Through various forms of oral and written traditions, including songs, myths, legends, epics, and narratives, these literary traditions vividly portray the experiences, struggles, beliefs, and aspirations of marginalized communities. The translation of these texts into English creates wider recognition and academic visibility, but it also raises significant questions about representation, authenticity, and the ethics of interpretation. Translation in this context is not merely a linguistic transfer but a political act that can challenge or reproduce existing power structures.

The translation of Dalit and Tribal literature is a complex and politically charged endeavor that requires not only linguistic competence but also cultural sensitivity and ethical responsibility. Translators must navigate questions of representation and authenticity, engage with the political dimensions of these texts, and remain sensitive to the cultural specificities that shape them. At the same time, translation offers an opportunity to bring these marginalized voices to a wider audience, contributing to the recognition and appreciation of India's pluralistic literary heritage.

Tribal literature, in particular, represents a rich and diverse tradition that has existed for centuries in oral form. The transition from oral to written forms, and from regional languages to English translation, represents a complex process of cultural translation that raises important questions about preservation, representation, and authenticity. The detailed analysis of the Dhangar community's ritual performance demonstrates the sophistication and complexity of tribal oral traditions, which deserve recognition as significant literary and cultural forms.

The recognition, documentation, and promotion of Dalit and Tribal literature are essential for developing a deeper understanding of India's pluralistic identity. In an era marked by rapid modernization and globalization, concerted efforts are required to preserve and disseminate these invaluable cultural traditions so that they continue to enrich the nation's literary landscape and inspire future generations.

Future research should explore the specific translation strategies employed in rendering marginalized literatures into English, the reception of these translations among different audiences, and the ways in which digital technologies might support the preservation and dissemination of oral traditions. The ethical and political questions raised by the translation of Dalit and Tribal literature will continue to be relevant as these literary traditions gain increasing recognition in the global literary landscape.

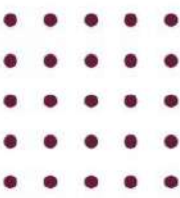
Ultimately, the translation of Dalit and Tribal literature is not merely an academic exercise but a political and ethical act that contributes to the broader struggle for social justice, equality, and recognition. By making these marginalized voices accessible to wider audiences, translation can play a crucial role in challenging dominant narratives and creating space for alternative perspectives. It is therefore essential that translators, scholars, and readers alike approach these texts with the care, sensitivity, and respect they deserve.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

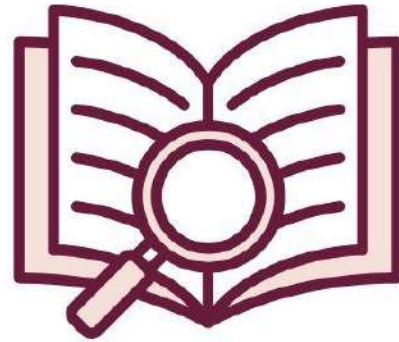
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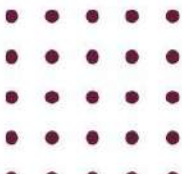
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