Life, Death and Trauma in the novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat: A Comparative Study

A Thesis Submitted

To

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By

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I, Kritika Nepal, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis titled "Life, Death and Trauma in the novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat: A Comparative Study" is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the awards of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else. The thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/institute. This is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English, School of languages and Literature, Sikkim University, Gangtok, India.

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This is to certify that the thesis titled "Life, Death and Trauma in the novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat: A Comparative Study" submitted to the Sikkim University for partial fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English, embodies the result of bonafide research work carried out by Kritika Nepal under my guidance and supervision. No part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other Degree, Diploma, Association and Fellowship. All the assistance and help received during the course of investigation have been duly acknowledged by her.

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

This thesis titled "Life, Death and Trauma in the novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat: A Comparative Study" is an attempt to compare, contrast and analyse representations of trauma, existential anguish and the absurd in the selected novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat. It also endeavours to explore the relationship between life and death, and the degree of influence they exercise on the nature of human identity.

Divided into five chapters, this thesis explores themes of trauma in the second chapter and themes of Nietzschean existentialism and the Camusian absurd in the third and fourth chapters. Novels studied to this end are Parijat's *Sirishko Phool* (2022 B.S.), *Mahattaheen* (2025 B.S.), *Baishako Manchey* (2029 B.S.) and *Boni* (2048 B.S.), and Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931).

The understanding of trauma was initially limited to extreme life-altering experiences not taking into account that destitution undeniably is one of the most life-altering conditions borne upon its victims on a routine and regular basis. *Baishako Manchey* finds underprivileged characters struggling, on a daily basis, to endure as well as emerge from the traumas of their deprivation. Their poverty intergenerational in nature, the characters' socio-economic stagnation is mirrored in the state of their surroundings, living conditions, behavioural traits and routines. Parijat portrays the stagnation experienced by the narrator through images of living and non-living stationary objects such as the youthful tree (alive and thriving but stationary in the most literal terms), the wall as a symbol of confinement and of the narrator's trauma, the well reflecting the dark sky above, and the termite infested road to nowhere. All these images set the tone for the socio-economic stagnancy, desperation and suffering

characters encounter in the novel. Studied from the perspective of Baron's concept of community psychology - that socio-economic and physical environments are most influential in determining mental disorders - characters' constant exposure to stressful situations facilitated by their destitution result in their poverty-induced trauma which is prolonged and reaffirmed by political tools such as the concepts of Patriotism and nationalism that help maintain the cycle of poverty. Childhood adversities in the case of the narrator - parental neglect, abuse and the regular witnessing of domestic violence - contribute to his undesirable experiences which, owing to repetition, take the form of chronic strains that mould his identity and facilitate his psychological deterioration.

Woolf and Parijat, through their use of similar images and gaps in narration, portray PTSD and perpetration-induced trauma through ex-veterans of war Septimus (*Mrs. Dalloway*) and Suyogbir (*Sirishko Phool*). PTSD in the case of Septimus proves fatal as he chooses, after prolonged suffering, to end the torment by committing suicide. Suyogbir, on the other hand, resumes his life in civil society where he finds himself constantly battling his sense of alienation and guilt at having committed atrocities against defenceless civilians. An interesting analogy may be derived in S*irishko Phool* between the nature of the carnivorous Sungabha plant which begins to wither after it traps and consumes its prey, and the nature of of Suyogbir's trauma which eats away at him as he inflicts pain and metaphorically consumes the victim of his sexual assault.

Themes of memory and trauma experienced in the civil society, and the nature of rehabilitation and treatment received by victims of mental afflictions in the early twentieth century are portrayed in the selected novels through multidimensional characters engaged in a constant war between their eternal and internal existences.

The chiming of the Big Ben in *Mrs. Dalloway* punctuates external time as it passes independent of the distinct internal timelines of its characters. Apart from the experiences and flashbacks of ex-soldiers, Woolf and Parijat also represent routine traumas endured outside the war-zone through characters such as Clarissa Dalloway, Peter Walsh, Lucrezia, Shivraj and Sakambari. Preoccupied with their pasts - almost entirely dwelling in their memories - these characters reveal the mind's propensity for repetition as they do the dichotomy between internal and external timelines. The distortions in Septimus's internal reality also find expression in the external world as he hallucinates his dead friends and relives his experiences at war. Unlike Suyogbir who does not receive any form of treatment for his PTSD, Septimus's life post-war finds him attending therapy sessions that, instead of alleviating his dis-ease, accelerate his downward spiral.

Woolf and Parijat delve into themes of Nietzschean existentialism and the Camusian absurd in the novels *The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse, The Waves, Mahattaheen* and *Boni.* The physical settings of these novels illustrate characters' existential crises and anxieties as observed in The Voyage Out which is set against the backdrop of the plague, most probably the third pandemic. Unfolding against the background of the sea and mountains which aid in the characters' realisation of their own insignificant natures, landscapes in *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse* stand in great contrast with the urban setting in Parijat's *Mahattaheen* with its narrow Streets, crowded settlements, filth and monotony. The fresh ocean air in Woolf's novels is replaced in *Mahattaheen* buy the stench of lust and decomposition. Where Wolf speaks of infinite horizons Parijat's characters experience their horizon reduced to a mere stroke of changeless colour in the distance. It is interesting to note that

Woolf employs natural surroundings and Parijat employs claustrophobic and sordid images in order to arrive at similar conclusions about the nature of human existence.

In *The Voyage Out* daily life is rendered surreal through comparisons such as moving cars equated to spiders on the moon and life to a tassel on the edge of the vast black cloak of existence. Symbols of death (a boar skull on the nursery wall, flies hovering over fruits in the kitchen), and traumas mirrored by distortions of the sunlight as it shines on furnitures, are constant reminders of the finitude and fragility of human realities. A certain cosmic nonchalance is implied as Woolf describes the sound of unaltered breathing prevailing in the atmosphere, and the smoke coming out of houses illustrate the transient realities that help shape societies and civilisations.

Conversations about the absence of God, in these novels, mirror the lack of faith characteristic of the modern age. In a hostile world abandoned by its maker, characters suffer a Sisyphean flight as they are engulfed by a sense of failure and the conviction that life was difficult and laborious without purpose. *Mahattaheen* sees its narrator claim this very godlessness when he compares the untimely and tragic death of his wife and the death of a female acquaintance to God dying a horrid death. The world reduced to an apple in a tub, characters in these novels experience a deep sense of solitude and alienation expressed in The Voyage Out through entomological imagery such as an insect set on a blade of grass, people gathered in the dining room compared to pigeons feeding off of the ground and the recurring image of moths dying in a night light. Woolf also compares her characters to insect-like figures or bumps on the rigging that support the mast of the ship on which they have set sail. In the same strain, the narrator in *Mahattaheen* compares people to toads living in a well full of algae even as he compares his wife to a colourful insect.

Reiterating the Nietzschean conviction that there are essentially no facts only interpretations the novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat convey that truth is relative and that every action has multiple possibilities. Lily in *To the Lighthouse* acknowledges that in order for her to fully understand Mrs. Ramsay, she would require no less than fifty pairs of eyes. Sartre's quasi-observation illustrates this in stating that an object can never be perceived in its entirety. *Dvaitadvaita Vedanta* makes a similar claim, that ultimate truth is imperceivable owing to limitations in human perceptions.

Chronic monotony in a world that promises multiplicity of perceptions is a common trait in *The Waves* and *Boni* as characters are presented with the possibility of experiencing everything and nothing simultaneously. The novel also refers to the concept of *Sunyata*, as explored in the Pali text *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā,* in employing images of all-enveloping shadows, lone ships and vast oceans as metaphors for the human condition. The concept of *Sunyata* is also implied in the circle imagery employed in *The Voyage Out* - dances in circular formations, life in London as a series of circular movements, people encircling tables, books encircling readers, necklaces encircling the slender necks of women and blood circulating inside veins.

Where Woolf's novels delve into the theme of human obsession with dead metaphors and the ways in which they function - detached from the emotions and identities that inspire them - Parijat explores the human obsession with private/personal space and individuality when the narrator in *Mahattaheen* is filled with amazement as he realises the absurdity of people confining themselves, quite literally, within walls of their own making. These rooms or enclosures represent the human dependence on routine and structure. Temples and shrines, too, are portrayed

as mere rooms that present a disoriented and ignorant population with nothing more than spaces to exercise their collective madness.

Characters' awareness of the fluid nature of their personalities, in *The Waves*, contribute to their identity crises. Focusing on the concept of mimesis as the basis of human identity as professed by Freud and Morton Prince, the psychophysical identity of an individual is mostly the result of human tendency for imitation. Characters in Woolf's novel, as in the real world, learn to become themselves by observing and imitating selves other than their own, and as their personalities evolve they derive their sense of identity from acknowledging the very lack thereof. The novel also criticises authority in the form of social and religious institutions as a crucial factor aiding in identity formation.

Across cultures and timelines, Woolf and Parijat explore what it means to be human in a violent and volatile world and as bleak as themes of trauma, death and existential anguish may seem, their musings on trauma, existentialism and the human psyche are not devoid of hope and a Nietzschean sense of liberation illustrated clearly in Clarissa Dalloway's conviction that existence implies confinement and that one can only survive through relentlessly engaging in the decoration of his/her personal prison.

Chapter 1

Introduction:

Human identity is heavily dependent on the faculty of collective and individual memories. Human nature, in real life and in its representations in literature, relies greatly on the formation and placement of these memories - traumatic as well as non-traumatic - in the psycho-social context. Moulding individual perceptions and socio-cultural attitudes towards the nature of existential realities and concept(s) of death, memory and its interpretations have operated the clockwork of human civilisations since time immemorial. This thesis is an attempt to explore the themes of trauma, human existence and non-existence and the ways in which, interlinked with everyday experiences and memories they re-establish the meaning of life in the post-World Wars scenario portrayed in the selected works of Virginia Woolf and Parijat. Seeking to peer inside the intricacies of human psyche and its internal and external manifestations the novels of both authors probe into the multi-faceted nature of human consciousness and of physical realities and their interdependence upon one another in determining human perceptions.

1.1. Defining Trauma:

The concept of trauma in its present day psychological implications began developing only during the 1860s with the likes of physician John Erichsen attributing the fear and distress experienced by victims of railway accidents to shock or spinal concussion (Leys 3) and neurologist Paul Oppenheim, attributing the phenomenon to "undetectable organic changes in the brain" while classifying the same as "traumatic

neurosis" (3). Freud's first published book *On Aphasia* extensively explores the effects of physical trauma to the brain (Caruth 8) and his later works concerning the study of trauma of sexual assault have been credited with "cementing" in trauma research the idea of psychic trauma (Leys 18). Freud's definition of trauma pertains to:

> any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield….a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus. (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 23)

A shift of focus from the physical to a more psychoanalytical approach in the study of trauma is observed in the works of Pierre Janet, Morton Prince, Sigmund Freud and others who were of the view that trauma is a "wounding of the mind brought about by sudden, unexpected, emotional shock" resulting in a "hysterical shattering" of personality and the traumatised mind an "apparatus for registering the blows to the psyche outside the domain of ordinary awareness" (3-4). Viewed no longer as a mere outcome of physical change or concussion one of the most historic exhibits of this psychological "wounding" presented itself in the form of the psycho-somatic manifestations of "shell shock" or "battle fatigue" in soldiers post their service in the Vietnam war. This is not to say that trauma in the modern world was understood only in the light of military combat, for it was studied in the 1970s in the context of non-military child sexual abuse although it was only in 1980 that trauma was officially recognised as a "disorder of memory" categorised under the title "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" (PTSD) by the American Psychiatric Association (Caruth 3). PTSD, as described by Caruth in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, is a delayed response to

an overwhelming event(s) manifested through repetitive intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours issuing from the event(s). It is also characterised by "numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event" (4).

The ambiguous nature of trauma is exhibited through the fact that inspite of access to a plethora of descriptions, definitions and characterisations of psychological trauma, trauma studies have not arrived (may never arrive) at a standard definition of the same. Always conceived in the past, Freud argues that trauma forms not at the very instant but after a certain amount of time has passed and one still can not shake off the recurring memory. This time taken for the realisation of trauma, he terms the "incubation period" or "latency" and the gap between the event, the negation or forgetting of the event and its re-experience as a fresh wound is what gives core power to the trauma. Hence, trauma can be experienced only through the process of first forgetting it (Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*). In its present day connotations trauma may very well be likened to a ghost or an echo - a boomerang that, after the first launch, keeps coming back incessantly - firstly for its abstract mechanism, secondly for its association with the past and thirdly for its infamous tendency to be present, yet absent. Trauma is described as a different reality altogether in the sense that the subtlety and abstraction of traumatic memories deport the victim from the mental norms subscribed to by the same in his or her attempts to find meaning in life. An event of traumatic nature is seen as a jolt from the regularity of everyday life and memories, opening up another portal through which the victim views the event in hindsight.

1.1.2. Beginnings and Early (mis)Conceptions:

According to its first usage noted c. 1693 the word “trauma” is Greek in origin and implies wounding or piercing of the physical body by an “extrinsic agent” (Merriam-Webster). More than a century later the very term previously used to represent external visible injury would aid in illuminating the yet uncharted territory of psychological injuries the signs and symptoms of which were often considered, prior to its understanding as a mental phenomenon, to be afflictions of the spirit or the soul. Ideas that eluded mental reasoning, almost always, were considered to be the doings of the supernatural and mental un-ease even more so, for it could not be observed by physical eyes as the mechanisms that control its symptoms are of a complex nature. Witch doctors and Shamans “treated” victims of these dis-eases in an attempt to hit the bull’s-eye in a dark room. Viewed as an indicator of “spiritual health” (Wesselmann 431) and “moral weakness” (429) mental dis-ease - psychological trauma included - still continues to be part of a highly misconstrued discourse with religious/spiritual as well as the secular population often treating it as a taboo subject. However, the shift in its meaning from an outward wound to something more internal and primitive in nature has brought the concept of trauma to the present stage where its meaning has expanded its horizons although its internal workings still remain an enigma.

1.1.3. The Psychopathology of Trauma:

Early attempts at interpreting the mind through its somatological attributes and the questioning of whether trauma has its “origin inside or outside the psyche” (Caruth 8) - “an experience or "situation" of identification that strictly speaking does not occur to

an autonomous or fully coherent subject" (Leys 33) - marked the nascent stage for trauma research. Trauma is essentially understood in terms of extreme stressors that initiate a fight or flight response in an individual exposed to what he/she may perceive as a potentially life threatening situation. Interestingly, the nature of such a threat may range from physical to psychological and emotional owing to the inability of the human mind to differentiate between situations that pose physical threat (like being attacked by a wild animal) and those that are not essentially physical in nature but psychological (such as chronic stress, family difficulties, etc). In case of physically perceivable threats the amygdala processes, interprets and transfers the threat perceived to the hypothalamus which then communicates to the body the need for a fight or flight response. This prompt response to danger issues high amounts adrenaline in the body causing the heart to pump blood faster, the lungs to take in more oxygen and the blood glucose levels to rapidly increase thus supplying to the body the fuels essential to sustain its survival mode. The entire somatological process is analogous to the mechanisms of psychological trauma in that the victim, biological fight or flight response having momentarily suspended the immediate psycho-physical registration, faces his/her trauma only in the form of its aftereffects, i.e. when the danger has past and the body resumes its normal functioning. It is only in its recall - biological or psychological - that the event of the trauma is encountered.

Leys emphasises on this faculty of recall when she describes PTSD as a disorder of memory caused by terror and surprise owing to certain events that destroy the ordinary workings of awareness and cognition - "the traumatic event is encoded in the brain in a different way from ordinary memory…. Lie outside verbal-semantic-linguistic representation" (7). The emotional wreckage resulting from such events is reflected in the inability of the mind to register its psychological wounds thus

resulting in its 'splitting' or dissociation (*Trauma* 2). Such psychological reaction(s) towards events that do not normally or automatically fall into the complex web of meanings we have structured for ourselves individually or as a society may arise from situations in which the sufferer goes through violence of some sort - be it sexual violence, violence against one's individuality, identity or emotions.

In the 1920s Freud recognised five distinct types of defence mechanisms that follow traumatic experiences - disavowal, rejection or repudiation, negation, splitting of the ego and primal repression (Leys 24). This splitting of the psyche is considered a prime factor in determining the intensity and extent to which a victim may dissociate from his/her daily physical realities. Traumatic stress is dependent, thus, not only on psychological factors responses just as it is not merely a physical or neurobiological phenomenon as was initially perceived.

1.1.4. Therapy and Rehabilitation:

Victims of trauma, as those of mental illness in general, have been subject to rather harsh (even inhuman) treatment in the guise of medical therapy. From lobotomies and trephinations to physical restrains for inhumanely long periods of time, medically-induced coma treatments and extreme isolation, doctors in the past have been catalysts to furthering the degeneration of their patient's mental health. One of the severe shortcomings in the treatment (or the lack of it) of victims of war trauma in the initial phases of the World Wars has been the maltreat of the shell-shocked soldier in the hands of medical professionals who brazenly accused them of malingering (Leys 4). It was assumed that these soldiers simply invented their illness in order to avoid being drafted in wars and that there was nothing more than

cowardice and laziness at the source of their afflictions. The resultant "crisis of truth" (Felman) would render victims of trauma invisible to the public eye owing to their inaccessibility to the histories of their own trauma and the blatant denial of the validity of their illness by medical and social agencies.

One prominent practice in psychotherapy is the use of hypnotism or "hypnotic catharsis" (Leys 4) as recognised in 1960 by the American Psychological Association. Trauma theory and the present-day concept of trauma in general is deeply associated with the initial practices of hypnosis and hypnotic suggestion as treatment for victims of trauma (Leys 8). The human tendency to imitate, heightened under the influence of hypnosis, often resulted in 'recall' which lead to a catharsis of sorts, although the legitimacy of such 'memories' is entirely debatable. This "problem of hypnotic imitation" (8), however, has been negated by the case studies of Janet, Charcot and Prince among others, considering the claim that their patients were relieved of their dis-ease post-hypnotherapy. The famous cure of Marie by Pierre Janet, a nineteen year old cured of her delirium and convulsions with the aid of hypnotherapy and the record of a "confession" as documented by William Sargant are often cited to this end:

> He described, with dramatic gestures, how during the retreat, he had come across his own brother lying by the roadside with a severe abdominal wound. At his brother's earnest plea he had dragged him into a field and put him out of his misery with a rifle shot. It was the hand that pulled the trigger that had suddenly become paralysed. After his confession of grief and guilt, this hand worked again. *(Unquiet Mind, 88).*

1.1.5. Broadening Horizons:

The field of trauma studies continues to evolve in its discoveries and interpretations of the human mental faculty. The complex mechanisms of the psyche and our understanding of it may be illustrated in the case of DESNOS (Disorders of Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified) which is characterised by a more subtle form of trauma wherein distressing experiences "may not be available as flashbacks or simple memories but may be exhibited in more subtle kinds of behavior" (Caruth viii). This evidence of a vast and only sparsely explored territory of trauma demands a constant evolution of the ways in which trauma is listened to and studied and in the ways in which distinct individual realities are embraced. In his study of witnesses and testimonies of the German Holocaust, Dori Laub writes about mass trauma or community trauma as "an event without a witness" (*Trauma* 80) wherein victims fail to recognise their own abuse and ill-treatment due to their involvement in it as "inside" witnesses instead of as "outside" witnesses (81). This "collapse of witnessing" (80) distinctive of traumatic events and is arguably the power source of the recurrence of trauma. Taking the events of the Holocaust as an example, its survivors exhibited mass trauma due to the variety of inhuman conditions they had to live through.

What is important and interesting to note in the context of mass or group trauma is that inspite of similar harsh conditions and maltreatments, not all the survivors displayed trauma of the same intensity as everyone else (*Unclaimed Experience)* and that this display is sometimes severely delayed or averted altogether owing to their inability to witness their own traumas. The brain is wired in a way that is full of surprises. Certain individuals go through disturbing or discomforting

situations and emerge only mildly scathed while some are troubled by those situations to the extent that they become a part of their identity and a reason for illness. In Cathy Caruth's collection of writings - *Trauma : Explorations in Memory* - the theme of trauma has been explored keeping in mind the large spectrum that reality encompasses. A certain dissociation occurs in the mind of the victim, creating a fracture in perceived reality and the recurrence of this fracture is the experience of trauma where the event is experienced anew with every echo. Traumatic memories are tricky in this sense as the natural reaction of human mind to something that can not be understood or explained in the context of normal circumstances, is to attempt to place it in a meaningful way - be it in hindsight or in the way the particular memory is processed. This is essentially applicable to non-traumatic memory as well in that the original event tends to occupy a secondary position with the passage of time as it is gradually replaced by the memory of the event - the thoughts and emotions one derives from it (James). This view of memory leads to the philosophical dilemma concerning the nature of reality in that human life is composed of both the tangible, 'real' expressions of existence and of the extremely personalised ever-evolving interpretations of the same. Be it traumatic or non-traumatic memory, then, human identity is highly indebted to the faculty of recollection and to the nature of socio-personal perceptions. 'Reality' and 'real' are rendered, in this context, highly idiosyncratic. This thesis is inspired by present day developments in the study of trauma with its horizons constantly expanding to incorporate multiple disciples and philosophies, the question of human identity and perception, and the ways in which they come together to shape human realities.

Trauma in perpetrators of violence is gaining more recognition now than it had ever done in the past. Victims of this form of trauma emerging from the acts of violence and brutality against another individual, include combat veterans forced to kill in war, perpetrators of genocides and homicides, executioners, police personnels killing on the line of duty, rapists and child sexual offenders. The traumas they experience have long been generally disregarded by social institutions due to the very fact that attempting to understand the suffering of one who causes suffering warps social structures and understanding. The blame game aside, however, perpetrators undergoing PTSD are important to the study of trauma as they offer new perspectives on the workings of the human psyche. Poverty-induced trauma is yet another field that has emerged in the last decade. Poverty automatically implies a lack of access to essential social, cultural, economic, educational and health services - a lack which is often wide exposed as a wound to potentially traumatic events. People living in poverty, especially children, are more vulnerable to abuse, neglect and numerous other forms of violence than those living comparatively well-off. These events, simply by virtue of their repetition and normalisation, have serious implications in their lives even as adults.

Trauma represented in Literature is somehow made concrete by the simple fact that words have a physical existence but there still exists an aporia in what is said - what the author wishes to include in the narration and what is not said i.e. that which is articulately excluded from the narrative landscape. Things which cannot be said but are hinted at via an indirect mode - imagery, for instance - are very often what give trauma in literature its core voice since images are but ideas made tangible through the help of language. The process of writing trauma - using the pen to graph the pain - is certainly therapeutic but what begs to be interrogated here is the reality of what

is actually represented via such narratives, the moment of trauma itself or its cognitive experience? This thesis attempts to explore the aporia presented through the narrative of trauma in its various manifestations in the selected works of Woolf and Parijat - "if psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology, and even literature are beginning to hear each other anew in the study o f trauma, it is because they are listening through the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience" (Caruth 4).

1.2. Nietzschean Existentialism and the Camusian Absurd

On the grounds that they they embrace the concept of human alienation as a way of life and celebrate the absence of a universal reality/truth, ideas embodies in Nietzschean and Camusian philosophies are the two other tools of analysis employed in this thesis. Instead of despising the anxiety and anguish resulting from suffering, existentialists view them as valuable proof that humans, in the absence of a higher power, are indeed alone in their suffering. This sense of solitude and suffering is interpreted as a source of liberation from external control - the freedom to choose one's own actions and create one's own meanings in life, to embrace the idea that, in the grand cosmic landscape, one is essentially living an absurd, insignificant and solitary life.

1.3. Research Problem:

- The nature of enquiry of this thesis can be summed up in the following questions:
- How do the selected novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat represent, across cultures, trauma in the post-World Wars scenario?

- How are these representations crucial to the understanding of trauma and of human nature in general?
- In what ways do traumatic experiences and memories of trauma, concepts of time and mortality shape human identities and expressions?
- What defines the nature of reality - the original event or the interpretation/reception of the same?
- How do the others employ narrative techniques to signify trauma in the absence of perceptible traumatic events?
- How do the gaps in narration express trauma and reveal the nature of memory in the selected texts?

1.4. Research Statement:

A considerable amount of work has been produced with regards to the novels of Virginia Woolf and the novels of Parijat. However, to the best of my knowledge very little has been explored when one talks about comparing and/or contrasting these two authors. This is rather surprising given that both Woolf and Parijat and very similar in their literary and philosophical expressions, their prose often identical in its poetry as they address similar themes of trauma, existentialism, the absurd nature of reality, human identity and death. This thesis is an attempt to bring to light the similarities and/or differences between the two authors as they explore through their works the interconnectedness and complexity of the human mind and of existence in general from the point of view of trauma studies, Nietzschean existentialism and psychoanalysis. It also aims to explore ways in which language and assigned meanings influence conceptions of life and death, thus assigning personal boundaries

that contain individual lives. As in the practice of hypnosis in psychotherapy which requires that a patient undergo the revival of his/her trauma in order to facilitate his/her cure, it is only the interdependence of binaries that acquaints human existence with its possibilities, limitations and revelations. Characters in the novels studied in this thesis partake in a constant tug-o'- war between their psychological selves and their physical selves, between their concepts of life and death, joy an grief, their acts of remembering and forgetting as they arrive at the awareness of their absurd and solitary natures with language being an essential yet futile mode of self expression. An exercise in locating trauma in literature as well as in the physical world rich in culture and contexts, this research delves into the existential crises of the post-World War population, the absurdities illuminated in the after-glow of violence and death, and the mass disillusionment with socio-religious and moral structures.

1.5. Aims and objectives of research:

This cross-cultural and cross-lingual study endeavours to facilitate a closer reading of trauma, life and death in literature in order that such readings may assist in deciphering the expressions of traumatic experiences faced in real life. The comparative nature of this research adds to the variety of resources and realities that are crucial for a broader understanding of the ways in which the human psyche operates - individually and in masses.

Through a close reading of the selected texts this thesis attempts to explicate how the history of a particular culture shapes the writing of trauma and how the narrative framework of these texts provide for a performance of "trauma" in its ontological real, functioning in its own paradigm. The research aims to show how, in

its narration, trauma is discursively engaged at three layers of cognition - firstly in the life of the author who tries to make visible the traumatic infliction of pain, secondly in the narrative structure and thirdly in the reader's engagement with the text. In its attempt to arrive at a comparative understanding of trauma in the works of Virginia Woolf and Parijat this thesis takes a material dialectic approach to the understanding of trauma while acknowledging the partially self-referential and self-formulated personal nature of trauma.

1.6. Methodology:

This thesis employs qualitative and comparative research methodology in the analysis of the selected novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat through the lens of trauma studies, existentialism and absurdism. The artists' oeuvre (primary texts, autobiographical works and biographical works included) have been studied from the perspectives of language, narration, cultural differences, the different forms of traumas represented in their works and the universal theme of existential crisis which runs through the novels of both authors. The themes of trauma and existentialism have been explored and re-explored in literature, however, this thesis is an attempt to understand the above mentioned themes and question the psycho-socially established differences between individual and existential experiences in the so-called First World and the so-called Third World.

The excerpts included in this thesis have been chosen on account of their relevance to the themes explored and also on account of the fact that both Virginia Woolf and Parijat exercise highly poetic styles in prose, demanding the presentation of said portions in their original forms.

All translations pertaining to Parijat and Shankar Lamichaney are my own. Excerpts which have not been translated have been presented in their original forms owing to the culture-specific expressions and terminologies, and concerns of miscommunication/misrepresentation in translation.

1.7. Literature Review:

From case studies and testimonies to theorisations and fictional representations, the field of trauma studies flaunts a wide variety of literary and scientific literatures. For reasons of convenience, works referred to below are chronological in order so that they adequately outline the evolution of trauma research, Nietzschean existentialism and the Camusian absurd relevant to this thesis.

Harvena Richter's 1970 book *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage* explores internal realities of Woolfian characters and the points of perception that shape these multiple, highly personal realities. Richter studies these characters as a reflection of Woolf's socio-political and psychological environment as they mirror the accelerated industrial and technological evolution of twentieth century England as well as associated mental reverberations. The book delves into Virginia Woolf's pursuit of the phenomenon of multiple realities within individual and varied characters through multiple point(s) of view and angle(s) of vision. It is interesting to note that in Richter's observations both characters and the physical world in Woolf's novels act as reflecting surfaces in that characters are not only sonic with the echoes of their dynamic environments but are themselves reflected in the latter. This mirroring of the external on the internal and the internal on the external constitute, according to Richter, the general tone of reality or realities in Woolfian novels where time is more

of a psychological experience than a physical phenomenon. In the book, she also deals with multiplicity of self - split through the passage of time and angles of perception but also held together by the same. Gravely associated with subjects of perception, time, realities and the self is the subject of psychological trauma owing to causes multifaceted and multifarious in nature.

Alice Miller's 1981 work *Thou Shall Not Be Aware: Society's betrayal of the Child* explores the subject of child abuse and the society's role in shaping the perceptions, identities and realities of young individuals. Critical of classical psychoanalysis, Freudianism and religious authority Miller's book contains case histories, accounts of dreams, and a study of the lives of authors like Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett as references for her theories and arguments against the vague nature of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy of the twentieth century. In consistence with the theme of personal identities LuAnn McCracken, in her 1990 publication *The Synthesis of My Being: Autobiography and the Reproduction of Identity in Virginia Woolf* explores the interpretations of identity in Virginia Woolf's fiction, thus posing questions that form an integral part of this thesis - what is the nature of individual existence? Can one be in possession of a single dominant "sense of being" (59) ? If so, how is it best represented? McCracken delves into the subject of Woolf's identity/identities through an analysis of the author's personal history and the reflection of the same through characters in her fiction in a manner that is self-exploratory.

Woolf's representation of selves through the device of silence - "I want to write a novel about Silence… the things people don't say" (*Voyage Out* 204) - is central to Patricia O. Laurence's 1991 book *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* which employs thinkers and philosophers from Kierkegaard to

Kristeva in order to study multiple perspectives and the inexpressibility of the inner world in Woolf. Laurence emphasises on the 'expression' of silence in novels like *The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse and The Waves* wherein characters convey their states of mind and their realities through the medium of soliloquies and contemplation. Casting aside the learned necessity for verbal expression *The Reading of Silence* proposes alternative angles for the interpretation and criticism of Woolf's works, concentrating more on what is unsaid over what is explicit. The same year marks the publication of *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* wherein Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman examine the role that memory and the witnessing of undesirable events play in people's lives. The book emphasises on the echoes of the German Holocaust in individuals who, inspite of having survived it, continue to suffer its emotional and psychological consequences as is evident in the testimonies attributed to them in the text. The highly visual narrative techniques of Laub and Felman explore the mechanisms of human memory and the act of bearing witness through the analysis of the works of Camus *(The Plague* and *The Fall*) and Paul de Man along with the study of French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann's Holocaust documentary *Shoah.*

The book questions possible relationships between trauma and pedagogy, crisis and education, and the ways in which experiences and representations of trauma are influenced by the methods via which they are studied. Felman emphasises the role of testimonies in the documentation of trauma, be it in the psychoanalytical field, literature, or history for the understanding of trauma demands that its study transcends interdisciplinary boundaries in order to arrive at a Gestalt view of human psychological crises. The book dwells on "the act of bearing witness" (2) as the first step towards the documentation of testimonies and on literature as a medium through

which the writer, as well as the reader, bears witness to representations of trauma. This act of witnessing along with the need to communicate it, according to Felman, is important in that it promises to heal and perhaps to cure entirely - " the capacity to witness and the act of bearing witness in themselves embody some remedial quality and belong already, in obscure ways, to the healing process" (4).

Laub draws attention, in this context, to traumatic experiences that escape the act of witnessing, events that render victims incapable of bearing witness to oneself (82). This concept Laub illustrates through the testimonies of the German holocaust survivors and their inability to bear witness to their own trauma due to their "very circumstance of being inside the event" (81). Felman and Laub analyse multiple texts ranging from Freud and Dostoevsky to Camus and Lanzmann in their attempt to knit together the creative artistic expression with the psychoanalytical historical and most importantly autobiographical nature of testimony literature. Testimony is one of the crucial texts in the study of psychic trauma, it representation throughout human history and the "black hole" (64) inherent to traumatic experiences. Felman and Laub call for an interdisciplinary approach to the listening of trauma in order to facilitate a more practical understanding of the same.

The 1991 collective publication of Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, *The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma* also deals with memory as quintessential in the understanding of trauma in its temporal and psychological stages. Kolk and Hart argue that the sequestered and generally inaccessible nature of most traumatic memories do not hinder their potency and ability to affect lives long after the event(s) of trauma. The work focus mainly on the theories of Pierre Janet as it terms memory “the central organizing apparatus of the mind”, assigning existing and new meaning schemes to everyday experiences. Janet’s

"subconscious" - "collection of automatically stored memories that form the map that guides subsequent interaction with the environment" (159) - is foundational to *The Intrusive Past* as it deals with ideas and memories fastened to rigid mental frameworks, dissociation, memory repression and triggers. Drawing on Janet's concept of memory as the core determinant of individual personalities, the work discusses "Habit Memory" or "Automatic Synthesis" (automated and animalistic in nature) and "Narrative Memory" (demanding a greater sense of personal logic and observation) (160) in the context of traumatic experiences illustrated through case studies. It states that memory is sorted and stored in different ways, with some memories being almost readily accessible while those associated with harrowing and unpleasant experiences resist recovery. Along with Janet's concepts of Traumatic and Narrative Memory, Kolk and Hart also draw from the likes of G.M. Edelman and W.H. Calvin in attributing the essence of memories not to the occurrence of perceptible events but to the experiences and emotions one attaches to those events.

Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* furthers the study in trauma narratives and is illustrated with her personal clinical experiences with the survivors of trauma. Trauma explored in Herman's book encompasses a vast socio-political sphere with survivors ranging from those suffering in the aftermath of incarceration in the hands of Nazis, war prisoners and ex-combatants to survivors of childhood sex abuse, incest and domestic violence. Within the great variety of contexts for trauma, Herman observes similarities in symptoms experienced and exhibited by survivors while also highlighting the need for diagnostic criteria regarding the same. *Trauma and Recovery* is highly critical of social and medical institutions that, instead of facilitating healing, partake in maltreatment thus furthering the survivors' ordeal. Herman professes the

urgency to understand and address trauma better than human society had done in the past, so as to facilitate rehabilitation through mourning, retrospection and clinical and social reorientation of survivors. The process, as Herman observes, affects not only the ones in need of rehabilitation but also those directly involved in facilitating the same as they often exhibit signs of PTSD, secondary and vicarious trauma owing to their exposure to high-stress and high-trauma environments.

Aiming for a better understanding of trauma in the modern world and the fundamentals of memory is *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, an anthology of literary essays edited by Cathy Caruth as she brings together the likes of Henry Krystal, Laura S. Brown, Harold Bloom, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in the defining, chronicling and analysing trauma studies. It explores the pathology of trauma in the post-modern context and the role of memory in defining the same. Caruth delves into the human subconscious and its expression through repetitive dreams, nightmares and flashbacks as they consistently and involuntarily return the victim of trauma back to the traumatic event. The invisible nature of psychological trauma and its resulting "crisis of truth" (6) wherein the victim is denied access to his/her personal truth is attributed to the sheer horror of a traumatic event and its tendency to elude immediate mental registration - "its very overwhelming immediacy, that produces its belated uncertainty" (6). From preliminary understandings of trauma two contemporary interpretations of the same, Trauma highlights the literality of post traumatic experiences describing trauma as "an impossible history" that is ghost-like in nature and possesses its victim over and over again (4-5). The complex nature of this form of possession, Caruth claims, places the single most major hindrance to therapy and cure.

Dave Grossman explores yet another complex attribute of trauma - perpetration guilt or perpetration-induced traumatic stress. In his 1995 book *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* Grossman explores the subject of war and combat trauma, especially perpetration-induced trauma in soldiers who kill not out of personal rivalry but because they are authorised, rather compelled, to kill in the name of duty. *On Killing* delves into the aftermath of such violence and its effects on the ones inflicting it. Through case studies and personal accounts of the Vietnam War, Grossman's work illustrates psychological conditioning in preparation for the battlefield, mass desensitisation to killing or extreme violence in the American media, and the resultant mental distortions brought on by perpetrator's guilt and trauma. Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt* explores similar gaps in the registration of trauma in the psyche of holocaust survivors, Elie Wiesel and Henry Kissinger. The latter, as described by the former, was in a sense absent through the entirety of their suffering - he was not "there". Tal engages in three distinctive forms of representations of trauma - the Holocaust, the Vietnam War and the trauma undergone by victims of rape and incest. Misrepresentation of the experiences of victims of genocides, wars and sexual abuse especially in the American context are the main concerns of Tal's work as she explores the labyrinthine nature of memory and perception. The dehumanisation of individual identity in victims of trauma is documented through the treatments meted out to them wherein their "hurt" is never really recognised as real enough and a cure is prescribed, reducing the human psyche to mere a object that can be fixed if broken. Tal also discusses denial on the part of the victim who is either incapable of recognising his/her trauma or refuses to do so for fear of social and moral judgement.

Cathy Caruth's 1996 book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* studies trauma, yet again, in the historical context of the German Holocaust. To this end Caruth analysis Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* as a history of the Jewish identity and their collective suffering, and an attempt to re-situate the same in the present context - a way for Freud to "return" (13) to the memory of his racial trauma. Caruth illustrates the repetitive nature of trauma through Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and his theory of "Traumatic Neurosis", describing trauma relieved as a form of possession (2) or haunting (4). This recurrence, along with the idea of perpetration-induced trauma, is further illustrated through Freud's example of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*. Caruth's work, along with a rethinking of present human condition in relation to history "aimed not at eliminating history but at re-situating it in our understanding... permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not" (11) also talks about war and combat PTSD. It describes history as an accident (16) a narrow escape from the same as described in Freud's example of a railroad mishap as he illustrates the trauma process - the "incubation period" and "latency" (17) that reinforce traumatic experiences. Along with the exploration of human desires and their realisation through the lenses of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* along with Lacan's theory of The Real, *Unclaimed Experience* furthers the study of memory and of the relationship between history and body with the aid of Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras's 1959 film *Hiroshima mon amour* which explores the inaccessibility of trauma and its realisation through its telling. The inexpressibility and incomprehensibility of trauma along with a "departure from sense and understanding" (56), according to Caruth, facilitates a sort of awakening, a witnessing of one's catastrophes (56).

Language as an inadequate medium of individual expression and exploration - a more or less meaningless form of referring to the internal as well as the external world - is another important area of study in the book which analyses Paul de Man's *The Resistance to Theory* and his interpretations of Kant and Kleist.

Where Cathy Caruth emphasis on the witnessing of personal and mass traumas, Peter Levine in his 1997 book *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* highlights the need to understand psychological trauma through the observation of its physical and bodily expressions. It also asserts that trauma can not only be healed but can also prove to be transformative. Attributing his understanding of human trauma to his study of trauma in animals, Levine presents a psychosomatic interpretation of trauma while proposing ways to heal and prevent mental distress not by isolated treatment or therapy of the mind alone but of the effects mirrored by the body as well. This is followed by a socio-cultural interpretation of trauma in Kirby Farrell's 1998 work *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* which delves into the relationship(s) between trauma and culture in a post-traumatic age. Farrell analyses a variety of experiences of such as those of Vietnam War veterans, the video farewells of Heaven's Gate Cult members, films such as *Schindler's List*, *Natural Born Killers* and *Strange Days* among others, and memoirs like Ronald Reagan's *Wheres the Rest of Me?* A study of trauma in fiction and culture in general, Farrell's work discusses the psychological sense of injury, mourning, and post-traumatic anxiety in modern life vexed by psychological and socio-economic stress. The interpretation of trauma, according to Farrell, varies across personal as well as sociocultural contexts and especially so in a world overwhelmed with problems of child sexual abuse and violence (domestic, political, social and racial). Trauma in this

context, he believes, is a psychophysiological tool that is as much a process of decoding the injury as it is an injury in itself.

Karen DeMeester's 1998 article *Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway* focuses more on the issue of misdiagnosis and medical injustices meted out to victims of war trauma as represented by the character of Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*. It reflects on Woolf's use of the war veteran as a means to symbolise and "to criticise the social system, & show it at work, at its most intense" (qtd. in DeMeester 653). Through a detailed analysis of Woolf's World War I writings, Karen L. Levenback in her 1999 work *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* attempts to trace the evolution of Woolf's fiction through the two World Wars. The book re-analyses Woolf's representations of the war and its impacts on military and civilian life, the trauma it entailed and the post-war world's reception of those severely altered by the hostility. Levenback's reading of Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* presents the character as a fictional portrayal of real-life soldiers who, upon returning home, were denied appropriate treatment for their "shell shock" with a large number of combat veterans even being victimised by the government, their war experiences declared fraudulent and their PTSD labelled insincere. It is interesting to note here that although Levenback categorises Virginia Woolf's work during this period as war literature, *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* leaves out, rather curiously, Woolf's work composed precisely during the war.

Ruth Ley's study of trauma in *Trauma: A Genealogy* explores the Freudian concept of trauma and delves into the practice of hypnosis as a cure for the same. The book documents numerous case studies of victims of "shell shock" or "war neuroses" and the role of memory in aggravating their psycho-physical distress. Leys presents accounts of victims whose physical trauma takes the form of psychological illness and

the success of therapy (namely hypnotherapy) in helping them re-live the moment of their trauma, thus facilitating in the relieving of their symptoms. Leys discusses Ferenczi and Kardiner as she explores the human inclination towards imitation and mimesis while also dwelling in the neurobiological aspects of trauma and the literality of post-traumatic experiences. Following this, LaCapra's 2001 work *Writing History, Writing Trauma* discusses the importance of studying history while retaining trauma narratives associated with it. This proposal for a possible interdisciplinary approach to the study of human history that includes not only the documentation of the physicality of events but also their psycho-social repercussions, emphasises on the German Holocaust and its fragmentary representation throughout history while also attempting a model approach to other traumatic experiences. Considering the multitudes of ways in which individual and collective histories have directed, rather continue to direct, present course of actions and thoughts LaCapra focuses on the need to heal the open wounds of history, to represent that which eludes representation, through the act of writing.

Rachel MacNair's 2001 article *Psychological Reverberations for the Killers: Preliminary historical evidence for perpetration-induced traumatic stress* deals with the study of war PTSD ("soldier's heart" of the American Civil War and "shell shock" of the first world war) (273) and of violence in general alongside a statistical study of its impacts on the psychology of victims and of perpetrators. The article dwells on the mistreatment of American, Israeli and German soldiers post-combat as their trauma was often neglected and trivialised even by medical professionals. MacNair's research on perpetration-induced trauma in this particular article is based primarily on the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS) and on the accounts of Nazi executioners (Einsatzgruppen), their court documents, diaries and interviews that

provide abundant evidence that veterans that have killed exhibit more severe symptoms of PTSD (nightmares, flashbacks, hyperarousal, dissociation, substance abuse among others) than those who are not involved in killing(chiefly exhibiting concentration and memory problems). MacNair notes, interestingly, that the use of gas chambers for Jewish executions was standardised by the Nazis as a way of distancing the executioner and the executed after large sections of the Einsatzgruppen (including doctors) began exhibiting what is now understood as symptoms of PTSD (275). Inspite of the bleak nature of issues discussed in this article, it is optimistic in its conclusion that human nature might not, after all, hold the tolerance for extreme violence. MacNair's 2002 article *Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress in Combat Veterans* follows in the same strain to assert that perpetration-induced PTSD proves to be statistically more severe than other forms of post-traumatic experiences.

Susan Sontag's 2003 book *Regarding the Pain of Others* documents human violence, particularly violence as a result of war, as depicted in photographs of the Crimean War, Bosnian Civil War, Spanish Civil War, the war in Somalia and others. Building on the concept that memory and the act of recall is essentially photographic, Sontag writes of the personal and individualistic nature of suffering, the tendency of photographs to exclude events outside their frames even as they depict real occurrences and the impact of such images on the human psyche in that such depiction of violence might entail more moral numbing than shock.

Modernity's Shock and Beauty: Trauma and the Vulnerable Body in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway from *Woolf in the Real World* deals with the Woolf's expression of personal childhood traumas and experiences of the First World War in Mrs. Dalloway. The novel, according to Cornelia Burian, mirrors Woolf's inner sense of vulnerability coupled with questions of gender-roles, identity and of reality itself.

Burian's paper also focuses on the flower imageries in Mrs. Dalloway, with flowers symbolising English hospitality, the British Army, liberation in addition to symbolising trauma. To Septimus, flowers constantly represent death, the dead, ruin and the war to which he lost his friend Evans. They also reveal his PTSD, survivor's guilt, the issue of his homosexuality in a largely homophobic era and finally distortions in his sense of reality post-war.

The 2004 work *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* explores certain major socio-political events in human history - African Slavery, the German Holocaust, the 9/11 attacks - and the ways in which these events cause mass trauma in the survivors who undergo vast changes both personally and as a group. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser and Piotr Sztompka delve into the processes of identity formation in the light of suffering as cultural history which aids in the formation of collective memories of trauma. Furthering the study of perpetration-induced trauma, Venessa Rohlf and Pauleen Bennett explore, in *Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress in Persons Who Euthanize Non Human Animals in Surgeries, Animal Shelters, and Laboartories*, the mental stress undergone by people involved in the euthanisation of animals in medical and social organisations. It is interesting to note that in assessing a hundred and forty-eight individuals who work with animals on a regular basis - vets, nurses, staff and researchers - Rohlf and Bennett come to the conclusion that death perception and moral conviction greatly affected human reactions to events.

A variation in the themes of trauma explored so far, Shawn A. Cassiman's *Toward a more Inclusive Poverty Knowledge* explores poverty and its consequences as they render the human psyche vulnerable to a host of undesirable circumstances that affect as well as alter perceptions and personalities. In a similar vein, *Violence*

and the Limits of Representation edited by Graham Matthews and Sam Goodman presents a study of violence in the modern age and the ways in which it is represented in literature, theatre, art, films and via the internet. The book discusses in great detail emotional and intellectual violence perpetrated by socio-economic institutions against entire cultures and religious groups through the power of representation in modern-day media and the internet. The book features the likes of Yoko Ono, Slavoj Zizek and Steven Spielberg in its exploration of the diverse forms of violence in the modern age. Through a study of violence in horror films and the angles of viewing the same, Violence explores ways in which representation, or framing of events, determine human response to the same. the book also delves into the theme of erotic violence. An extensive and interdisciplinary study, Violence aims at understanding human response to violent occurrences in order with the hope that such an understanding might result in productive interpretations of present day conflict.

Pete Walker's 2013 book *Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving* introduces Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as mostly the outcome of traumatic childhood experiences of neglect and abuse that have long term effects on an individual's intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. According to Walker, those suffering from C-PTSD demonstrate a heightened sense of anxiety and threat perception along with emotional flashbacks that sustain their traumas. Their sense of insecurity and ever-looming danger leads to an unhealthy compulsion to counter distress with the four dominant stress responses - fight, flight, freeze and fawn responses - that, more often than not, lead to behavioural problems. Complex PTSD also discusses traumatic healing through healthy management of flashbacks, mindfulness, therapy, rationalising of emotions among other methods towards constant recovery. Peter A. Levine examines memory and addresses questions

regarding their reliability in his 2015 book *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in Search for the Living Past* as he discusses in great detail the clockwork of memory formation, the ways in which traumatic memories are reasserted and the nature of memories that are not easily accessible but are 'remembered' by the body - implicit memories. *Trauma and Memory* is a study of human dependence on personal memories - the mental documentation of one's past - as a tool to facilitate the articulation of the self.

Other sources pivotal to the conception of this thesis are Geoffrey H. Hartman's 1995 article *On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies,* C.H. Cantrell's 1998 article *"The Locus of Compossibility": Virginia Woolf, Modernism, and Place,* E. Jane Costello's 2003 article *Relationships Between Poverty and Psychopathology: A Natural Experiment,* Roger Luckhurst's 2008 work *The Trauma Question* as an interdisciplinary study in trauma and cultural memory as a determinant of human identity as portrayed in the literatures of Toni Morrison, W.G. Sebald and Stephen King, the films of David Lynch and Atom Egovan, and in journalism among other media. This research is also highly indebted to Jeanette McVicker's *Between Writing and Truth: Woolf's Positive Nihilism,* Bessel van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma.*

Among the Existentialist texts that are crucial to the interpreting of trauma as a response to the act of living are, most credibly, the works of Friedrich Nietzsche - *Human, All Too Human* (1878), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885), *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1896), *Ecce Homo* (1908) - as they contemplate on problems of identity, socio-cultural impressioning, moral and ethical dichotomies and the resultant perceptions which often aid in the re-enforcement of human suffering. Considering language a flawed mode of human expression Nietzsche highlights the ways in which

language as an institution shapes human desires and apathies, reducing the human experience to a formulaic concoction of indoctrination and herd mentality. Nietzsche's writings greatly criticise the human tendency to blindly hero-worship imagined gods - their relevance and the principles attributed to them mostly never questioned - partly because these deities are moulded according to human rationality and longings. Nietzsche focuses more on the need for scepticism in order to dismantle traditional structures and institutions that preserve a rigid understanding of the self and the world, than a mindless indulgence with tradition. The same reasons are applicable to his rejection of the Darwinian model of evolution and survival as Nietzsche is almost always found to be in disagreement with hierarchies - social, cultural or special. The idea that a single species, a single culture or individual is superior in comparison to the rest, is highly scorned upon in Nietzschean texts as they dismiss the notion of singular truths in favour of the multiplicity of realities and their interpretations. Nietzsche highlights the psycho-social manipulation that entails the concept of genius - according to him, myth - and accuses flawed notions of prodigy of nurturing social hierarchies when human achievements are essentially, solely the products of persistence and dedication. Nietzsche's works are often criticisms of socio-cultural conditioning, the author's own nature of being and his personal striving towards the Overman.

Albert Camus's 1942 book *The Myth of Sisyphus* is yet another important existentialist text that professes the acceptance of one's own insignificant existence in a world consisting of more questions than answers, more absurdity than order and justice. Camus's book is monumental in that it attempts to rationalise the problem of suicide, concluding that the act of suicide is as futile, if not more, as the act of living. Rebellion through the acceptance of life's absurdities and the awareness that disorder

implies the potential for order or that meaninglessness implies the potential to create one's own meanings is, according to Camus, the sole road to freedom.

William Barrett's 1958 book *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* studies the precursors of the existentialist thought and their evolution in pre-war and post-war contexts. As a philosophy that has been ever present throughout human history Existentialism, according to Barrett, mirrors the psycho-social landscape of the modern age with its growing sense of futility and disorder. Barrett's book discusses existentialist philosophies from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to Sartre as it comes to the premise that the awareness of one's own insignificant nature as a human being is crucial to the realisation of one's freedom. Sartre's 1965 work *Essays in Existentialism* presents a study and defence of the existentialist thought as it asserts that existentialism is in no way synonymous to despair. It also claims that existence precedes essence and that attempts at defining human nature - boiling it down to a set of ideal characteristics - are severely flawed considering the multitudes of perceptions and truths that govern human consciousness. The essays highlight the invaluable influence human existence and identity derive from existential anguish and the realisation of personal responsibility. Anguish experienced as a result of the conviction of cosmic nonchalance and the sense of individual responsibility experienced as a consequence of a re-establishment of faith in one's own potential are, according to Sartre, foundational to the realisation of a liberated existence. The book also deals with the concept of abandonment, and emphasises on the multidimensional nature of fluid human identities in a world as devoid of meaning as the signs used to interpret it.

1.8. Research gap:

Current trends in the study of trauma delve deep into a variety of cause-effect relationships and the role of memory in representing trauma. This, however, does not entirely fill the void that is still agape in the understanding of the traumatic clockwork. Are individual experiences merely distant memories that constantly shift shapes in the light of present circumstances? Research in trauma still begs for answers about identity and the varied ways in which it is shaped by trauma through the established semiotics of social expression.

The problem of representation encountered in modern trauma studies is distinctly similar to the problem of representation as faced by Lily in *To the Lighthouse.* This thesis is an attempt to understand the problem better through the novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat as they employ language that often seems to transcend barriers of language and culture in their endeavour to represent, each solitarily yet together, the traumas of their respective times.

1.9. Division of Chapters:

Chapter 2 titled **Trauma in the Modern Novel: A Study of *Baishako Manchey, Sirishko Phool* and *Mrs. Dalloway*** deals with themes of trauma and memory and the various ways in which they manifest in and through physical circumstances. The chapter begins with the study of Parijat's *Baishako Manchey* which chronicles the external and internal lives of its characters especially those of the narrator, his friend the peon boy, Goldyangri the mute and Shyamo. Personal

experiences of these characters (past and present), apart from revealing their individual selves, also reveal the lives of other minor characters. The alcoholic and violent nature of the narrator's father and the domestic abuse undergone by his mother is revealed through descriptions of the narrator's childhood neglect and the characters' subjugation to intergenerational poverty. The theme of poverty-induced trauma thus runs through the novel along with speculations on concepts of nationalism and patriotism which, as characters in *Baishako Manchey* realise, play a major role in their socio-economic oppression.

The chapter also delves into the importance of environmental factors in catalysing psychological trauma or facilitating breeding grounds for the same. Environmental determinants as a cause for trauma is a theme common to the other two novels studied in this chapter, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Sirishko Phool*. Where *Baishako Manchey* unfolds in the 'civil society', events in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Parijat's *Sirishko Phool* transpire against the backdrop of war and the return of these soldiers into civil society - London and Kathmandu respectively - post-war. The chapter deals in the psychoanalysis of Woolf's character Septimus and Parijats character Suyogbir, both ex-veterans and victims of PTSD. Septimus' trauma has its origin in his witnessing the death of his friend Evans and the bloodshed he witnessed during his service at the front-lines. His psychotherapy upon returning from combat proves counter-effective as, treated by two highly incompetent doctors, Septimus' mental health spirals down into suicide. Suyogbir's trauma is the result of similar circumstances in addition to the perpetrator's guilt he experiences upon having raped and murdered a young woman. This chapter also deals with the concepts of external/physical time and internal/psychological time as portrayed through characters like Septimus, Suyogbir, Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh among others.

Chapter 3 titled **Voyage to a Lighthouse: Life and Death in *The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse* and *Mahattaheen*** deals with themes of life and death as characters in all three novels are constantly reminded of the fleeting nature of existence and the unreliability of memory.

Sartre's phenomenon of quasi-observation, that an object (or an event) can only be observed partially and never in its entirety, is explored via the multiplicity of perspectives and possibilities, and the subject of multiple time measures. Characters' perceptions of themselves versus society's perception of them widens the gap between the self and the other, the centre and the periphery; adding to their existential crises. Death looms large over the characters of all three novels studied in this chapter as it shapes their personalities and lives. A section in the chapter deals with the physical landscape of these novels - the sea, hills, mountains, forests and sky in *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse* and the overcrowded urban settlements in *Mahattaheen* as they accentuate the characters' sense of alienation and insignificance. A sense of godlessness pervades through novels of both authors and life is perceived as absurd and often meaningless. This chapter also applies the concept of *Sunyata* through the comparative analysis between the three novels and translations of ancient Pali texts, namely the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* and Nagarjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Nietzschean and Camusian texts such as *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *The Myth of Sysiphus* further aid in the existentialist and absurdist analysis of the novels of Woolf and Parijat.

Chapter 4 titled **Human Identity and the Nature of Realities in *The Waves* and *Boni*** continues the existential theme of its preceding chapter and are studies through the lens of existentialism and absurdism. While *The Waves* reads like a prose poem from beginning to end and *Boni* is highly political in language and ideology,

they share the dominant theme of personal identity in a world fluctuating between apparent order and chaos. Characters in both novels transition from childhood to adulthood as they are constantly shaped and reshaped by their psycho-physical environments. Language as a major but sterile form of human expression is also explored in this chapter. This is not to say that language is unimportant but merely that it is often ineffective or even counter-effective considering its ability to distort reality, ideas and thoughts. Themes of death and memory run through and mould both *The Waves* and *Boni* as they explore the fluid nature of identities and the individual's eternal search for coherence in the self and in the physical world.

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Chapter 2

Trauma in the Modern Novel: A Study of *Baishako Manchey, Sirishko Phool* and *Mrs. Dalloway.*

> *Are we not all prisoners? She had read a wonderful play about a man who scratched on the wall of his cell, and she had felt that was true of life — one scratched on the wall.*
>
> - Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

This chapter deals with one of the major subjects of this thesis - the treatment of trauma in Parijat's *Baishako Manchay* and *Sirishko Phool*; and in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Momentarily overlooking the universality of trauma and how its exploration by Parijat and Woolf binds them across years and cultures, as writers and as human beings; the two writers are very similar in their execution of imageries and symbols. Their use of interior monologues circle around a distinctly similar thought process, explored in prose that is thoroughly poetic. It is interesting how *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Sirishko Phool*, published exactly forty years apart, address the triumph of war-induced trauma in their respective cultures and timelines. *Mrs. Dalloway* published between World War I and World War II, and *Sirishko Phool* published twenty years after World War II, are testimony to how the World Wars altered human expectations, longings and an overall sense of reality. The world, as represented by its literature, had gone from glorifying war and romanticising martyrdom to demonising war and calling violence by its name - uninfected by romanticism or propaganda. Although divided in their political stances and each nation having demonstrated an ominous necessity for nationalism, the two World Wars ushered in torture, death and

suffering on both sides of the front, for soldiers were wounded, tortured and killed irrespective of whether they fought on the side of the Allies or on the side of the Central Powers. The war killed soldiers and civilians alike, and the ones who dodged the bombs and the bullets, however, could not dodge the trauma that followed. This trauma has been muse to most of the post-War literature around the world, with writers and poets initially focusing on the effects of war on the fronts. Gradually, the theme of trauma began to incorporate not only the aftereffects of violence encountered in the battlefield but also war-induced psychological violence in civil society.

2.1. Poverty-induced trauma in *Baishako Manchey:*

Baishako Manchey begins with the image of a youthful tree. This tree, mentioned several times throughout the course of the novel, is eerily symbolic of what the narrator in his true nature feels about his own situation. Something alive and youthful yet stationary in the most literal terms, the tree represents social and psychological stagnancy of the young narrator due to unfavourable socio-economic and psychological conditions. As the novel progresses, this stagnancy takes a toll on the lives of most of the characters in *Baishako Manchey* and shall be a major theme in the study of their poverty-induced trauma which renders an entire community of people vulnerable to events and circumstances that are physically and psychologically traumatic in nature. Exploring the ecological perspective of community psychology, Robert A. Baron discusses how “mental disorders stem, at least in part, from social, economic, and physical environments in which people live” (Baron 608), and that "countering factors such as poverty and disintegrating communities, and providing

people with decent affordable housing, can be useful steps in preventing mental disorders" (Baron 609). As obvious as this statement may sound, initial research in trauma focused only on the visibly distressing drastic changes that people experienced in their lives. The amount of negative psychological stress resulting from such experiences was thought to be proportional to the amount or intensity of negative external circumstances encountered. This approach to the understanding of trauma succeeded in partially validating the gravity of extreme forms of psychological distress caused as the result of wars, genocides, terrorist attacks, natural and man-made disasters, and accidents that inflict fatal or near-fatal injuries while categorically neglecting the psychological upheavals caused by daily life circumstances, such as poverty and the resultant suffering explored in *Baishako Manchey.*

Regular life and its traumas often go unacknowledged owing to society's normalisation of these repetitive experiences. What we observe in the novel *Baishako Manchey*, is studied under what are called "chronic strains" (Pearlin et al. 339) which are primarily adversities or problems that have been repeating over a long period of time. In the case of the narrator in this particular novel, the adversities are social and economic in nature, set to motion even prior to his birth. This is analogous to the Freudian idea of trauma ensuing from the realm of the unconscious (or preceding the birth of consciousness) in which the victim is entirely unaware of the actual event or origin of his/her trauma which is revealed only in the light of their consciousness and active perceptions. The trauma of the narrator in *Baishako Manchey,* then, can also be read as a reference to Freud's theory of "primary identification" (Horacio 107) wherein the source of trauma in the subject precedes his/her personal history and exists in a realm pre-dating the birth of consciousness in the victim - "It follows that the origin is not present to the subject but is on the contrary the condition of the

latter's "birth"" (Leys 32). Like a cruel birthright, deprivation was handed down to the narrator by socio-economic institutions through the medium of his parents. This inheritance, as the narrator describes, clings to his skin, often appearing to assume a distinct colour and stench that is constantly projected in his surroundings, reaffirming his destitution. *"...chhalasangai tassiyeko"* (Parijat 156) (stuck to the skin) is one of the strongest statements *Baishako Manchey* makes in the context of poverty inherited across generations and the years of deprivation that isolates their chance at a fair and gratifying life. The reference to his skin echoes the words of Alex Haley "Through this flesh, which is us, we are you, and you are us!" (Haley ch. 120) which finds yet another interpretation, that in the case of physical, psychological and economic traits inherited with regards to socio-economic standing, an unfortunate multitude of people are condemned to live their entire lives in deprivation and uncertainty simply by the virtue of their being born into it. Much like religion, caste and race their socio-economic deprivation becomes their identity. This is applicable to situations where an individual isn't necessarily born into poverty but spirals down the socio-economic slide later in life, and with the exterior being always more visible than the interior, the current state of a person's finances determines the facilities they are allowed access to and the discriminations they must endure. These discriminations repeated over and over from one day to another take the form of chronic strains mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Born to a mother most likely undergoing prenatal stress considering the physical violence meted out to her by her husband along with lack of proper care and nutrition in the light of her poor living conditions, the narrator's childhood experiences revolve around severe parental neglect and domestic violence aside from other implications of having an abusive, alcoholic father. Violence brought into the

household by the narrator's father unquestionably left its imprints in the young child's mind. Watching his mother physically and mentally abused by the sole father figure in his life, the narrator in *Baishako Manchey* helps explore the implications of indirect violence, of bearing witness to violence inflicted on other than the self. Also depicted in the character of Suyogbir in Parijat's *Sirishko Phool*, the psychological distress caused by bearing witness to violence against another individual is substantial in the study of trauma as evidence of the intricate mechanism of the human mind in its ability to endure injury on behalf of another individual. Domestic violence, in particular, the witnessing of harm or abuse of the basic human rights of a family member results in PTSD-like symptoms and more so in children who are witnesses to abuse since it tends to follow a pattern that ensures its recurrence, repeatedly wounding the impressionable mind. Domestic violence tends to cause post traumatic stress responses in children (Delima and Vimpani 42–52) as they develop behavioural problems (Kilpatrick and Williams 639-44). Cognition is also severely affected in children who bear witness to violence on a regular basis and they tend to display poor language skills and deformations in memory *(*Pechtel and Pizzagalli 55-70). *Baishako Manchey* finds its narrator moulded into his present self by environments he had been subject to from the very beginning of his life. His disorientated disposition and outrage at his circumstances is often revealed in the violence of his thoughts as his desire to wound and cause suffering leaves its trail throughout the novel, culminating in his abusing the freedom of a fellow human and their right to life. The abuse and neglect he witnesses and endures as a child cling onto the narrator to adulthood, taking possession of his life in a way that is characteristic of post-traumatic experiences. He lives from one day to another in an

almost trance-like state - alive and attempting to branch out but essentially rooted in the same static psychic realm much like the tree described at the start of his narration.

A brief but significant exchange between the narrator and the peon boy exhibits the narrator's tendency towards derision as he scorns at Shyamo's poverty. In this particular context, Shyamo represents the underprivileged population in general and how concepts like dignity and freedom of choice are denied to them as their plight is either mocked at or mentioned with embarrassment. This instance in the novel is crucial to the understanding of the narrator's distorted value system which is, in turn, moulded by societal expectations and materialism. Owing to his fiscal conditions, the narrator's learned inferiority mirrors itself as social influence succeeds in convincing him that others of his socio-economic stature are insignificant in their existence compared to the financially well off. This learned inferiority is the consequence of spending most or all of one's life surrounded by a hazardous and subversive environment, where one is always vulnerable to stressful events. The chronically poor exhibit lower cognitive abilities as compared to their more affluent counterparts, on account of their being beat down upon by wave after wave of adversities. A brain with a consistently active fight-flight mode is overtaxed and always on edge, resulting in problems common to most of the characters in *Baishako Manchey* - anxiety, shame and a very low sense of self worth. The issue rather resembles the issue of colonial consciousness and colonial brainwashing, with a select group establishing itself as superior to the rest of the population and deciding human worth on the basis of finances.

As in the case of the colonised, the underprivileged individual is subject to psychological and social pressures that lead him/her to believe in and often embody their own subordination, rendering him/her incapable of sympathy for situations that

resemble his/her own. Self worth, like food, comfort and security, becomes a symbol of extravagance - the ones unable to afford these provisions deemed inadequate and insignificant. As part of a social arrangement where individual worth is measured in terms of currency, the narrator's tone is dismissive of other individuals who are subject to the same discriminations and deprivations as himself. As though indoctrinated since birth to disregard the basic human rights of his own economic class, the narrator experiences a fracture in his identity when the peon boy reminds him that honour is not tethered to economic possession and that a disadvantaged girl like Shyamo has as much claim at dignity as any other woman, irrespective of material wealth. This exchange in the novel also highlights the double marginalisation of women in a patriarchal community crushed, at the very base of modern existence, under the weight of materialism.

The initial portion of the novel finds the narrator expressing his urge to commit acts of violence. From wanting to strip time of its garments to describing a certain dark night as *"...laatle dyammai kulchiyeko raat..."* (Parijat 159) (night trampled under foot), the imageries are indications of the impending crime committed by the end of the novel. The abandonment and violence he experiences at home on a regular basis comes full circle as he kills his friend's landlord, recreating and surpassing the cruelty that was introduced to him as a child. Having been denied a healthy start even before he came into existence, the narrator's witnessing of conflict in the household and the repetition of this conflict throughout his early years shapes his self image and his sense of insecurity in a way that distorts his vision of reality to the extent that his adulthood sees him plagued by irrational thought patterns leading to his internal sense of confinement. The poverty and destitution of the narrator creates an invisible enclosure that allows him manoeuvres only within the social

opportunities he was born into - at/near the base of the socio-economic pyramid. Trauma in *Baishako Manchey* reads as a part of a greater affliction that is poverty as a whole, for it contains within itself the potential to influence mental states, thereby inducing stress, trauma, and all possible variants of mental ill health. Poverty in *Baishako Manchey* dictates the lives of the characters in the novel - the force that is their be all and end all. In order to understand the nature and impact of this force in the study of trauma it is essential to explore what poverty means and what it could mean. The United Nations definition of poverty is important in the context of this novel:

> …a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and cloth[e] a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households, and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation. (qtd. in Gordon).

This breeding ground for mental illness has been home to the narrator and most of the other characters in *Baishako Manchey* since the beginning of their existence, and the invalidating environment it creates has given rise to emotional aberrations in its inhabitants. The narrator's character illustrates this in detail as his perception of reality shows signs of distortion which, interlaced with his difficult living conditions, shape his personality and his trauma. His deprivation and the deprivation faced on a daily

basis by other characters in the novel, severely affects their perception of everyday life. Living life in impoverishment means to be riddled with lack of acceptable living environments, to be constantly exposed to situations which foster a sense of alienation from the rest of the "privileged" population. With society engaged in a constant clambering towards the apex of socio-economic structure, the impoverished are continually pushed towards the periphery. Poor access to clean drinking water and sanitation, illiteracy and sub-standard education, undernourishment, and unemployment create an environment brimming with defeat, powerlessness, insecurity, anxiety and the subsequent inception of a reality greatly in contrast to that of financially secure communities.

The "otherness" of the characters in *Baishako Manchey* makes them vulnerable to the neglect faced by individuals occupying the margin. The "Capability Perspective" terms poverty as signifying "the absence of some basic capability to function" (HDR 16); this absence of capability to function applies in *Baishako Manchey* to physical aspects of existence as well as mental states of being, as the leash of poverty sanctions limited mobility - outward or inward. Substandard living conditions as seen in the setting of the novel, expose characters to physiological and psychological afflictions. The novel sees its characters, in part, aware of the factors contributing to the mental, physical, financial and social immobility. However, in spite of the knowledge that the root cause of their predicament is their ceaseless poverty, there is not much they can do to elevate their station. Under the lack of intellectual and material resources, entire communities are deprived of well paying jobs, financial stability and personal well being. Human psychology, being influenced and moulded greatly by physical, social and economic components the narrator, the peon boy, the Tibetan waitress - essentially every other major or minor character in

Baishako Manchey - carries with them the burdensome trauma of poverty. Their deprivation encompasses their entire past, present and future, since poverty operates as a cycle - beginning and terminating in their mass confinement to deprivation. Poverty begins, for individuals such as the narrator of the novel and most characters in it, right from their prenatal existence and subsists to the very end of their lives. Entire lives are spent in penury and subservience, with uncertainty and insecurity straining their faculties to the extent that it affects their ability to make rational life choices. The narrator's making a reference to the collective trauma faced by others like him- *"garibiko nata le hami ek arka sanga jodiyeka haun"* (Parijat 160) (we are connected to one another by virtue of poverty) - echoes the violent history of nations and civilisations that have scarred the minds and bodies of its defenceless people. The phenomenon of "massive psychic trauma" (Caruth 6) leading to a "collapse of witnessing" (Laub 80), can be applied in such a situation as is presented in the novel, where an entire community lives in a deprived and hostile environment. Laub's example of Holocaust victims and survivors illustrates their inability to witness their own trauma due to the basic fact that they were actively involved/ receptors in their own trauma. The conditions that poverty creates distresses its victims in such a way that they experience the event(s) and undergo the trauma while being unable to actually bear witness to their own injuries and to the injuries of others suffering with them. So while the narrator, his mother, the peon boy, young Tibetan girl, her mute friend - the whole lot of them - endure adversities fundamentally spawned from their socio-economic crisis; their everyday trauma caused by poor living conditions, becomes a standard way of life in a way that their suffering blends in with their environment and people. The anger, isolation, depression, anxiety, dissociation and high levels of stress commonly experienced by the narrator and the peon boy;

substance abuse in the area (including the alcoholism of narrator's stepfather), crime, ignorance and violence in the public as well as domestic sphere, all come together to weigh down each major and minor character in the novel's setting to the extent that these characters display acute signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Their immediate future shrouded in uncertainty, Parijat's characters experience shame, regret and stress on a daily basis, in a form that reshapes and constitutes a large part of their reality. Other event-specific trauma are mostly contained within the said event, whereas trauma caused by low living standards/poverty is a constant realisation of one's destitution and susceptibility to maltreatment or abuse. This emphasis on social economics playing a major role in people's psychological nature of being, adheres to the term "ecological perspective - the view that the causes of mental disorders stem, at least in part, from the social, economic, and the physical environments in which people live: factors such as poverty, disintegrating communities, and poor schools, to name just a few" (Baron 608). The narrator's perception of his own self as someone stuck in a situation undesired, is spelt out in the form of a physically immobile entity of the tree. This sets the background for the novel with its variety of daily stationary objects like the wall, a mushroom, a flower - all real and growing in a sense but essentially fixated to the ground. The song "*maato mero bandhan"* (Parijat 195) (land is my constraint) is an expression of stagnancy in reference to the soil/one's country, for wars and elections are fought in the name of the very soil which has been used since time immemorial, to aid in the exploitation and deprivation of the vulnerable.

When Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Parijat's *Sirishko Phool* find their characters directly affected by wars on the frontline - the World Wars to be precise - *Baishako Manchey* deals with violence of the kind that is as good as invisible to the modern desensitised population. Parijat does not beat around the bush as she probes

into the concept of nation and the idea of patriotism - *"kasley ho kunni maato ko nau ma hilo ko garungho patti baandhi diyechan, hamra aankhaharu ma, kasley ho ghaati samma bhyaune gari hami lai gaadi diyechan dhiska haru ma"* (195) (someone, in the name of land, has plastered our eyes with mud, someone has buried us neck-deep in the soil). While "*maato*" implies nourishment and healing, "*hilo*" implies disorder and decomposition, the narrator's disillusionment is evident in the lines above as is the realisation that the underprivileged are deceived and suppressed under the heavy blindfold of nationalism. "*kasley*" in the above sentence is a clear reference to the few in power who manipulate national administration to meet their own ends. It hints at people a lot more powerful than them - a force with enough resources and authority to be able to keep entire masses of population under illusions and oppression on the pretext of patriotism. The shallow graves (yet another reference to land/soil) that entomb the destitute, are attributed to the oppressors who debilitate underprivileged masses from rising above their circumstances.

Parijat, instead of presenting rather flat characters with ignorant suffering as their sole purpose in the story, employs the above instance to contribute significantly to the roundedness of major as well as minor characters in *Baishako Manchey*. The awareness of their own socio-economic oppression, and their ability to question fundamental structures of society, breathes life into them and makes them closer in nature to real life socio-economic scenarios. It presents them as contemplative humans even though steeped in deprivation and uncertainty, thus keeping intact the prime human characteristic that is analytical intelligence. Unemployment and poverty do not keep the narrator from desiring meaning beyond his daily struggle for the basics. For him, to be born, to grow up, to experience the world in all its light and darkness that builds the self in one way and breaks it another, and then to look for a

job solely in order to fill one's empty stomach is of the poorest worth. The narrator holds the idea of freedom as his highest aim and even believes to some extent that he is a free man. His brief conversation with his mother, however, makes him question freedom as he realises that owing to his socio-economic status he can never really be free. He attempts, hereafter, to come to terms with the fact that no amount of craving for freedom could really help him triumph over his circumstances. Thinking, feeling, intelligent individuals like most characters in *Baishako Manchey* are thus reduced to mere droplets consumed by a gluttonous ocean of avarice. The narrator pays for his realisation with feelings of dissociation, fear, guilt, and a confused sense of identity. There are instances in the novel where the narrator tends to feel guilty about his most insignificant actions as the reader, in the process, is made aware of his deep seated insecurities and his identity crisis. Each day under his circumstances preserves a sense of stagnation as the narrator walks the same roads and streets everyday just as he faces the same dilemmas and disappointments every waking moment - "*ke yaha raat ko arko anuhar chaina?"* (161) (does this night have no other face?)

The 'wall of anxiety' that stands before him, the wall that walks ahead every time he begins to progress, can explicitly be interpreted as the narrator's psychological trauma which not only runs ahead of him but also dominates the resting spot just as he thinks of taking a rest. The narrator expresses his anxiety and sudden bursts of dissociation as he questions the relevance of his own existence when he says, *"afulai taral parera polna mann lagcha"* (163) (I desire to liquefy and burn myself). He often seems unsure of his own being and wonders if there is any way of knowing if he really does exist. Upon seeing cloudy skies, the narrator is reminded of a childhood rhyme that could allegedly clear the sky of clouds. His childhood, though rife with difficulties, stands in stark contrast against his present. His innocence and ignorance

has now been taken over by a loss of identity and fear to such an extent that he now feels like a mere blueprint of the modern man. Growing up in hostile conditions has certainly robbed him of his inculpability and in spite of wanting to believe that things were simpler or that life was kind, he is aware that his foggy mind might never experience its clear blue skies. The author employs synesthesia when the narrator describes the commotion around him as *"masino halla"* (tiny noise) implying the insignificance of their voices and stories in their own nation, in their own home. The term also strongly hints at the narrator's distorted sense of reality perception . A certain moving shadow on the dark road is compared to a ghost and this comparison, to the narrator, is a source of delight instead of fear or confusion. The narrator delights at the idea of the unknown or unpredictable, while the known - his real world - and the predictable - his monotonous daily life - cause nothing but misery. Confusing experiences are so much a part of daily life that his sense of confusion itself, is automatised. This ostranenei in *Baishako Manchey* makes the narrator's reality more prominent while also highlighting his dissociation from daily events. His tendency to blame himself mirrors his internal chaos. Upon being insulted by a stranger, for example, the narrator concludes "shit attracts flies" - himself as faecal matter and the stranger, a fly. Self-respect and self-love are alien concepts to the narrator who later states, *"yahan ta ma neech huna lai, manasik pangu huna lai hurkirahechu"* (184) (this place is nursing my ignoble and unhinged future self), yet again implying hopelessness and fatalism. His sense of self is injured and his personal dignity destroyed by the trauma that engulfs his entire community.

"*Kasley ho kunni manis ka kankaalharu tersayera maato lai Akshata abir faalidina sikaidieychan"* (195) (somebody has taught us to worship the soil while disregarding the human skeletons that lay beside it) is a particularly bleak image in

the novel where people are likened to mere skeletons laid down beside one another while the land and its soil are revered and showered with blessings. The narrator climbs down from the elevated space of his thoughts, *"...feri ma vichaarko ucchata bata tala orli sakekochu, bheed ma samagam..."* (195) (from the elevated world of thought, I have descended once again into the crowd) implying that the provision for contemplation is a luxury rarely accessible in his current social condition, and that he constantly finds himself invisible in the multitude of impoverished people suffering alongside him. The question *"desh bhaneko ke ho?"* (196) (what is country?) follows shoddy attempts at equating a nation with its government, with the people's idea of a motherland, and sardonically with a map tied upright by four pillars and boundaries ill-defined -*"deshko euta map huncha, tyeslai chaar killa le baandhnaparcha tara malai simana ramro sanga thaha chaina"* (196) (A country has a map, fortified on all four sides but I do not know the boundaries well).

Entertainment as a means to further their misconceptions and divert their attention from the reality of things is another strong statement Parijat makes through the narrator, as the novel attempts not only to point out the psycho-social repercussions of poor living conditions but also examines factors that contribute directly and/or indirectly to the preservation of their subjugation. The balmy and glamorous image of their nation as portrayed by media and entertainment outlets (*"desh bhanera hami radio ko geet sunchaun"; 197*), newspapers that proclaim development while a major portion of the population suffers at the hands of unemployment and socio-economic invisibility, (*"akhbaar ko desh le euta reshami parda hamra aankhaharuma taangera hamilai dighbhramit banaidiyeko cha",* 197*;* the country as depicted in its newspapers has drawn silken curtains before our eyes and has misled us), ill-informed nationalism/patriotism are identified among major

agencies employed to mould the masses according to socio-political requirements and to limit their overall mobility. The narrator observes herd mentality of the group of men he converses with as they pause for his approval and/or disapproval on their idea of a nation. It is evident that they are clueless of what defines the concept of a country and how distorted ideas of patriotism are employed to create room for their exploitation. Mostly seen guessing for a right answer or seeking approval from the politically invisible crowd, the vulnerability of these men is evident even as they being to realise their subjection -*"mero samarthan athwa khandanko oo pratiksha gariraheko huncha saathma euta jamaat liyera"* (196) (a crowd behind him, he waits for my approval and/or disapproval). The narrator's statement that a nation is not virtually the same as its maps, its newspapers or its political addresses (196), serves as a prelude to what appears as a sort of social awakening in *Baishako Manchey* only to culminate on a bleak note as the peon boy succumbs to his poverty and the narrator is driven to murder. The comment *"hami hamro desh bhanera makkha parchaun tara ajhasamma hamro deshlai dekheko chainaun"* (196-197) (we delight in the idea of a country we have not yet seen) sees the narrator revealing ambiguity created through ignorant interpretations of a nation state. Their country is invisible to them unlike illusions that take its place, just as they are invisible to the source and the advocates of these illusions. The image of citizens engaged in childish games with a corrupted definition of nationalism as their playground (197), further illustrates the extent to which the illusions run. By the time the group concludes its enquiry into the true nature of a nation state, the narrator presents us with significantly lucid images that define his understanding of his motherland:

> *desh bhaneko fitalo nalikhuttama sajaiyeka hamra vigyapta karang ka dhaachaharu ho, desh bhaneko aadha pet gaantemula ko jhol ra bhaat ma dhaaniyeko hamro shithil sharir ho, timi hami nimukha ra huthihara haru desh haun, hamro bhoko pet desh ho, hamro nyano luga ko abhaav desh ho. Deshlai hamile daak ticket, calendar, pauwachitra, tourist book, akhbaar ra dewal haru ma khojchaun tara desh yugaun dekhi hamilai afno garibi ra uplabhdiheenta haruma parkhi rahancha.* (197)
>
> (country is our skeletal frames displayed on our feeble shins, country is our flaccid bodies half-starved on rice and turnip stew, country is us the voiceless and the oppressed, country is our empty stomachs, country is our lack of adequate clothing. We search for country in postal stamps, calendars, painted scrolls, tourist brochures, newspapers and walls but country waits for us for ages in its poverty and failures).

The realisation that their destitution defines their country, shows the group of men beginning to rely on facts and (their) reality in order to define their nation. These definitions coincide with the bleakness of their daily lives - their exploitation, malnourishment, hunger, lack of proper clothing - and their constant fight for survival in the modern world even as they are ill-equipped (under-equipped, rather) to counter its materialism and its hegemonistic appetite. This instance in the novel also marks the severe dissociation faced by its marginalised characters, from the established notion of identity as shared by the more privileged population. *"...tara desh yugaun dekhi hamilai afno garibi ra upalabhdiheenta haruma parkhi rahancha"* (197) (but our country reveals itself to us in its poverty and unaccomplishments) reveals

hopelessness and despair in a tone that is fatalistic in nature even as the group begins to value lived reality more than manipulative illusions. This episode is marked by the narrator feeling his own body, *"ma eso aafulai chamchu manau desh chamna thalirahechu"* (197) (I examine myself as though I were beginning to examine this country), as though he was finally beginning to sense within him the country that had previously been so abstract and ill-defined. This mirrors his disillusionment and the resultant isolation as he realises the incoherence between his own grim reality and the prosperous reality portrayed by the media and arts.

The narrator is assigned his neighbourhood by virtue of his poverty. To be denied nutrition, basic sanitation, education, and healthcare in a world that revels in its modernity is tragic; and even more so since the opportunities one does and does not have access to readily, is (unsurprisingly) decided by the facilities one does and does not have access to readily. *Baishako Manchey* is set in an extremely poor and bleak neighbourhood where incidents of eve-teasing and molestation occur on a regular basis, and people have been conditioned, through trying circumstances, to hold themselves and others in low regard. The setting - physical area and the environment that moulds and is moulded by its inhabitants - underscores the effects that poverty and social inequalities have on the human psyche in terms of the trauma they cause and the identities they form. A particular brief moment in the novel finds the narrator brooding over places he frequents. His description of these places reveal a labyrinth of images successfully illustrating the link between despondency and fatalism. "*sadak bhari ghaam ganaucha, faat bhari ghaam ganaucha, ma dohoriyera dewal ko bhitta mathi ades lagna aipugchu"* (158) (sunshine stinks all over the road, across open spaces, drawn back to the wall I lean against it) - the odour permeating physical places frequented by the narrator mirrors the stench of poverty which, like an

infinity loop, brings him back to his routine misery. His despondency and pessimism is effectively illustrated by the grim description of how it is not merely his surroundings that stink but the very sunshine that envelops these places emits a foul stench. Sunlight, associated throughout most cultures and literature with hope, truth, power and health, is transmuted into something highly undesirable as it only illuminates desolation in the narrator's context. The place is likened to a prostitute and the narrator, her regular client. The odour/ambience of the place is described as something that is glued to the skin, implying the inescapable fusion of his social circumstances with his individuality. The description of the road he walks - *"...sadak, dhamira lageko sadak,"* (195) (…road, termite infested road) - is fatalistic in nature as it concerns both his present as well as his future, for a termite infested road can only run so far. Like the fire in hell (Milton 19) that only reveals more darkness, the only truth that light has to offer the narrator, is the confirmation that the narrator and his community inhabit the base of the socio-economic pyramid - all caught repeatedly in the ceaseless grind of deprivation.

The peon boy shares his space at the base of this structure alongside the narrator as his minimum wage job helps poverty maintain its hold on him. Although dwelling in the same filth as the narrator and the men who frequent the wall, the peon boy maintains a certain code of honour as he exhibits the capability to feel empathy for others in the same situation as him. He is described by the narrator as an individual who works to overcome his present limitations for the sake of the future as we observe that, unlike the narrator, the peon boy is not entirely devoid of hope and coherence. *"... vartamaanlai paitalale tekera bhavishyako nimti baacheko oo"* (Parijat 158) (he neglects his present for the sake of his future), inspite of his will and desire to work to elevate his station, the peon boy is lured effortlessly into an early

grave, simply due to his inability to avail basic health care facilities. His grip on reality, including his rational/ideological abilities exhibit more clarity than any other character in *Baishako Manchey* however, as the novel advances, his will to survive and overcome destitution fail to compensate for the gaping hole poverty has carved out on his chest. Solitude in adversity drives him to writing and journaling, and when he says *"...hami lekhnai kaha sakchau ra?... mayaka kura haru ani-ani asantushtika kuraharu. Euta diary raakhna mann lagcha. eklo manchey kehi ta hunu paryo ni hagi?"* (159) (we can't really write… things about love and-and about dissatisfaction. I like to keep a diary. A lone man ought to have company of some kind, no?) he reiterates the truth of his condition and the conditions of most of the characters in *Baishako Manchey* - their voicelessness, their inability to be visible and to be noticed in the socio-economic narrative. He says *"...hami lekhnai kaha sakchau ra?"* as though it were an established fact that the "we" he refers to - victims of poverty - completely lack the capability to write, implying their lack of means to tell their story. Their inability to make a mark on paper mirrors their inability to possess their own fair space in society and in the world in general. The peon boy's journals, here, also hint at the act of writing as an important therapeutic means to counter solitude and traumatic experiences, by facilitating a sense of organisation when confronted by undesirable experiences or experiences that escape comprehension. Writing, in the case of the peon boy, also serves as a medium of self expression in a way that preserves personal identity amidst a turbulent sea of people facing identical adversities, by providing structure to otherwise chaotic adversities.

Baishako Manchey explores lives in poverty, lives immobile in the economic and social ecosystem. A tendency towards "irrational thoughts" (Baron 587) as displayed by the narrator when he says that youth should be the time to eat, work

hard, sleep exhausted but satisfied, flirt with women, sway with the motions of the earth, the time to be full of life as a leopards cub; introduces us to the dangers of an irrational belief system. the narrator's cluster of irrational beliefs swiftly make way for violent thoughts and desires. his description of a supposedly ideal youth takes a turn incorporating a raging thirst to murder and rebel. The narrator conveniently transitions from "*yo umer aha yo umer, ek mana bhaat khana parne yo umer, pasina bagauna parney yo umer, thakaanko nindra sutnaparne yo umer, taruni fakauna parne yo umer, bhuichaalo sanga mattiyeko yo umer, vharkharko chituwa jasto yo umer,"* to "*khalti bharibhari barood bokna parne yo umer, euta-duiwata manchey maaridina parney umer, yo bandook bokna parne umer, aago khaney umer, yo aago okalne umer, samayako jyaanmara umer yo, khanaparne umer."* (Parijat 155) (ah! this youth, the age to eat plentifully, the age to toil, the age to sleep exhausted, the age to woo women, the age to sway with the motions of the earth, this age like a leopard in youth); (the age to carry pockets full of gunpowder, the age to commit at least a few killings, the age to carry guns, the age to swallow fire, to breathe fire, a murderous age, this age to eat plentifully). In the same violent strain, he goes on to express his intense wish to hold Time under his knee and strip its colourful scarf, rendering it naked. This sudden turn to violence gives an insight into his present state of mind where, owing to his assumptions about an ideal life, he cannot shake off thoughts of anger that echo throughout the novel. Apart from its portrayal of poverty-induced trauma, *Baishako Manchey* (especially the opening sequence) is an exploration and a strong commentary on the unhealthy repercussions of irrational thought patterns. Additionally, "irrational thought" is not confined to the narrator alone. The rules he has laid down for himself and the rules laid down for him by the society shape most of his internal and external identity - the peon boy saying, "*chi! baishako*

lognemanchay yesto maranchyaase hunuhuncha?" (189) (ugh! Is it becoming of a young man to be so frail?) is not just a part of their tête-à-tête, but represents the persistent dialogue between social structures/ expectations and the individual. Walking around the same neighbourhood everyday, where circumstances don't change for the better, the narrator feels trapped. This condition alludes to the loop-like nature of his existence and the existence of millions who live from cradle to the grave swamped by poverty. Their lives are rife with physical and psychological afflictions, for where feelings of self worth and dignity depend on one's economic standing, a healthy state of mind is a luxury only at the disposal of the affluent. This is not to suggest that trauma and other forms of psychological dis-eases are characteristic of only the underprivileged population, for trauma is universal and mental illness does not discriminate, however, the role of poverty in this equation is that it catalyses that downward spiral.

Limited or no economic mobility, as in the case of the narrator, the peon boy, Goldyangri and most characters in *Baishako Manchey*, renders low income communities more vulnerable to difficult experiences or experiences with the potential to cause psychological trauma. To illustrate, the peon boy dies not because his disease was incurable but because he did not have access to the means that could have saved him from suffering and eventual death. Neglect, substance abuse and physical abuse of the likes experienced by the narrator and his family due to the lack of a proper functioning value system in the community, create ideal breeding grounds for trauma and stress. The constant sense of insecurity, inferiority, seclusion and shame incorporate specifications into their everyday stress, shutting each one of them inside their very own personal bell jars of desolation. The ability of humans to visualise the future, to think and plan ahead comes with a prerequisite - conviction in

one's abilities, one's position, a religion, philosophy, or whatever it is that keeps one's internal clockwork healthy and running. The lighthouse in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* represents the very concept of a sturdy towering structure perpetually guiding journeys in the shapeshifting waves. However, as mentioned earlier, the above implications do not allude entirely to an individual's socio-fiscal standards of living, and *Baishako Manchey* also includes minor characters who exhibit blissful nonchalance in their poverty. Joking about the probability of accidental death, a man quips about how dying could help his wife receive financial relief, while yet another person remarks that his wife would not receive any aid as he was walking on the wrong side of the road. The laughter that follows reveals a dark sense of humour resulting from a clear knowledge of one's own condition and the nonchalance that accompanies dejection - "*...mrityuko kura ma bas haasutcha"* (195) (the topic of death evokes nothing but laughter).

Stress, much like trauma, thrives not solely due to isolated events but also due to the nature of an individual's psychological response to them. Hans Selye, the man who coined the term "stress" in its present day connotation, defined it as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it" (Selye 14). This generalised definition of stress is seminal to the study of stress, memory and trauma in that it is non discriminatory of "eustress" and "distress" as it highlights the pivotal role of psycho-physical responses in determining one's psycho-physical well being. This shows that with regards to trauma and stress, perception and interpretation of an event is as important as the event itself. To the narrator, his life seems so monotonous and deprived of meaning that the usual semiotics that function in our world appear to have lost their base in the reality he inhabits. The poverty and filth surrounding him has made him lose faith in a God and when a stranger talks to him about being

homeless and having to beg after his mother unexpectedly becomes pregnant, the protagonist grows extremely uncomfortable and disgusted. The place with its images of various deities begins to stink like the very concept of devotion and faith that had begin to breed maggots in the mind of the young protagonist. Here, God was an idea rotting and falling to the ground. It is important to note that at one point in the novel the narrator mentions an unknown fragrance in the air but unlike the odour emanating from sunshine, this fragrance has no effect on his thought process. His extreme dislike for the place often results in instances of paranoia and he becomes increasingly distrustful of his mother, his friend and people in general, even going as far as to doubt his identity and relationships.

Highlighting the importance of memory the narrator remarks on how the dead are exempt from paying the price that history or memory imposes on the living. This point of view is also echoed in Parijat's *Sirishko Phool* where Suyogbir's victim, a tribal woman, does not survive his sexual assault, thus marking the end of any possibility for trauma. Her assailant, however, is constantly haunted by the violence and brutality he had imposed on the young woman, the trauma of the event possessing only the "survivor". Similarly, brooding over the subjects of death, suffering and mourning, the narrator in *Baishako Manchey* attempts to come to terms with the news of Shyamo's death. He bestows the quality of retention to a road which engraves in its being, the memory of every footfall. The road also symbolises journey and the desire to reach a certain destination even as it is marked or marred by the memory of innumerable feet.

Parijat's writing was evidently years ahead of her time - globally as well as in the context of the third world nation in which she lived and wrote till the end of her days. This is similar to the emotional and psychological intelligence displayed in the

works of Virginia Woolf who, just like Parijat, questioned and contradicted contemporary socio-economic and psychological structures in a way that has evidently made more sense with the passage of years. Their understanding of human emotions and their sense of adventure in dealing with vexations of the mind is what makes this comparative study so interesting. Violence on the frontline undeniably means overall unrest within concerned nations/civilisations, and what is a nation but a single organism with numerous minds negotiating with each other for peace, a sense of purpose and healthy co-existence.

2.2. PTSD and Wartime Trauma in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Sirish ko Phool*

Mrs. Dalloway was conceived at a time when the world was still attempting to recover from the scars of the First World War. In this interval between the First World War and the Second World War, socio-political turbulence choked almost every nation, and Britain being one of the major world powers at the time, did not pass unaffected. Colonies like India were beginning to lose faith in the British Empire which had begun to lose its power and hold over them, and young soldiers newly returned from war were exhibiting peculiar behaviour - symptoms later categorised under the term "shell shock" (Trauma Explorations, 3). The hostility of war, adverse everyday living conditions, having to kill and witness friends being killed, set to motion the post-war phenomenon of war neurosis, the understanding of which was aided by Freud's ideas on the unconscious workings of the human psyche and its dissociative tendencies (Leys, 4). Virginia Woolf writes in *Mrs. Dalloway* of one such victim of shell shock - Septimus Warren Smith.

Initially titled *The Hours*, Woolf's stream of consciousness classic presents the reader with twelve hours of a single day and multiple central characters whose minds are laid open for one to dive in and out of. Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith are characters fashioned in the likeness of various different psychological parts of Woolf herself as her own experiences with twentieth century understanding of the human psyche and with her doctors motivate the experiences of the two characters. Woolf's Septimus Warren Smith and Parijat's Suyogbir (*Sirish ko Phool*), who are worlds apart on the physical plane, are very much similar to one another in ideas and afflictions. Both these characters are ex-soldiers who have been scarred by the wars they have fought. Suyogbir's flashbacks consist of violence he witnessed against his own troops, violence inflicted upon the opposing troops by them, and the military violence faced by common civilians who were at the mercy of these brutish army men. Suyogbir often recalls sexually assaulting a young tribal woman during the war and the violence he committed against her often comes back in the form of Perpetrator Trauma as he experiences severe guilt and a sense of moral injury. Dr. B.L. Green enlists eight categories of stressors that foster Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the final category hinting at perpetration-induced stress while Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman's book *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (1995) discusses PTSD as a consequence of violence with regards to the perpetrator, especially in combat veterans who have killed or have caused severe harm to the other. Characters like Parijat's Suyogbir and Woolf's Septimus partake in combat violence as an obligation to their respective nations. They witness as well as commit brutalities originating not from a personal sense of vengeance but as a service demanded of them, leaving events like the tribal woman's rape and murder in its wake. Studies of the accounts of numerous Nazi executioners who suffered PTSD-like

symptoms because of their acts of killing - in works like MacNair's *Psychological Reverberation for the Killers: Preliminary Historical Evidence for Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress (2001), Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress in Combat Veterans (2002), Causing Trauma as a Form of Trauma (2015);* Chiappetta and Johnson's *Trauma and coping Among Execution Team Members* (2020) - reveal that suffering is not exclusive to the victim and that the ones who inflict it might not entirely escape it themselves. As *Baishako Manchey* reveals, the dead are exempted from the trauma that continuously haunts the living and those among the living who have wounded and killed, often display wounds of their own that have been glossed over throughout most of human history. Rachel M. MacNair lists "…three major reasons for this neglect. One is sympathy for the military veteran and denial that he has anything to feel guilty for. A second is a desire to blame the enemy for any harm to the veterans, not the country responsible for sending them into war. Finally, there are those for whom people have no sympathy at all, such as Nazis, slave-catchers, or torturers. Acknowledging such people as having pain does not occur to many" (63).

Mrs. Dalloway has Clarissa Dalloway state that it is a dangerous task to get through even a single day. Existence, here, is portrayed as nothing short of a constant war with one's own self, with external events and with one's memories of those events and the emotions attached to them - an arduous struggle from one day to another. Our interactions with the world from the moment we wake to the moment we fall asleep, influences and modifies our interactions with our selves, and the fact that Woolf's entire novel essentially portrays a single day in the lives of its characters illustrates the details and the vastness of a single tumultuous day of existing as a human. *Mrs. Dalloway* spans twelve hours and is a peek into the minds of Clarissa Dalloway, Peter Walsh, Septimus Warren Smith, Lucrezia Smith and other characters.

Within the time frame of these twelve hours, Virginia Woolf provides the reader with rounded, three dimensional characters whose actions and musing can today be studied from the perspective of Memory and Trauma Studies. The assertion of it being dangerous to live through even one day is an acknowledgement of the constant grinding of our minds, the constant chatter that we partake in with ourselves about our lives and about those who affect them. Memory and stress form an extensive part of our daily lives, triggering the defensive tendency of our minds to generate our primal fight-or-flight reflexes. These reflexes do not distinguish between physical dangers such as being chased by a wild animal and psychological threats such as anxiety and mental trauma. Under such conditions when the mind's defence for either situation works in a similar fashion, it is indeed a tiresome affair to be alive as "intelligent" beings. This existential exhaustion in *Mrs. Dalloway* brings to light the minute workings of the human psyche as it reveals ways in which characters are trapped in their own minds when the physical world does seem to be filled with variety but the interior workings of these characters are full of repetitions and echoes from the past. Lines such as "Some grief from the past holds it back, some concern for the present" (Woolf 49) are subtle examples of such echoes. "…words attached themselves to some scene, to some room, to some past he had been dreaming of. It became clearer; the scene, the room, the past he had been dreaming of" (58) - the past referred to here is memories of Bourton and Peter's love for Clarissa which, in his life as a fifty year old individual, is the nucleus of his mental existence. No matter where he walks to or what sights he encounters, Peter Walsh runs back into thoughts of Clarissa and their youthful exploits. Upon meeting Clarissa after his return from India, Peter Walsh's drawing up "to the surface something which positively hurt him as it rose" (42) sets the tone for one of the most important statements that the novel makes, which is that

the war trauma of Septimus and the daily workings of memory in the lives of those directly unaffected by being on the frontline, operate in a similar way. His flashbacks consist of Evans, his closest friend, who was killed in the war. He hallucinates Evans's ghost and even hears birds singing a chorus in Greek (which is taken from one of Woolf's personal experiences where, in one of her bouts of illness, she was certain the birds outside were singing in Greek) (*Old Bloomsbury* 184). Severe shortcomings in the treatment of Septimus's trauma mirror, interestingly, Virginia Woolf's personal experiences with doctors and therapists. In her collection of autobiographical essays *Moments of Being*, Virginia Woolf recounts doctors prescribing ample rest as a cure for her bipolar disorder diagnosis. Another doctor had some of her teeth extracted in a confident bid that it would be therapeutic for her illness and would probably cure it. *Mrs. Dalloway* is a statement Woolf makes that mental illness is not imaginary or a sign of moral weakness as was understood during her lifetime, that it must be understood for what it is, and its victims may include people from all walks of life. Be it a war torn soldier who is wounded on the front-lines or an ordinary housewife whose life mostly revolves around her family; stress, anxiety, depression and trauma have the potential to inflict themselves on any individual.

The novel is punctuated by the chiming of the Big Ben, which only adds to the stark difference between external time and the internal. Time in the physical world seems to move slower as it often fails to be in sync with the psyche. Examples of this are Peter Walsh experiencing a halt in time as he repeats to himself that Clarissa had refused him in the past, and Septimus, upon hearing his wife talk of time's passing, encounters visions of Evans and of millions of soldiers all grieving and in distress. The dead come alive in these visions unlike the real world where time cannot be

turned backwards to revive the deceased. As is observed in the novel the chronology of the outside world differs greatly from that of the inner world. "Big Ben was beginning to strike, first the warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable" (Woolf 116) underlines this difference between time in the physical plane and time in the plane of memory, for physical time cannot be revoked once it has passed but in the mental plane time works via separate set of rules. The sole definition of time as dictated by the Big Ben emphasises on the clock-time hegemony that alienates other time structures, thus imposing a single standard measure of existence upon a diverse multitude. At one instance in the novel, Peter Walsh feels as if someone had called his name - not Peter, "but his private name which he called himself in his own thoughts" (52) - ever so strongly implying the existence of an inner world separate from the outer world of social interactions. This dichotomy between the two worlds forms the structure of the novel and the inspiration for it. Characters such as Dr. Holmes and Dr. William are representations of the physical and concrete world, who fail to understand the ailments brought to them in the form of Septimus Warren Smith who represents trauma in its full-blown manifestation. Ruth Leys' reference to Kardiner's description of a traumatised soldier as one exhibiting "a marked absence of the facial mimicry associated with emotional expression…. He answered in monosyllables…. He was completely detached" (*Death Masks* 62) echoes, interestingly, the physical and mental disposition characteristic of Septimus Warren Smith.

A certain amount of trust is considered a requirement in doctor-patient relationships which, inspired by Woolf's personal experiences with doctors, is absent in the twentieth century setting of the novel. The first doctor introduced to the reader is Dr. Holmes who, according to Septimus and Lucrezia, is more a tyrant than a medical practitioner. Septimus is utterly unhappy with their meetings and Dr.

Holmes's lack of consideration and support for his patient's condition presents the reader with the state of psychological studies, with its developments and severe shortcomings, in the post World War I era. Septimus perpetually feels that Dr. Holmes is "on him" and his war anxiety is magnified in its wake. He wishes to break away from the presence of the doctor who, instead of being a part of the cure, becomes the catalyst to his patient's anxiety. The doctor becomes, to Septimus, the embodiment of the negative and cruel qualities of human nature. He, the tortured, views the two doctors as his "torturers". With the dis-ease misunderstood and the patient mistreated, Septimus feels deserted by the society he inhabits. To him, life seems to offer no comfort and most of the living seem absurd and incapable of kindness. The dark cloud of death looms over him as he contemplates ways to take his own life - the voice of dead Evans growing ever stronger in Septimus's mind as it yearns for consideration and warmth. The second doctor, Dr. William, though initially exhibits a sympathetic approach towards his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, suggests measures for his cure which are unacceptable to both Septimus and Lucrezia.

Ample rest in order to cure an illness bred from trauma, comes as an ill-informed and unprofessional suggestion on the part of the psychiatrists in *Mrs. Dalloway*. While assuring Septimus that the previous doctor whom he so loathes shall have no part in his future treatment and that he would be in safe and caring hands, Dr. Williams betrays Septimus and Lucrezia by sending in the very same doctor, Dr. Holmes, to treat the patient. The scene before he jumps to his death presents the readers with a somewhat hopeful and creative Septimus where he is discussing hats with Lucrezia, giving her advice on how to go about a particular hat. Lucrezia appears somewhat hopeful as well, as she observes Septimus' enthusiasm and interest in little things and details. The trouble begins when he realises the doctors' betrayal,

psychologically triggering feelings of deception and abandonment he had experienced at the front-lines. Septimus is only beginning to feel safer and to trust Lucrezia who makes it known that she did not agree with the decision of the second doctor, but the moment Dr. Holmes knocks on his door, whatever little faith he had had in Dr. Williams is shattered very much like the shattering of trust and belief he had experienced during his time at war. In the end, Dr. Holmes and Sir Williams were the same, "who different in their verdicts (for Holmes said one thing, Bradshaw another), yet judges they were; who mixed the vision and the sideboard; saw nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted" (Woolf 147). This is not to imply that it is this singular moment that defines the veteran's suicide, however there is no denying that Dr. Holmes making his way back to Septimus is the final straw that causes his last major breakdown. Peter Walsh muses among the trees, "Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind, he thinks; a desire for solace, for relief, for something outside these miserable pigmies, these feeble, these ugly, these craven men and women" (56). When a set pattern of things or a set way of life suddenly changes, the individual's mind fails to place it in his/her personal structure of meanings like "craven men and women" and what is an individual but a cluster of associations, ideological structures and meaning. Traumatic experiences open up different portals of perception where the victim, dissociated, views the world desperately attempting to place the pieces of its puzzle in a manner that makes sense to him/her. He/she looks out at the world always through a thin screen of his/her experiences, observing external life as if it were a play or a film always cloudy and aching. Septimus has visions of Evans and it represents a certain violence where he dissociates from the "real" world while still managing to partake in the repetitive incident of his moment of trauma which is "…"relived" in the transferential relationship not in the form of a recounting of a past event but of a

hypnotic identification with another in the present - in the timelessness of the unconsciousness - that is characterized by a profound amnesia or absence from the self" (Leys 32). The "radical unbinding of the death drive" (34) initiated by the traumatic state is chaos and confusion in its quintessential form resulting in sudden complications in one's assigned systems of meaning create doubt, confusion, fear, anxiety; and as observed in Septimus who, denied mental space to recover by the very society that placed him and his friends in the war zone with some food and permission to kill, experiences a death of hope resulting in the death of the body.

In Mrs. Dalloway's party, Sir William Bradshaw discusses the effects of shell shock and a certain Bill regarding the same. His superficial concern for victims of shell shock versus his actual practice demonstrated in detail through the now deceased Septimus underlines the status of Trauma Studies in the twentieth century - evolving in theory but severely lacking in competence and application. It also shows the doctors' inability to "feel", as Septimus would say, the plight of their patients. Septimus's screaming "I'll give it you!" (Woolf 148) before jumping out of the window and impaling himself on the railings below, is his final act of retaliation against the likes of his two doctors, one of which (Dr. Holmes) bursts through the door calling the dying man a coward for choosing death over life's suffering. Dr. Holmes is clearly baffled even though Septimus had been exhibiting severe symptoms of trauma throughout the novel. His telling Mrs. Filmer that no one could have foretold his patient's suicide implies that Septimus's symptoms had simply not been considered serious enough throughout the course of their interactions. This statement is the satirical voice of most of the novel through which Virginia Woolf taunts the civil society of her time as it flaunted expertise in science while, at the same time,

maintaining an almost insurmountable wall dividing mental wellness and mental illness - the “sane” and the “insane”.

As is observed in Septimus’ case, society deals with the troubled mind from an emotional and psychological distance as though illness had stripped its victim of human attributes and credibility. An ambulance passes Peter Walsh on the way - most probably carrying Septimus’s dead body in it - and he ironically thinks of the vehicle as one of the triumphs of human civilisation. The contrast between Peter’s interpretation of the speeding ambulance as “… the efficiency, the organisation, the communal spirit of London” (150) and Septimus’s morbid reality once again shows how different physical events can be from mental conceptions. The sight of men and women giving way and stopping on their tracks to look at the ambulance, thinking how easily it could have been their own selves lying on the stretcher attended by doctors and nurses, furthers the atmosphere of fear and sense of taboo regarding death while also revealing, through their awareness of the vulnerable nature of their existence, the unpredictability of mortal life.

Mrs. Dalloway is replete with internal and external dialogues which remind the reader about the nature of memory and its significance in the understanding of trauma. Peter Walsh’s meeting with Clarissa Dalloway provides a perfect example of this since with every word and every thought Woolf illustrates the most peculiar but surprisingly familiar ways in which the human mind preoccupies itself with the past. The present meeting is not so much on both their minds as are their past exploits together. Peter Walsh tells Clarissa that he is in love with a married Indian woman and is here to arrange for her divorce, but throughout the conversation he continues to wonder why Clarissa had left him and if she was happy with Richard Dalloway. Most of Peter’s conscious living in the novel is done through his past, and this holds true

for every character in *Mrs. Dalloway* as they cruise through their today in the light of their yesterdays. Peter is brought to tears with internal agony as he thinks and rethinks about his love life, all the while talking to Clarissa and fiddling with the pocket knife he has apparently had since they were all young and full of adventure. The repetitive fidgeting with his knife along with the circling thoughts of characters' minds, represents the loop-like nature of human memory and lives which, like the Ouroboros, goes round and round feeding on itself endlessly.

Peter recalls memories of childhood as he takes a walk through Regent's Park and he tries to appropriate the source of those memories to his meeting with Clarissa:

> …the result of seeing Clarissa, perhaps; for women live much more in the past than we do, he thought. They attach themselves to places; and their fathers — a woman's always proud of her father. Bourton was a nice place, a very nice place, but I could never get on with the old man, he thought. There was quite a scene one night — an argument about something or other…. (55)

These sentences shed light on three important details - firstly, the repetitive nature of Peter's mind which, though presently far away from Clarissa's home, is attributing even the faintest of his ideas to her. In his attempts to give meaning to his current emotions and experiences, his mind constantly revolves around his memories with Clarissa. Secondly, the tendency of twentieth century patriarchy to render women in an inferior light is apparent in Peter's disgust at the realisation that Clarissa has clearly been popping up into his mind too much and attaching her to something he considers distasteful - living in the past. His statement that women attach themselves to places and their fathers also exhibits the regressive twentieth century assumption of

female psychology as the 'weaker sex' is attributed with irrationality and mental fragility. Thirdly, the rapidity with which Peter's thoughts move from childhood, to Clarissa, to women in general and then to Clarissa's father and an argument they had had a long time ago, presents the mind in its seemingly chaotic and haphazard nature while also exhibiting the organised repetitive structure of thought processes. People and events seemingly unrelated in the light of present circumstances are strung together through associations and perceptions owing to past experiences, thus creating psychological structures that dominate the entire lives of these characters and form the foundation of their personalities.

Elizabeth's entry prompts Clarissa to introduce her daughter as "my Elizabeth" (47), which Peter finds rather annoying. His susceptibility to irritation at something that is virtually insignificant defines his character throughout the novel as Clarissa's use of the word "my" stirs in Peter his conception of her superficial nature. The single small word such as was pronounced by Clarissa seemed insincere to Peter, revealing the tendency of human mind to form impressions and judgements in split seconds. Clarissa's introduction of her daughter also triggers a sense of resentment in Peter who is still clearly dwelling in the past they had shared long ago. Her addressing Elizabeth as "my" immediately renders Peter an outsider to her life, the "other".

Even in moments of delight, unruly complications of the mind are brought to light by instances such as Peter Walsh feeling "as if inside his brain by another hand strings were pulled, shutters moved, and he, having nothing to do with it, yet stood at the opening of endless avenues, down which if he chose he might wander" (51-52). Be it in pain or in joy, human existence is reduced to a mere puppet defenceless in the hands of memory and perception. Virginia Woolf's application of the Stream of Consciousness technique becomes not merely a vessel for *Mrs. Dalloway*, but an

integral part of the characters' thought processes. There are numerous minor characters mentioned barely once as a passing glimpse in the main characters' attempts to validate their own thoughts. Nevertheless these passing figures who appear as shadows on the outer and inner landscape, hold the novel together through their imagery. The image of an ancient stream as Peter walks down Regent's Park presents the reader with a voice "of no age or sex" (80), a language which is devoid of human meaning and one without a beginning or an end. The sound symbolises the primitive that has been handed down from generation to generation through centuries of human existence, one that has become incomprehensible but which still manages to evoke, in the individual, images of its ancient nature. This instance represents the peculiarities of consciousness in its images of streams flowing into rivulets that seep into and penetrate the earth - one hears the sound but cannot decipher its meaning.

The sentence, "suddenly the outline of the landlady, bending to remove the cloth, becomes soft with light, an adorable emblem which only the recollection of cold human contacts forbids us to embrace" (58) subtly hints, through Peter's eyes, at Septimus's "cold" experiences and the experiences that render humanity in general, blind to the kindnesses in life. It hints that it is in "recollection", in memory, that individuals base their entire present and future selves. Memory shapes, as it is being shaped. Apart from Clarissa, Peter and Septimus, Septimus's Italian wife Lucrezia Smith is yet another important character in the novel, for she is a brilliant illustration of the effects of trauma on the ordinary folks and relations who care for victims of psychological illness. Evident in the exchanges between Septimus and and his wife is the fact that undesirable events affect not only primary recipients of the trauma, but also their primary social support system such as immediate family and friends. Lucrezia has no knowledge whatsoever of the nature of the ailment distressing

Septimus. Seeing him suffer is often a mixture of pain and embarrassment coupled with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. When Lucrezia thinks "…why should I suffer?… No; I can't stand it any longer, she was saying, having left Septimus, who wasn't Septimus any longer, to say hard, cruel, wicked things, to talk to himself…" (64-65) she highlights the gap in communication and understanding that very often alienates victims of trauma from the rest of society, mental injuries rendering them solitary in their suffering. Every event leaves a different imprint depending on a plethora of variables in addition to individual personality trypes, nature of individual perceptions and socio-cultural as well as personal belief systems but Lucrezia cannot seem to understand why Septimus was so affected by the death of his friend Evans, when according to her everyone has lost someone dear to them, everyone has suffered.

"Yet he could be happy when he chose" (66) - Virginia Woolf highlights through Lucrezia's character the misinformed notion that mental illness is something which can be brought under control if the sufferer only tries. Lucrezia had to give up her home after she got married and she could think of so many things to be worried about if she, like Septimus, chose to do so. She misinterprets moments when Septimus appears calm and in his vast pool of agony, finds a few minutes of serenity. To Lucrezia, Septimus is just not trying hard enough. She cannot help caring for and loving her husband but at the same time she does not wish to suffer in the course of tending to a man so selfish and changed that he appears to be someone entirely different from the person she had married. She often thinks of going back to her home, away from the reach of her husband's illness. As would happen with any other physical illness, Septimus's trauma affects the person most close to him. Septimus's wife lives constantly as though she had a sword hanging over her head, especially

since Septimus mentioned his desire to kill himself. She feels defenceless, her surroundings feel to her enormous, the world indifferent to her plight and she constantly feels anxious to the extent that little things such as the snapping of a twig frighten her. Lucrezia accompanies him to therapy and follows doctors' every advice and prescription for the betterment of her husband, but the fear which engulfs her every time Septimus has one of his visions and episodes adds to her confusion and fatigue, often resulting in her being irritable of Septimus's condition. Emphasising on the poor understanding and practice of human psychology as late as the twentieth century, Woolf's Dr. Holmes, though a certified therapist, tells Lucrezia that there is nothing wrong with Septimus. The doctor does not answer questions of how and why the war transformed the veteran, he merely negates the possibility of there being something wrong with the patient, leaving her in utter darkness, confused about the nature of her husband's affliction. Lucrezia means well but generally lacks the right instruments and is ill-equipped to close the wounds of a man damaged by war.

In order to deal with her trauma, Clarissa Dalloway the "perfect hostess" (7) as Peter calls her, finds comfort in organising parties and social gatherings, for everything is mundane to her and she believes these little parties help her overcome the boredom imposed by existence. She obsesses over little details and fineries in an attempt to feel life more fully and when her party finally begins, Clarissa is consumed by the anxiety of it turning into a failure. When Sir William Bradshaw and his wife mention the suicide of Septimus, she feels a certain resentment towards them for having brought death into the party - into her desperate attempt at celebrating life. It is social gatherings and fussing over the decor to her parties that help Mrs. Dalloway see things in a "deeper" light:

> Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another. It was, she thought, partly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary ways, partly the background, it was possible to say things you couldn't say anyhow else, things that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper. (169-70)

This approach towards life came to her as a revelation after the accidental death of her sister, Sylvia, by a falling tree. The fear experienced due to this tragic event leads a younger Clarissa to devise a form of defence, a coping mechanism for her grief which obliterates her faith in God and re-moulds numerous aspects of her personality. Her memory of the event, causing "scars of shocks in the ego" (Ferenczi 111) stays even though the event itself has long passed. The only belief she held now was that gods revelled in the agony of humans and that the only attainable way to get on their nerves was to make the best of a given situation, to "…decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions; be as decent as we possibly can" (Woolf 77). Septimus's defence mechanism when Evans died, in contrast, is to not feel anything. He even congratulates his ability, learned at war, to feel so very little upon the loss. Initially, the reaction seems reasonable to him and he is in awe of how he survived the bombs and the bloodshed. However, this feeling that he had "survived" does not last very long as, one evening, he is hit suddenly with the realisation that he can not feel. It is when the war was over and the dead rested in their graves that Septimus's journey down the rabbit hole of trauma begins and he starts hearing sounds and looking at the world from "behind a pane of glass" (87). He could not "feel"; the order of things and the worldly structure of meanings begin to crumble down as it seems to him that "…it

might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" (88). Septimus begins to hallucinate Evans and absurd visions inspired by his memory of the war which, owing to their inability to manifest in the outer world, become a big part of his internal existence. The fabric that had previously held together the semiotics of his internal and external world now reveals a puncture, and the imbalance it creates eventually leads Septimus to his suicide. The echoes of his war experiences finally catch up with him and watching his wife weep and cry while he himself felt nothing at all, pushes him further down the spiral. Septimus' plight brings to mind Theo from P.D. James' dystopian novel *The Children of Men* - "Feel, he told himself, feel, feel, feel. Even if what you feel is pain, only let yourself feel" (ch. 6). His trauma has already laid its roots deep into his being by the time Septimus retains his ability to feel and express grief over the gruesome death of his dear friend. The world suddenly seems too dangerous to bring forth children into it and his readings of Shakespeare and Dante seem to indicate towards a future filled with nothing but despair and hatred. Septimus comes to the conclusion that humanity is not above its animal instincts and that the world hunts in packs, deserting the ones who have fallen. Miserable and alone in his suffering he feels betrayed by the modern world he is supposedly a part of. How can humans go on with their little gatherings and entertainment, their daily cups of tea, when the newspaper screams of women burned alive and men trapped, suffocating to death in mines? An incident he recalls of the general "normal" folk laughing aloud at a cruel display of mentally-ill patients at a hospital, reveals the inhumane ways in which the mentally unsound were viewed and treated. Probed and stared at as though they were an entirely different species, the identity of a person declared mentally unsound, in the eyes of society, amounted to nothing more than the sketchy definition of his/her illness.

Dr. Holmes insisting that there was nothing wrong with Septimus, ushers in the guilt that drives him further away from the road to recovery. According to the doctor, Septimus was making his wife miserable and that things were indeed under his own control - “Didn’t that give her a very odd idea of English husbands? Didn’t one owe perhaps a duty to one’s wife? Wouldn’t it be better to do something instead of lying in bed?” (91). His “forty years’ experience” (91) as the doctor makes matters worse by blatantly generalising the situation and blaming the patient seeking his help. Septimus is held responsible for his medical condition as well as for the agony it is causing his lovely wife. For Dr. Holmes, taking up a hobby or simply choosing to be well was the cure for his patient’s illness. This approach to trauma (in soldiers and civilians alike) where victims were accused of feigning symptoms or entire illnesses so as to escape battle or other undesirable social and personal circumstances, was a common characteristic of the dawn of the modern age on account of a severe lack of knowledge about the human mind and its modes of operation. Allan Young addresses this misconception in his book *The Harmony of Illusions* where he states that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is as “real” as any other illness - “…the reality of PTSD is confirmed empirically by its place in people’s lives, by their experiences and convictions, and by the personal and collective investments that have been made in it” (5). In the same vein, Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery* chronicles the plight of victims of trauma and their re-victimisation at the hands of medical experts who, similar to the doctors treating Septimus’s PTSD, qualified more as part of the problem than as catalysts for their patients’ cure as they shamed, berated and threatened victims of trauma - “remember, you must behave as the hero I expect you to be…. A man who has gone through so many battles should have better control of himself” (ch. 1).

In order to make sense of his situation, then, Septimus comes to the conjecture that his present suffering must be the result of his vices - his not having mourned Evans's death, his having married a woman without loving her, and so forth. A prime characteristic of trauma, Septimus's guilt leads to self loathing to the point that he begins to feel that his ominous presence makes women on the street shudder. He feels like a criminal rightfully condemned to death. To his wife, Septimus's distinction and promotion after the war is an achievement. She deems it something to be proud of, whereas for Septimus the war was nothing more than "that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder" (Woolf 95) - a petty yet horrifying event that turned him into a miserable and broken man. This portion in the novel indicates the gap in proper communication and understanding of events between the victim and the ones who are relatively unaltered. The perception of worldly symbols varies in nature from one individual to another. The concrete nature of the physical world too, owes its fluidity to the psychological semantics one constructs on an individual level. It is via the differences evident in the perception of Lucrezia and Septimus that Virginia Woolf highlights the idea of several truths as opposed to a single supreme truth or interpretation to an event. Reality becomes fluid like the ancient stream encountered by Peter Walsh - babbling in an alien language and branching into numerous parts without beginning or end.

In one of the episodes in the novel Septimus mutters to himself, "Communication is health; communication is happiness, communication —" (93) and briefly but potently, the reader is presented with the ability to perceive the war veteran's sense of alienation and the urgency with which Septimus longs to understand and be understood. The moment or the event of trauma is, as discussed previously, never the starting point of the ordeal. Following a pause or incubation

period, traumatic occurrences - individual interpretations of it and the faculty of recall - pounce on its victim. Septimus' incubation period sees him unaffected, with his traumatic grief response delayed for an abnormal length of time before it erupts within him the pain of his experiences. The difference in the psychological endurance of Septimus and Clarissa observed in the instances above, illustrates that the mind's capacity for suffering and its ability to tolerate grief varies from one individual to another. The unpredictability of an individual's reaction to a traumatic event is the foundation upon which the process of healing truly and fruitfully occurs. The preparation for Septimus's intended recovery and for Clarissa's Dalloway's party unfold parallel to each other which additionally contrast and highlight the perspectives through which the two characters, inspite of having been victims of memory in their own ways, view life. The Big Ben chimes from hour to hour as they try to fight their past in their attempts at making their present sufferable. Throughout his presence in the novel, Septimus is compared to a drowned sailor and is described at one point as a person who has travelled from life to death - the journey marred by trauma. This implied image of tumultuous waters is a theme common to Virgina Woolf's *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse* among others, where life is symbolised by ceaseless waves and stormy seas. With its internal compass broken and his lighthouse demolished, Septimus' voyage does not see its destination.

The characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* can be studied from the perspective of Lacanian "Real" in trauma. As Lacan teams The Real with trauma, Septimus's life after the war, the lives of Clarissa Dalloway, Peter Walsh and the rest, can be read as frantic ramblings in their attempt to satiate the demands of the Real. The Stream of Consciousness technique employed, with its dream-like imagery and absurd metaphors, gives the characters this primal voice. The Real, being undefinable as 'the

thing' ("Das Ding") that can not be translated into symbols of the physical world, makes its presence known in every action in the novel, so much so as the chiming of the inanimate Big Ben is an anticipation, a prolepsis and a lurching forward to the Real as the reader continues the act of reading and the characters continue their acts of living. The entire situation is driven by desire - a desire to move the story forward, a desire to continue with life. In Septimus, we observe a desire for self-expression for its own sake, be it through writing odd sentences in his pocketbook or through his mutterings about death and war. His act of writing is significantly important in expressing, rather expressing the inexpressibility of his trauma and in drawing similarities between the inexpressible trauma and the inexpressible Real. Noting down peculiar thoughts and scribbling on envelopes are Septimus's attempts at communicating with himself but the symbols he employs to do so are of the physical world, thus powerless. The gap between what he desires to express and what ultimately is expressed, is wide enough to cause him additional distress apart from the one he experiences at war. He seems to be partaking in a great treasure hunt, fixing parts of a giant puzzle, while he writes down words as they come to him and hopes to make sense out of it all later. Not very well endowed with the gift of speaking clearly or making sense most of the times Septimus Warren Smith - the war veteran in *Mrs. Dalloway* - becomes the embodiment of inexpressibility. Inspite of his sentences not making much sense, like his Greek-singing birds, he can not stop thinking them and writing them down. He can not express his inexpressible trauma even as it repeats over and over again, metaphorically and literally never ceasing to write itself. Septimus mumbles disconnected sentences as he fights his visions all the while noting down his fragmented thoughts for an implied later use.

The character of Septimus is interesting in that he is continuously hopping in and out of worldly realities. He has an existence parallel to the world where the war has ended - the world built out of his trauma where the war is still raging everyday. He is perpetually anticipating danger and horror, and his distorted reality automatically sets on a lookout for more distortion. Looking at his wife, he involuntarily expects deformation in her physical person but is relieved as he begins to observe her, one anatomical feature at a time, reacquiring the beauty of her familiarity. A mind always on the lookout, as in the case of Septimus, is bound to wear out quickly. Humans are creatures of habit and his heightened flight-fight response to danger remains with him even as the war comes to an end. His post-war mind expects nothing but threats, and prepares his responses accordingly. For someone who is tormented by the realisation that he cannot feel, Septimus in one episode in the novel feels that Mrs. Peters' hat "was so real, it was so substantial" (143) when, fighting away a constant sense of fear, guilt and despair, Septimus finds a moment of serenity in his creative endeavour. His attention to the details in the hat and the calmness it ensues mirrors Clarissa Dalloway's attention to detail as she plans her party decor. A certain cushion, tablecloth or the colour of a curtain, is fussed with till it pleases the hostess's aesthetic sense while decorating her personal dungeon of existence. For Septimus, the hat is something he can hold in his hands, design, destroy and recreate as he desires - a symbol, in his context, of numerous possibilities and control. The absurdity of the fact that a half-finished ladies' hat suddenly, though briefly, shields him from existential instabilities, highlights the volatile and absurd nature of human psyche.

Sirishko Phool is narrated solely from the point of view of Suyogbir, a military runaway of the Gorkha Regiment stationed in Burma during war with Japan. It begins

precisely at a bar sometime after his return to his motherland Nepal. As an individual, Suyogbir seems very much aware of his own nature as he asserts that he is not at all a sincere person - not sincere towards his relations, or even towards his own self. At the bar - a place shrouded in gloom and a constant backdrop to the novel - Suyogbir makes his acquaintance with Shivraj, a fellow alcoholic with a lovely home and garden and three beautiful sisters. Suyogbir's interactions with Shivraj, his sisters and their home garden, landscape the novel and aid in revealing the fears and vexations of its narrator. His war experiences are laid open as a doorway to his personality and its irregularities. Through Suyogbir's interactions in society Parijat highlights the misconception that a man returned from war is troubled, if he is troubled at all, only by the physical wounds endured. Shivraj nags Suyogbir to tell him stories of war and bravery he had witnessed on the battlefield. Him saying, *"bhannuhos na hamilai sunna kasto iccha lagcha"* (Parijat 8) (Please tell us, we love hearing about it) when Suyogbir ignores his demands for wartime stories, displays the illusion involving war and violence as the ones directly uninvolved tend to view the physical and psychological wreckage from a myopic, almost entirely detached standpoint. An ex-soldier in the World War is reduced to a mere spectacle, and a very poor one at that by the seemingly naive questions of Shivraj and the crude comments of Sakambari who sees him as nothing more than an old alcoholic military man with utterly flawed views on life. Parijat here brings to light the treatment or the lack of it received by soldiers in the post-World War twentieth century.

Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway* did receive a promotion after his service on the fronts but humanity was denied to him in the emotional and psychological front where he needed it the most. Suyogbir was not decorated, nor was he granted promotions of any kind but was merely reduced to a symbol of war's ruination. Testimonies, cuts,

bruises, wounds - anything that would physically validate Suyogbir's history as a soldier is given importance and around it revolves a sincerely zealous curiosity hinting that what ever was being asked for/about was devoid of laceration and discomfort but was instead full of pride and glory. Like a child demanding a storytelling session from the elderly, Shivraj asks Suyogbir to lay open his war wounds, demanding that they parade before him, all dressed up in majestic outfits. An important part of psychotherapy, to speak of an event is to make it tangible, to assert its truth as a part of one's being; this form of acknowledgement and assertion regarding his time in Burma is absent in Suyogbir's external narration. *"malai yuddhako vishayma kehi bolna mann lagdaina Shivrajji! Yuddha bhaneko hami afu jastai maanisharu apastama katakat garnu ta ho ni badi ke ho ra"* (7) (I don't like talking about war, Shivrajji! What more is war but people like us killing one another) - resounds echoes from Septimus' description of war in *Mrs. Dalloway* ("that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder", 95) as well as from *Baishako Manchey* where the narrator realises his own oppression through the means of nationalism/patriotism. Irrespective of their status as soldiers or as a lay civilian folk, the underpaid working class is rendered most affected by national turmoil. Be it domestic economy (as in *Baishako Manchey*) or the war time chaos addressed in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Sirish ko Phool*, the nation state claims its victims from the common population via flawed ideas of what a country should stand for. It is evident in these novels that war, be it domestic or international in nature, is the "rich man's war and the poor man's fight" (Foote ch. 6) as it most affects the highly vulnerable. Suyogbir's country not only demands of him service at the war front but also requires personal sacrifices that facilitate his psychological suffering.

Inspite of the horrors he encounters at war, Suyogbir does not speak to a single person, throughout the course of the novel, of his war experiences. According to him, a man off to war is as good as a machine for he is not allowed space to feel or think, and as a machine even after the event of war one must continue to live one's life - a hollow entity drained of all that was once familiar. Suyogbir's disillusioned and deglorified view of war is starkly similar to Septimus' response in *Mrs. Dalloway* as he is decorated for his service at the war that kills his friends and terminates his chances at a healthy and normal life. Both Suyogbir and Septimus are reduced to mere shadows of who they once used to be. The futility of war is explored in Suyogbir's address to the tribal woman he rapes in Burma - "*timi ra ma ma ke dushmani cha ra? Timi ke paucheu ani ma ke pauchu ra yo yuddha jitera hos wa harera?"* (Parijat 37) (What enmity do we have against one another? What do you or I gain from this war?). Parijat employs images of Suyogbir and the tribal woman's dog feasting together on the meat of a wild boar upon invitation from the headhunter chief, thus conveying the sense of mindlessness and absurdity in life felt by Suyogbir who would, the very next day, end up violently raping the same woman in whose house he had feasted. The shadow of death that looms over Suyogbir's identity as a soldier in the World War makes him blind to everything else but to his own physical and psychological needs. The uncertainty of life and the imminence of death in the frontiers, drives this particular soldier to commit insensitive and cruel crimes against fellow human beings.

The illustration of the young woman's rape occurs in one of Suyogbir's recollections and is particularly violent - her bloodied cheeks, mutilated breasts along with the rest of her body is toyed with for an absurdly long period of time. Like a depraved animal gorging on its food, Suyogbir struggles to find meaning in life in the face of death while depriving another human being of her right to life and exploiting

her for his own selfish purposes. Abnormal circumstances are normalised through repetition to such an extent that the soldier does not think twice before violating and killing the woman whose family had welcomed him into their home. The urgency to live life in the face of death, watching his friends kill and die around him makes Suyogbir question his own significance in the existential order. Suyogbir exhibits severe symptoms of shell shock characterised, in *Trauma: A Genealogy*, by "mutism, loss of sight or hearing… anesthesia, exhaustion, sleeplessness, depression, and terrifying, repetitive nightmares… bodily expressions of obstructed or "repressed" emotions" (Leys 84). Just like *Mrs. Dalloway's* Septimus, he experiences flashbacks of bloodshed and of the violence he had inflicted on the innocent. The atrocities suffered by his side of the regiment and the personal acts of inhumanity he had afflicted upon the local women, surface time and time again as a catalyst to his emptiness and guilt. He believes that one is never alone because personal history and the misery that the world endows upon every living being never allows one the luxury of solitude. However, the image comparing Suyogbir to a dark well that has consumed numerous lives and is now looking skywards for compromise, illustrates the utter loneliness Suyogbir feels in the depths of his being. *Baishako Manchey*, too, employs the image of a dark well as it reflects nothing except the darkness in the lives of its characters. The same purposelessness and hollowness of existence is felt by Suyogbir who, thousands of miles away from the war, still feels scared and vulnerable and is easy to startle. His anxiety is evident in his moments alone as well as in his social interactions, and for every sentence spoken there is a myriad of doubts and confusions tormenting his mind.

Suyogbir expresses guilt at having victimised the defenceless woman, likening himself to a hungry cheetah waiting to pounce on his food but also, interestingly,

recalls that he had felt at the moment as if he were dreaming a "*mitho sapana*" (Parijat 38) (sweet dream). To describe an act of brutality as a "sweet dream", requires that one is psychologically and emotionally distorted to a great degree. His brutal display of power against the tribal woman comes to him almost as a respite from the powerlessness he is experiencing at the battleground. Not having to think of death in that brief moment brings him relief and happiness but it breaks down the social and moral structure he was previously familiar with, creating a chasm between his former self and the self born from his trauma. This makes Suyogbir's psychology particularly complex to decipher and his trauma difficult to unmask. There are moments when he regrets his actions and circumstances, and there are other moments still when he attempts to justify his deeds. In his desperate need to come out of this chronic confusion, he decides to push away his guilt by acknowledging that he is not ready to confess his sins and that if they really even were sins, his time in the Death Valley would have washed them away by now. Suyogbir addresses the woman he had killed, saying "*Mero matra hoina yahan timro jiwanko pani astitwa chaina, mero matra hoina timro mrityuko pani artha chaina. Yo yuddha ko ghanghor chhetra bhitra hami duiwatai ko mulya chaina"* (37) (your life, like mine, lacks identity, your death, like mine, is meaningless. This terrible battlefield has rendered both our lives worthless) marking that point in the novel where he lets go of his guilt, equating the violence done by him and the violence committed unto him. The lacuna created by traumatising events strips life of the meaning(s) assigned to it, causing Suyogbir to come to the conclusion that no life has meaning in a world raging with war.

The act of war itself appears such a great sin to Suyogbir that his private crimes seem to him minor blunders inspite of the fact that they haunt him on a daily basis. His inability to understand the reason and appropriate the source of his trauma

causes Suyogbir to lead a disorientated life. He repeats, throughout the novel, that he has been emptied by the war and that he is indeed a dead person amongst the general living population. War distorts Suyogbir's concept of life and death in a way that he deems the violent murder and abuse of the tribal woman equal to his looming inevitable death as a soldier on the fronts. The concept of tomorrow or a future is absent in the mind of the soldier who is reduced, by the threat of war, to an animal who only lives on its instincts and focuses on its momentary needs. Excerpts like, *"...aja kacho aalu, bholi ke khaney? ek-arkalai khane ki afnai masu khaney?"* (47) (… raw potatoes today, what do we eat tomorrow? Do we eat one another or dine on our own flesh?) bare the state of mind of humans exposed to life threatening violence such as seen in the war front. Their dysfunctional and violent environment is marked by a severe lack that crushes their sense of dignity - lack of adequate food supplies, lack of sufficient medical attention, lack of security, lack of basic human rights taken for granted under peaceful circumstances. The shortage of food, in Suyogbir's case, prepares his mind for extreme possibilities - to kill and be killed, to eat and be eaten. The half-starved Suyogbir succumbs to inflictions of stress as he surrenders to the chaos around him. It is in his interior commentaries that the reader is made aware of the magnitude of his mental injury - *"mero sharirma wishwayuddhako kunai chhap chaina tyo chhalako rog ta euti jungali keti…"* (7) (my body bears no trace of the world war, the skin condition is because of a tribal girl…) he trails off, never beginning his verbal account, denying others a peek into his perspectives and his experiences. The fact that the only physical mark he bears of the war at Burma is a skin infection he contracted from the woman he had raped, leads him to discredit the sacrifice he had made for the sake of his profession. His sense of self worth demolished, Suyogbir leads life post-war in a repetitive daze of anxiety and

aimlessness - *"Suyogbir Singh budo, raksyaha, sipahi, hawama nango khukuri nachayera ayeko yo mero inaam"* (19) (Suyogbir Singh old, alcoholic, soldier, my reward for brandishing my khukuri in the battlefield). He is aware that the war had changed him in many ways. He speaks of meaninglessness of life and the futility in violence as he realises that in going to war he had not gained a single thing but had lost too much of his own being in the process. In his own eyes, Suyogbir has now been rendered empty - *"...ma rittiyera ayeko"* (7) (I have arrived empty).

His relationship to Sakambari in the novel can be read parallel to his relationship with the war in which he had served. He compares Sakambari's speech to the sound of bullets being fired - something he is always vigilant about. Around her, Suyogbir is always on his toes, watchful of what he says and how he acts. Every encounter with Sakambari is an event of mental violence which attracts and repulses him at the same time. The fact that she sees him as an old alcoholic criminal - for war is a crime to her and the ones who partake in it in any form are all offenders - almost comes as the booming voice of truth to Suyogbir in his state of perpetual hollowness. To be in the company of Sakambari becomes to him equal to living his soldier's shame, his profession rendered absurd and pointless. His act of seeking validation from Sakambari, asking her for a "*jiwandaan*" can be likened to his seeking a fresh start from life. Since his days at the war in Burma, Suyogbir had thirsted after life and attempted desperately to give it some worth as observed in acts such as his raping the headhunter's daughter. Imminent death - a meaningless one at that - drives him headfirst into a blind search for value in life. This search ends at Sakambari who stands for hope and redemption even as she constantly causes him mental violence. A firm believer in the meaningfulness of life, Suyogbir believes in interdependence among individuals and among events, deeming occurrences meaningful only through

their interactions with one another, whereas Sakambari has taught herself to find meaning in the individuality of things or people irrespective of the nature of the incidents taking place around them. Love, for example, is one such interdependence of beings which appears unnecessary to Sakambari unlike Suyogbir who, inspite of his numerous guilts and regrets, seeks the explanation to life in human relationships. Sakambari's existence in the novel counters the existence and ideology of Suyogbir, as is seen in their conversation about the carnivorous *sungabha* plant (11 - 13).

Where Suyogbir sees the plant's existence as meaningless owing to the fact that it does not wrestle with the bees for nectar, it does not indulge in amorous fights with the insects but merely consumes them; Sakambari believes that to be able to exist thus in solitude and selfish delight is a trait to be applauded. A carnivorous plant devouring insects that wander too close, is analogous to the rape and murder committed by Suyogbir. Very much like the *sungabha* that withers away even as it consumes another life, the soldier deteriorates mentally and physically after having inflicted pain on a fellow human being. In the context of the *Sungabha,* Sakambari advocating solitary living devoid of tussles with insects and birds, stands greatly in contrast with Suyogbir's insensitive actions in the past. Sakambari's ideology represents the way of life Suyogbir craves for on a daily basis - to revel and bloom in solitude and to live with one's past without having to clash with external forces.

An important facet of trauma which is discussed by Parijat in *Sirishko Phool* is that trauma is born of violence and the violence, like disease, does not discriminate between the inflictor and the inflicted. It spreads, perhaps not equally but surely, in all directions. Suyogbir's sexual assault of the tribal woman echoes throughout his existence post his service in the military. His perpetrator's trauma breeds monsters in his mind while the lifeless victim escapes the grasp of traumatic influence. The

passage of a considerable amount of time had been unable to erase the glaring eyes of the tribal woman from his mind. Suyogbir weighs his worth in life with these events as reference points. His feelings of wretchedness and guilt upon having raped and molested numerous women, having exploited still others after giving them false hopes of marriage and then finally running away from them and from the war, all contribute to his PTSD. *"ma bichar garchu kasta yiniharu khaltika aulaharule tarsaudainan kya ra? Hamile ke lanu Swadeshma, ladakuharu ka tauka?"* (42) (i wonder if they are haunted by the mutilated fingers in their pockets. What souvenir do we take home from this war, the heads of warriors?) - illustrates Suyogbir's guilt and the guilt of innumerable soldiers whose only medal once the war ends, is the shame of having committed atrocities on other beings and having suffered cruelty themselves. Fear and guilt together give rise to Suyogbir's condition where he craves for a purpose.

Suyogbir's experiences with women had brought him nothing but self loathing and he is continuously haunted by his cruel acts, especially whenever he encounters Sakambari in person or in thoughts. He is an assailant, suffering the trauma of an incident his victim could not live to undergo. The trauma of those events instead, like a ghost, possesses the living breathing Suyogbir through his act of witnessing and more importantly through his position as the perpetrator of violence. His anxiety makes him want to scream into the night and his past latches on to his present, and is constantly plagued by his former way of life. Sakambari reminds him of war as does every other interaction he has with the world. Love is rendered meaningless as he observes the tuberculosis inflicted woman shopkeeper and her young lover desperately trying to make the most of their uncertain time together. Realising that no amount or intensity of affection can save one from the clutches of untimely death, extinguishes Suyogbir's faith in love. Sakambari's sudden demise reinforces in him

the conviction that his wounds will never find closure in the apathetic world he inhabits. His hope to find salvation in Sakambari is shattered as is his hope of being understood:

> *...hami eka-arka ma spashta huna sakenaun ra kahilyei sakdainaun pani. Yas jiwan ko pachi euta mahashunya cha aba kehi pani chitaunna, sab nirarthak chan. Timi euta andhakaar ma nissasiyera mareu ra kun din ma pani marchu , yehi ho timro ra mero jiwan ko mulya.* (66-67)

> (…we could not and will never be open to one another. Life thrives against the background of a great void that renders every desire meaningless. You died asphyxiated in the darkness and some day I will meet the same fate, this is what both our lives ultimately amount to).

Death looms large on all worldly events and Suyogbir begins to view existence as synonymous with suffering. On a deathly still night the lovers, himself and a street dog howl in agony as they are all depicted in Suyogbir's eyes as equal in their misery. Whatever little optimism and faith he had in life is obliterated completely and he sees nothing wrong with the act of suicide, comparing humans with worms and insects dragging themselves across excreta. He expresses his desire to engrave on his body, his new revelation - *"aan malai shareerbhari khopera hidna mann lageko cha, "jiwan asafalta ho, yo jiwan durbhagya ho , maanis yesai pani dukhi cha usai pani dukhi cha."* (67) (yes I wish to tattoo these words all over my body, "life is failure and ill luck, mankind is always in distress"). Sakambari's death finds Suyogbir transitioning into a nihilistic phase in his life as he embraces the

pointlessness of reality and seeks no more to evaluate existence on the basis of events and relationships. The sentence *"maile vastaviktaharu lai pachai sakeko chu ra ahiley santushti ko euta paridhi khichna sakeko chu"* (68) (I have mulled over realities and am now able draw around myself a circle of contentment) illustrates his detachment from reality and his progression into a more intricate reclusion. Suyogbir's newfound stoicism aids him as he mourns his loss and continues his attempts at living life far away from the hauntings of his existential trauma. By the time Parijat ends the novel, Suyogbir's confusion and guilt is converted into his acceptance of the suffering in existence - *"euta nissar sansaar bhitra ma bachiraheko chu ra sadhai swikaar garchu ma euta mahashunya bhitra baachi raheko chu"* (68) (I live in an absurd world and accept the fact that I exist within a great void). This reference to the great existential void, *shunyata*, also appears in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* with its characters struggling, like Suyogbir, to find their purpose.

In conclusion, *Baishako Manchey*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Sirishko Phool* chronicle the multiple ways in which external physical events and environments give rise to trauma and distortions in the human psyche. This psychosomatic nature of human existence is demonstrated in *Baishako Manchey* through the relationship between its characters and their socio-economic conditions, and through the role their physical environment plays in shaping their anxieties and perceptions. *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Sirishko Phool* exhibit the same through their backdrop of war and through the exploration of memory and trauma in the context of shell shocked soldiers and civilians alike. In this context Pierre Janet's case study of Marie illustrates appropriately how physical is made psychological. Janet documents Marie's illness, owing to convulsions and delirium coinciding with her menstrual periods, as violent

episodes in which she became hyperactive, ""uttered cries of terror", speaking incessantly of blood and fire", vomited blood, suffered from "various anesthesias and a hysterical blindness of her left eye" (Leys 106). Her hysteria was revealed through therapy to have originated in her past when, feeling ashamed at the onset of her first menstrual periods, she had pluged herself into a large tub of cold water in an attempt to stop the blood flow. This episode had resulted in physical shock, shivering, delirium lasting several days and the termination of her monthly cycle which would only begin again, laden with symptoms of her psychological affliction, after an interval of five years (106). Similarly literal and physical occurrences are interpreted by characters in the novels studied in this chapter in a way that these events become part of their psyche. However, unlike Marie whom Janet claims to have cured with hypnotherapy characters in the novels studied in this chapter are compelled to navigate through their psychosomatic traumas on their own unaided by any form of effective therapy.

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Chapter 3

Voyage to a Lighthouse: Life and Death in *The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse* and *Mahattaheen.*

> *Have you ever seen fireworks that make figures? ... I want to make figures... . Is that what you want to do?*
>
> - Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*
>
> *By divers ways and wendings did I arrive at my truth; not by one ladder did I mount to the height where mine eye roveth into my remoteness.*
>
> - Nietzsche Frederich, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Along with themes of trauma and memory, the novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat deal with questions of mortality and the significance (and the lack of it) of life in the shadow of death. Virginia Woolf's first novel *The Voyage Out* and her sixth and autobiographical *To the Lighthouse*, are accounts of the characters' psycho-physical journeys towards self-realisation. The physical progression of characters towards the vacation island and their psychological progression towards future lives in *The Voyage Out*, and the advancement towards the plentifully mentioned (but never, during the course of the novel, arrived at) lighthouse in *To the Lighthouse*, transpire upon a strong foundation of societal norms and traditions. Events in both novels are shaped by their landscapes that predominantly comprise of the sea and its turbulences, islands and their attempts at civilisation and, in the case of *To the Lighthouse*, a faraway luminous tower. Both novels are a departure from the routine way of life

practiced within the walls of civilisation - *The Voyage Out* with its literal voyage out at sea, and *To The Lighthouse* with its holiday home in the Hebrides and the journey towards the fabled lighthouse. Parijat's *Mahataheen* questions social structures, traditions, human relationships and the understanding of ethics. Just as characters in *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse* are constantly reminded of their insignificance in the light of their environment, physical surroundings in *Mahattaheen* consistently portray the existential crisis of its narrator.

3.1 Natural, Built and Psychological Environment in *The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse* and *Mahattaheen*:

The physical settings of the *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse* isolate their characters who are drawn out from their post industrial world and are placed against the grand landscape of the sea and mountains. In *The Voyage Out* England is rendered a mere cluster of lights as the voyagers sail away from land. The greater part of its surface constituting water, strips of land teeming with modern civilisation are reduced to a tiny speck against the background of the vast uncharted sea. Helen Ambrose ruminates, "The people in ships, however, took an equally singular view of England. Not only did it appear to them to be an island, and a very small island, but it was a shrinking island in which people were imprisoned" (*Voyage Out* 24). Civilisation and modernity are equated with prisons deterring people, who are compared to ants (24), from true freedom. Their frenzied existence is labelled "aimless" (24) and selfish with each of them almost pushing the other over the edge, and from a distance England sounds confused and clamorous before the noise is eventually completely silenced.

Once out at sea, the voyagers find themselves against the cosmic backdrop. Towns appear puny in comparison to the great purple mountains behind them and the seas seem to flow eternally. Their withdrawal from civilisation is termed "lonely" (25), while it is also described as a source of great tranquility as Helen, along with her fellow passengers, sets forth into a boundless world "travelling all day across an empty universe" (25) filled with uncertainty. Joy and death seem equally plausible as they sail away from the familiar squabbles of society. The characters in the novel are frequently engaged in conversations about death, courage, and the valour its characters associate with the military. The ongoing plague also leads the characters to realise their own mortal natures as they speculate the possibility of everyone dying "of the plague to-morrow" (45). It most likely refers to the Third Pandemic that afflicted their globalised world - "The plague—you see. It attacks the rats, and through them other creatures" (145) - while also symbolising the despondency and desolation that plagued the modern world. With the war raging and hopelessness spreading through the world like a disease, characters in *The Voyage Out* find themselves vulnerable to the sort of psychological crises which tormented and often claimed the lives of the afflicted as is observed in the case of Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway.*

In *To the Lighthouse*, the sea is a symbol of impermanence, violence and constant motion with ceaseless waves that dash against and eat away at the island inch by inch. This fluidity of nature symbolised by the sea causes Mrs. Ramsay to fear, as humans have feared since time immemorial, "…the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea…" (*Lighthouse* 20). Though perched cozily upon an island, the characters are surrounded by uncertainty and change in the form of weather, scenery and circumstances. The house they spend their summers in, is yet another organism

which ages as does the furniture within it. Surrounded by symbols of constant change, the characters in *To the Lighthouse* live within an edifice that continually changes from the inside out. The present turbulence of Mrs. Ramsay's mind, her fussing over dinner parties and potential weddings - the waves - are in coexistence with her realisation that time is swift in its passing and her children will soon become adults, things familiar today will change tomorrow and that the only way to preserving them in a transitory world is to indulge in them wholly while they still belong to the present. This perception of time and death bestows in Mrs. Ramsay the ability to relish the present in its full potential. While the sea as the grand symbol of universal motion is terrifying to the characters, it is also a source of relief as they go to the waters, "... Regularly every evening drawn by some need. It was as if the water floated off and set sailing thoughts which had grown stagnant on dry land, and gave to their bodies even some sort of physical relief" (24). The novel makes the stationary lighthouse its focal point, while being surrounded its entire length by images of sailing boats and moving waves. Much like in *The Voyage Out*, the characters in this novel experience a sense of inadequacy as they compare themselves to their natural surroundings. The brevity of their existence dawns upon them time and again through their proximity to the landscape, as "…distant views seemed to outlast by a million years (Lily thought) the gazer…" (25).

The cityscape in *Mahattaheen* stands in contrast to the settings mentioned above, with its narrow streets, crowded settlements, filth and monotony. His psycho-physical landscape is portrayed as, "*ma bhitra euta mahattaheen, dukhi ra jhutro manchey baachcha, jhutrey saanjh haru lai bitaundai euta jhutray sthaan ma, euta jhutray parivesh ma*." (Parijat 125) (within me resides a worthless, sad and petty man, living through petty evenings in a petty place and environment). Unlike the characters

in *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse*, characters in *Mahattaheen* inhabit the bustling, crowded part of a city described as "*pauwachita jasto sahar*" (73) (a scroll painting of a city). In place of mountains, forests and seemingly infinite seas, the narrator in Parijat's novel is surrounded by the bleakness of city life in Kathmandu, and the ocean air in Virginia Woolf's novels is replaced by the "*durgandha*" (99) (stench) of monotony, lust and decomposition. Sia, the apparent origin of this stench, is compared to a fossil - "fossil Sia" (149) - preserved by a lifeless and dismal city where crows perched on leafless branches sing their dreary tunes. Kathmandu seems almost unreal as though it were an unchanging painting, the light of day being just another shade in the canvas - "*ghaam thiyena, matra rang ko sanskaar pokhiyeko thyo aankha ko akash bhari.*" (101) (there was no sun, only colours spilt over the skies of perception). In the latter parts of the novel, the narrator's days are driven by compulsion as the horizon is reduced to a mere stroke of colour in the distance and his value system is pulverised.

3.2. Absurdity and Existential Burden in *The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse* and *Mahattaheen*:

The Voyage Out finds Helen Ambrose deliberating over the absurd nature of the modern world as she is struck by the strangeness of everyday objects and people. The familiar is rendered surreal by comparisons such as the one equating moving cars to spiders on the moon - "The shooting motor cars, more like spiders in the moon than terrestrial objects, the thundering drays, the jingling hansoms, and little black broughams, made her think of the world she lived in." (Woolf 5). This defamiliarisation of routine circumstances in the initial parts of the novel marks a shift

of perception in Helen Ambrose as she begins to view the civilised world around her in a new light. The defamiliarisation also comes as a prologue to the novel which is an account of the characters' physical and psychological journey towards the unknown.

The Voyage Out, published in 1915, is a peek into life in a world plagued by the first World War. It portrays masterfully the sense of alienation that confronted the masses as they transitioned into an unpredictably volatile new world. With conventional psycho-social structures pulverised in the wake of the first World War, the novel illustrates this dissociation with a former, relatively non-hostile, way of life. Sentences such as "When one gave up seeing the beauty that clothed things, this was the skeleton beneath." (5), offer to the reader visual depictions of the grand scale of disenchantment experienced by a population overwhelmed with war. The word "skeleton" in the above sentence associates modern state of affairs with death and decomposition, revealing a society internally hollowed out and what is a society but the sum total of its members - "…. *hami ta haun samaaj natra samaaj ko ke astitwa cha?*" (Parijat 95).

Helen Ambrose's children are her most cherished link to this skeletal society, and having to leave her children behind on the trip reveals to her a certain morbidity in life where flowers seem to lose their "blaze" (*Voyage Out* 5) and lovers, though sheltered from the rain, were already "past their passion" (5). The flowers that just "would no blaze" (5), along with the image of the lovers is analogous to the condition of civilians in a world at war, for even though Helen Ambrose and a million other people are sheltered from the constant gunfire at the frontline, they do not emerge from the ruins of the past order unharmed. The lack of lustre and lovelessness described above mirror spiritual, religious, and socio-political scepticism that consumed the turbulent twentieth century, leaving its people cynical and traumatised.

The Voyage Out dives headfirst into themes of absurdism and existentialism as, from the very beginning, the novel is marked with a penetrating sense of meaninglessness whereupon the entire West End with its street lamps and "carefully finished" (6) houses seems like an unfinished project - just "a small golden tassel on the edge of a vast black cloak" (6). The word "vast" in this context renders the place and herself near insignificant and in stark contrast with the great "black cloak" of existence. An interesting contrast,Virginia Woolf employs images of night, darkness and the colour black to represent the great unknown, and the presence of light to represent human life and the known world. The twenty sixth chapter of *The Voyage Out* highlights this contrast when a particularly silent night hosts, among faint birdsong, "the sound of a slight but continuous breathing which never ceased, although it never rose and never fell" (343). Cosmic nonchalance symbolised by unaltered breathing underscores the insignificant status of human existence while standing in stark contrast with the abundance of sounds and visions ushered in by the light of the day. Pain makes itself known in the light of day and "sounds of life become bolder and more full of courage and authority" (335).

The image of smoke thickening over houses "until they were as round and straight as columns" (335) symbolises transient realities that shape societies and civilisations. Light from the sun illuminates "dark windows, beyond which there was depth and space" (335), which stands in contrast with the cosmic vastness made audible by night. Woolf's characters live their lives in the shadow of the great void with the sun shining upon dark windows in noisy towns to reveal the intricacies (physical and psychological) of human existence in the erratic and transient universe. In their attempts to get away from the uncertainties of the modern world, the characters in the novel embark on a journey into equally uncertain seas. Their

physical voyage coincides with their psycho-spiritual journey as they strive to come to terms with the knowledge of their own mortality. The voyage undertaken by the characters in the novel is a departure from the accustomed form of life and thought, and a journey towards self-realisation in the absence of civilisation/society. This departure from troubled lands is described as exhilarating - "They were free of roads, free of mankind, and the same exhilaration at their freedom ran through them all." (20). The exhilaration gives way to existential anxiety as they sail into the middle of nowhere, surrounded by fear of oblivion.

Narrated mostly in soliloquies, *The Voyage Out*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Mahattaheen* deal with the sense of godlessness owing to a severe lack of faith that nearly defines the modern age. *To the Lighthouse* perceives disorder and injustice in a faithless and corrupt world when Mrs. Ramsay muses, "How could any Lord have made this world?…. there is no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death, the poor. There was no treachery too base for the world to commit…. No happiness lasted…" (*Lighthouse* 71). This faithlessness, in *The Voyage Out*, translates to a sense of abandonment as the effect that death and destruction has on the civilian population even as they are not deployed on the combat zone, is revealed in images of millions of flowers cut down by the very hands that had nurtured them - "In thousands of small gardens, millions of dark-red flowers were blooming, until the old ladies who had tended them so carefully came down the paths with their scissors, snipped through their juicy stalks, and laid them upon cold stone ledges in the village church" (23). The millions of flowers snipped off of their stalks and laid down for exhibition in the church signifies the abysmal absence of a compassionate creator.

Trauma from the ongoing World War finds its way into Virginia Woolf's work as her characters are troubled by the awareness of human insignificance in a

hostile world seemingly abandoned by its maker. Insecurity and dereliction loom large as the characters come face to face with the absurdity and purposelessness of their petty existence. A Sisyphean reference, Miss Allan is engulfed by a sense of failure as though her life "had been hard and laborious to no purpose" (*Voyage Out* 336) and even as she realises the futility of her existence, knows she will continue rolling her rock uphill. The immensity of existential anxiety experienced reduces the world, even as it debilitates their sense of self-worth, into "an apple in a tub". Moments of existential crises which question and doubt the nature of existence previously perceived, is represented by the storm at sea. As soon as the storm subsides, passengers in the Euphrosyne are described as mentally calmer individuals who, once again, begin to perceive the world as a coherent entity - "the world floated like an apple in a tub" (63).

The perception of life and death through human senses are, as can be derived from the storm incident, subject to manipulation by forces beyond human control. This reduces the individual to a mere leaf in the tree of the universe, with no control whatsoever of forces that may sway it one way or another. Stephen Vincent Benet illustrates this sense of absolute solitude in his civil war composition *Western Star* which hints at the psychosomatic journey humans inevitably have to undertake individually - "There is a wilderness we walk alone, however well-companioned" (*Prelude* 31). To citizens of a raging world, then, life appears as nothing more than perpetual conflict and tireless wanderings in alienation. *To the Lighthouse* views life through a similar lens as the passage of time in a volatile universe bring them closer to their own mortality. That life is essentially without meaning in the grand scheme of things and everything parishes, is a thesis the novel shares with *The Voyage Out* and *Mahattaheen* where this realisation of one's mortality is considered as fragmentary

and insignificant as the oblivious and mundane life of the characters - *"...mero afno drishtikon bata afulai mrityu sachet thaannu apawaad jasto lagcha."* (Parijat 118)

Human relationships appear meaningless to the narrator in Parijat's *Mahattaheen* as he feels alienated and entirely alone in a city teeming with houses, people and cars. Human relationships are described as *"arthaheen ghanishtata"* (91) (meaningless intimacy) and *"uddeshyaheen ghanishtata"* (91)(aimless affinity), and the narrator realises the temporality of social interactions as new relationships take place of the old and the present swiftly turns into the past almost as if social relationships were merely stops on the way to our solitary and dreary journey into the unknown:

"bichaar garein, baata ka mod haru sangai hamro ghanishtata pani chodindai jancha…. ek arka dekhi taada hundai hami afnai afnai ritto eklaash liyera afai bhitra niyaasri sakeka hunchaun. Hamro ek arka lai bhanne kehi huney chaina" (91)

(I thought to myself, our affiliations perish with every turn in our roads…. Separated from one another we will only have our own hollow selves for company. We will no longer have anything to say to each other).

Virginia Woolf highlights solitude and the feeling of utter insignificance as Rachel in *The Voyage Out* fidgets with a blade of grass as she wonders if the insect she set on the tassel of it, "realised his strange adventure" (129) the way she was realising her own. Characters are compared to pigeons - "The dining-room at this moment had a certain fantastic resemblance to a farmyard scattered with grain on which bright pigeons kept descending." (*Voyage Out* 138) - and insects, as though it

mattered not whether they were humans or some other life form entirely for in the grand machine, no single existence held superior value over the others. Mrs. Flushing's enquiry "Have you ever seen a moth dyin' in a night-light?" (184) reiterates the novel's generous amount of entomological imagery, frequently reminding the reader of the banality of its characters' existence. The moth, analogous to the "indescribable stir of life" (349), is a recurring aversion as it "shot from light to light, whizzing over elaborate heads of hair, and causing several young women to raise their hands nervously and exclaim, "Some one ought to kill it!"' (168). Its fixation with light is symbolic of the human struggle against mortality with its psychological endeavours comparable to moths knocking against "…the lamps with a thud" (349). At one point in the novel, Virginia Woolf comments on the "small-ness" of her characters against the vastitude of consciousness and existence - "The insect-like figures of Dalloways, Ambroses, and Vinraces were also derided, both from the extreme small-ness of their persons and the doubt which only strong glasses could dispel as to whether they were really live creatures or only lumps on the rigging" (78). The latter half of the sentence quoted earlier presents to its reader the philosophical question of what, besides breathing and reproducing, fundamentally defines living. The Dalloways, the Ambroses and the Vinraces are first reduced to insects and then to bumps on the rigging that supported the masts of the ship on which they have set sail. The narrator in *Mahattaheen* makes a similar comparison when he realises the insignificance of his existence - *"Manis kira hunu ko pratik iniharu sabai, manis kira hunu ko pratik Sia, manis kira hunuko pratik sabai bhanda joddaar vigyapan ma afai."* (Parijat 147) (They all represent the insect-like nature of human beings, Sia is a symbol of the same, the finest display of this attribute is my own self).

Woolf's debut novel documents a point in human history that witnessed the mass collapse of religious and spiritual faith followed by a general sense of disorder previously kept at bay with theological aids. With the idea of a supreme truth or a singular version of reality crumbling down, perspective becomes the be all and end all of existence, and the novel reiterates the Nietzschean conviction that there are essentially no facts, only interpretations - "Against that positivism which stops before phenomena, saying "there are only facts," I should say: no, it is precisely facts that do not exist, only interpretations…" (*Portable Nietzsche* 458). Truth becomes relative and every action branches out into multiple possibilities. The Stream of Consciousness technique employed by Woolf and her contemporaries, has its roots in this era of the Seminal Catastrophe that marks humankind's shift in perspective - from the external fuming world to one's internal chaos. The numerous branching thoughts that absorb characters in Virginia Woolf's novels signify this internal exploration. The multiplicity of truths and fluidity of the psyche dawns upon the new industrial world thriving under shadows of absent gods, as it finds characters like Rachel perceiving numerous different possibilities and the numerous ways events could unfold -"how strange it was that she should have bent that tassel rather than any other of the million tassels." (*Voyage Out* 129). That one thing must occur over another becomes a familiar surprise throughout. Rachel choosing one blade of grass over the others and setting an insect on its utmost tassel while puzzled over that specific decision of hers, presents an analogy where the insect is every human being and Rachel, the higher power that decides and directs while being entirely unconscious of her own decisions. The insect has no control over where and how it is placed and the hand that directs its experience, has no good reason to do so. In the absence of god, life seems erratic and meaningless with a million different ways for existence to unfold in an industrial

world unbridled by heaven or hell. Interestingly, amidst all the variables in life - the multiplicity of events and outcomes and individual diversity - Virginia Woolf hints at the mundane nature of human life wherein every individual seems like everyone else when Miss Allan says, "That is what I find so difficult, saying something different about everybody." (299). Miss Allan comments on the banality of life and the ludicrous nature of human knowledge when she discusses her novel with the other women who find its story far from natural - "Still, it's the kind of book people call very clever" (350). Nugatory knowledge coupled with the perception of monotony marks the absurd in *The Voyage Out.*

Mahattaheen questions the nature of truth, ultimately stating that truth is only a word uttered so often without thought or meaning. The novel finds it characters living the same uninspiring lives everyday in a place where every evening looks and feels the same. The narrator's external monotony mirrors his internal stagnancy and he realises the days have not changed him nor healed his past wounds and bitterness. Images like *"baasi badal"* (stale cloud) add to this feeling of stagnancy that makes life almost unbearable for the narrator:

> *"...tin din dekhi euta chitrakala ma baandhiyeko cha. Hijo kai niskriyapan odeko yo saanjh, hijo kai baasi badal ra hijo ko tyehi ma, hijo ka samasta yathartha haru sanga ko ma, hijo ko kunai titopan harulai birsana nasakeko ma, afai ma nango ma, afaima parichit ma baachi raheka thium."* (Parijat 102)
>
> (…tethered to an unchanging image for the past three days. Embodying the same stagnation from yesterday this evening, the same stale cloud and my same unchanging self, the self that holding on to the same truths, the self

incapable of shedding past bitternesses, my naked self, the self I am well acquainted with, all coexisting).

The future appears meaningless in a world where things remain the same day after day and nothing really changes. The narrator attempts to rebel against the dreariness of his room by flinging open windows only to realise instantly that the world outside, with its never changing scenery and stubborn horizons, is as banal as the world inside. In contradiction, Rachel's character in *The Voyage Out* reveals to the reader life through the perspective of an individual who has lived almost solitarily or in the company of a few people before disembarking with the Ambroses. A new birth for her independent self, she starts out in awe of the prospects in life. That "… she became profoundly excited at the thought of living" (*Voyage Out* 75) indicates that life probably has a valid meaning only if lived in freedom - the independence to form one's own thoughts, to carry out one's own actions, "…unmergeable, like the sea or the wind" (75). As the novel nears conclusion, Rachel's illness and her untimely death highlight extreme shifts in characters' perceptions as they are subject to suffering along with the realisation of their mortality. The theme of death and ruin lurking around even in the happiest of moments recur in all three novels. A primary example of this is the persistent reminder of death hanging on the nursery walls in *To the Lighthouse* - the boar skull. Put to display in a room occupied by children, the skull is a reminder that death is certain and, owing to its unpredictability, overshadows days irrespective of whether they are joyful or dismal, and people whether young or old.

The impervious "shadow" (313) that envelops Rachel's waking moments in the latter parts of *The Voyage Out* stands greatly in contrast with her previous healthy condition and the undesirability of stagnancy/immobility is reiterated as Rachel

struggles against "…terribly stationary sight[s]" (313). Sound health that had once harboured her fearless disposition is replaced by confusing and often horrifying fever-induced hallucinations and her sense of adventure is altogether snubbed as she nears her demise. Where Terence's presence and the idea of being in love had previously exhilarated her, Rachel now sees "an old woman slicing a man's head off with a knife" (320) and even as he kisses her, her ailing self is found yearning for death - "…a man with mules…. "Why doesn't he come? Why doesn't he come?"" (320). The narrator in *Mahattaheen* echoes this same desperate longing for death when he wonders "*ke thegaan mrityu ajhai kati tadha cha*!" (Parijat 110). Rachel suffering physical dis-ease and the narrator undergoing existential crisis, both look to death for comfort and escape. In their moments of solitude they are every human being that perceives the absurdity and immensity of life which goes on unaffected by their sufferings and anxieties. Life and solitude are intertwined to their very last details and death would be the final seal upon that solitude - "And life, what was that? It was only a light passing over the surface and vanishing, as in time she would vanish, though the furniture in the room would remain." (*Voyage Out* 114).

Terence, vexed by Rachel's ill health, experiences suffering of a different kind. Unlike Rachel who is tormented by nightmarish hallucinations caused by her physical ailment, Terence's defence against his unpleasant situation displays a tendency to dissociate from his circumstances. His desire to forget that Rachel was suffering sees the start of his dissociation:

> He seemed to stand in an unvexed space of air, on a little island by himself; he was free and immune from pain. It did not matter whether Rachel was well or

> ill; it did not matter whether they were apart or together; nothing mattered—nothing mattered." (323-24)

As he withdraws into his safe space, Terence is comforted by a great sense of security, by "dark and nothingness" (324), which convince him that the physical world is unreal. Suffering and anxiety of the physical world lose their meaning as Terence cocoons himself inside "…the real world, the world that lay beneath the superficial world, so that, whatever happened, one was secure" (324). His suffering, however, goes on even after death relieves Rachel of her suffering. *Mahattaheen* echoes this reference to trauma when the narrator exclaims, "*Maarera matra apraadh kaha siddhincha! Tyes pachi bhogna parcha.*" (Parijat 81) alluding to the nature of trauma as it haunts the living - victim, perpetrator or both - and spares the dead. He acknowledges the fact that his wife died a sudden, horrifying and agonising death, while also stating that the sudden tragedy had now ended for his dead wife although he continues to live with it. The narrator, like Terence, dissociates from his loss and feels neither joy not sorrow but a nagging sense of emptiness. For a brief while the monotony of his daily life acts almost as a cocoon, luring the narrator into a routine and mechanical existence that holds no space for emotional and philosophical introspection. Parijat comments on the aimlessness of an internally hollowed out population that busies itself, from birth to death, with trivialities and futile endeavours:

> "*Ramailo lagthyo afu hunu, office janu, cycle chadnu ra kaamchori garnu lai jiwan ko sadabahar niyati samjhanuma. Esto lagthyo jiwan lai kelai rahane fursad nai nahos. Jiwan lai gijolirahanu parne stithi ani na aaos. Yahan haami estai janmanchaun ra yaha hamilai estai bes lagcha.*" (82)

> (I enjoyed thinking of my existence, the transit to office, riding the bicycle and shirking at work as the perennial certainty of life. I hoped to never have time to dwell on life's intricacies. To always avoid having to dissect it. We are born into this disposition and we thoroughly revel in it).

The narrator's conscious choice to busy himself with his daily routine in order to avoid distressing thoughts highlights his urgency to escape into a state of existence that demands nothing of him but emptiness. This escape, he later realises, is impossible in a paradoxical world with nowhere to run to and a whole world to run away to at the same time (101). Parijat hints on the illusory comfort in habit and routine when the narrator becomes aware of the fact that he could not escape even if he wanted to and that there was no point whatsoever in trying to flee from the life one has, for so long, been accustomed to - "*bhagna pani kaha dinthey uniharu. Feri yetiko nirlipta bhaisakey pachi bhagne pani kina?*" (145). The realisation of his entrapment in an existential labyrinth where the idea of freedom is reduced to nothing more than hollow words, convinces the narrator that freedom and constraint are two halves that come together to form the core of human existence.*"…. aile samma bhogi raheka jiwan ko theek yahi thau ma euta gaada kaalo parda khasidiye huncha ani ma tyesko viparit hididinchu ra hidi nai rahanchu."* (98) (If a dark veil were to drop now in between me and the life I have endured in the past, I would continue walking opposite that blackness) illustrates the absurd nature of the narrator's existence which, aided by the unreliability of memory, is like a pitch black veil that curtains the past while one walks endlessly beside it. Parijat comments on the unreality of real life as we know it, through the narrator comparing time to a road with numerous turnings. That memory is unreliable and reality is fleeting, is illustrated by this analogy in which every curve is a new point in time and other turning points are imperceptible - "*Pratyek bata ka*

mod haru jhai hamima samay ka mod haru gujrera janchan ra maile chai pratyek mod ma pugda afno bigat mod lai ek kisim le birsi sakeko hunchu" (82-83) (like turns in a road time keeps swerving through us and with every bend we lose sight of the curves we lived through in the past).

The Voyage Out represents the human condition through rivers venturing rocky terrain, "quicker still, as it races to a waterfall" (210), the certainty of suffering portrayed by the river "racing because the earth was shaped to make it race" (210). An image of a lone ship sailing in the night appears as "…an emblem of the loneliness of human life" (*Voyage Out* 78) as it cruises through the boundless cosmos. Similar to the solitary ship, the sky overhead is described as "an emblem of the life to come" (24), hinting at the characters' psychological and physical journey towards death. Owing to its colourlessness (20) the sky mirrors life below and also symbolises the characters' minds. The fathomless celestial city that constantly glares at the world below is allegorical to human psychology, mirroring not only the fictional world of the novel but also the author's social reality with its newfound curiosity for the human mind. The "thinly clouded" (20) sky is representative of veils of perception through which the characters in *The Voyage Out* comprehend themselves and their world. The sky also stands for the vast emptiness or, as Indian philosophy terms it, *Sunyata* - "Those for whom emptiness is possible, for them everything is possible. Those for whom emptiness is not possible, for them everything is not possible" (Nagarjuna 61).

Images in the novel bear a striking resemblance to the smilies in *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā,* the ancient Pali text that almost singlehandedly aided in the development of the concept of *Sunyata* in the 1st century BCE. Composed during one of the most favourable eras for global trade and culture in human history, the novels

of Virginia Woolf and those of Parijat exhibit, like the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Camus and Franz Kafka, merging points where eastern mysticism meets the western industrial society. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* reads of the cosmos, the all-enveloping shadows, lone ships, vast oceans and the absurdity that dooms the human race to suffering as soon as it comes into existence - "In the ocean of birth-and-death they must wander about for ever and ever, In birth, decay, death, sorrow, turmoil, and the breaking up [of limbs]" (*Simile of the Ship*). *The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse* and *Mahattaheen* are strung by the same themes and philosophy that drives the ancient Pali composition - the negation of a singular perspective or truth and the affirmation of emptiness as the final destination. Sattarood demanding to know whether his glass was full or empty hints at the theme of multiple perspectives running through the novels of Woolf and Parijat alike. The nothingness - the "vast black cloak" (*Voyage Out* 6) - translates life as a product of the emptiness, thus rendering the nothing as something (i.e. life) and the something that it is dissolves, in the presence of death, into nothing.

Virginia Woolf employs elements of nature in order to highlight the vexations and traumas of a civilisation "groping about in illusion and ignorance" (213). It is a constant reminder that evolution and illusory supremacy of humans are awfully unspectacular against the grand natural backdrop. Vast spaces in the landscape intimidate the characters and are a constant reminder of their insignificant status in the grand scheme of things. An excursion into the forest among towering old trees and wildlife places the characters in a position from where they realise their own fragility, and this realisation fades out only as they begin to leave the forest. Woolf, through Mrs. Ambrose, states that the events in our lives hold no coherence or meaning whatsoever and that the forces affecting them are just as arbitrary and confused. The

death of god, brought on by man, turned the world into a place with "chaos triumphant, things happening for no reason at all, and every one groping about in illusion and ignorance" (213).

Constant looming uncertainty reveals human life as a series of accidents replete with perpetual conflict and struggle for a structure in order to give familiar shapes to our experiences. This need for coherence echoes as Terrence mentions fireworks that are bound, by their nature, to blow up to smithereens as soon as they come alive - "Have you ever seen fireworks that make figures? ... I want to make figures... . Is that what you want to do?" (207) Terrence's desire to be positioned in the grand design alludes to the primal human inclination towards making a mark in the grand scheme of things. It is representative of the human appetite for meaning and structure in life as well as death, exhibited in the character of Miss Allan. Her obsession with assigning objects to their right places sheds light on her reliance on familiarity and predictability in daily living, representing her desperate attempts at escaping her psychological and physical realities. Human preoccupation with diversions is portrayed through Miss Allan's fixation with daily objects, events and their alignment - distractions from the greater uncertainties of life - "…depended implicitly upon one thing following another that the mere glimpse of a world where dinner could be disregarded, or the table moved one inch from its accustomed place, filled her with fears for her own stability" (120). The triviality of her existence dawns upon the young Rachel Vinrace and she finds herself referring to the people in the garden below as "aimless masses of matter, floating hither and thither, without aim except to impede her" (244).

Rachel's statement that daily objects like the rusty inkstand, stationary, the ashtray, "represent human lives" (245), is a reference to page no. 78 of *The Voyage*

Out where the entomological figures of the voyagers are questioned of their corporeality. *Mahattaheen* finds its narrator thinking similar thoughts when he notices the empty glasses and cigarettes lying around submissive, just like him, to the unpredictable forces of life. Rachel declares halfway through the novel that living or dead, humans hold as much value as inanimate household objects - the rusty inkstand and pen representing unwritten/unstructured stories, the ashtray as a symbol of the paltry residue of life terminated, and the old newspaper in a foreign language symbolising perplexing complexity of stories put on print. The realisation that human life has so much in common with these non-living things, comes as an anticipated shock that tears through illusions in a godless world, leading Rachel to infer that life as we understand is "a dream" (245). Parijat illustrates the same idea when the narrator in *Mahattaheen* describes his existence as merely something that occupies a tiny space among multitudes of other tiny spaces filled by people who, apart from the fact that they breathe and reproduce, can hardly be separated from the inanimate - *"tathapi mailey euta thau ogateko chu…. thaha chaina kun prerna le garda ma thau ogati nai rahanchu…. yesari baachna malai jatti bhane pani chhoot diyiyeko cha"* (Parijat 123) (still I occupy this space…. I do not know why I continue to inhabit it…. I am free to live like this as much as I like).

The Voyage Out dwells in the arbitrariness and meaninglessness of life which gives rise to scepticism in the characters. It is through this very incertitude that individual identities and perspectives are recognised, resulting in a million different versions and interpretations of life in the midst of an existential void. The nihilistic tone of the novel is overpowered by the characters' realisation of the possibility of multitudes of meanings. Addressing this multiplicity of truths and their foundation on individual perspectives Nietzsche writes, "This—is now MY way,—where is yours?"

Thus did I answer those who asked me "the way". For THE way—it doth not exist!" (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*).

To the Lighthouse deals with the theme of subjective reality with Lily Briscoe realising that in order for her to fully understand the subject of her adoration - Mrs. Ramsay - she would require no less than fifty pairs of eyes. Lily's statement echoes Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenon of quasi-observation that proposes that an object can never be perceived in its entirety since, using Sartre's example of a cube, one can only perceive one or a maximum of only three sides of the cube at any given time. *Dvaitadvaita Vedanta* speaks of a similar phenomenon wherein truth, rather the ultimate truth, is unperceivable owing to severe limitations in human perception. Perspectives shift as the shift in time and space make way for newer observations and realities to form. Sartre comments on the nature of reality through this example of the appearance of a cube - "…the object never appears except in a series of profiles, of projections…. The object itself is the synthesis of all these appearances. The perception of an object is therefore a phenomenon of an infinity of aspects." (*Imaginary* 8). Lily's realisation of the inadequacy of perception brings to light the infinitude of points from which an object - reality in this case - can be understood while also highlighting the humble nature of human knowledge and observation.

That *The Voyage Out,* like most novels of Virginia Woolf, emphasises on thought and perspective over external events and circumstances is summarised in a single sentence wherein Terence troubled by Rachel's ill health feels as though "Thought had ceased; life itself had come to a standstill" (*Voyage Out* 316). Cessation of thought is equated with stagnancy, reducing one to a mere stationary object amidst the multitude of ink stands, pens, papers and umbrellas strewn throughout the novel. The abundance of truths in a world bereft of a singular supreme meaning is explicitly

discussed further in the novel where the figure of Christ, representative of the singular notion of truth, is discussed as an all-knowing entity who spoke of the nature of life and truth:

While Christ spoke they made another effort to fit his interpretation of life upon the lives they lived, but as they were all very different, some practical, some ambitious, some stupid, some wild and experimental, some in love, and others long past any feeling except a feeling of comfort, they did very different things with the words of Christ. (215)

Christ's *intention de l'auteur* thus becomes redundant owing to the myriad perspectives and interpretations unique to individual recipients of his word. By virtue of human capacity for analytical thinking, as Rachel realises, even the basic act of preferring/favouring one thing over another and announcing one's feelings about one thing over another, creates an insurmountable void between individuals. Here, Woolf touches upon the recurring topic of human communication as she does in *Mrs Dalloway,* as important to survival but mostly counterproductive owing to the walls our words build around us. A Sisyphean gesture, communication collapses on itself, isolating individuals inside their own shrunken spaces, separated from each other by words and emotions. Rachel's inclination to music is a symbol of the unspoken and unspeakable Lacanian Real that saturates human existence while eluding human language - "It appeared that nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked of a feeling they felt, but that was what music was for" (29).

Music, literature, dance and other art forms discussed in *The Voyage Out* find a parallel in Lily's painting which serves as a means of contemplation, expression and preservation to the lives of the characters. *To the Lighthouse* is a story about

impermanence in a changing world and as characters die, thick layers of dust cover the furniture and homes that once hosted magnificent celebrations rot in the overgrowth, Lily's painting remains essentially the only object to outlive everything and everyone around it. Through the medium of painting Lily conveys thoughts that could not have been conveyed through words, such as the portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay and James as simply one "triangular purple shape" (*Lighthouse* 58) in an ever changing canvas of light, shade and figures added constantly in ways that maintain "the unity of the whole" (60). Lily's canvas symbolises an attempt to define life in all its variety and shades. A basic lesson in the multiplicity of perceptions, Woolf presents the example of a sea as it is observed from atop a cliff and the same sea as observed by a swimmer. In order for her to start painting, Lily would have to choose a point of view that gives coherence to the work of art and although adopting one view point would mean negation of all other view point, Lily states that "the risk must be run; the mark made" (172). Her act of painting reveals the inevitable fracture between thought and practice as the image she has in her mind of the intended painting, seems to dwindle the moment she takes up her brush. The problem of representation in this case stems from the fact that language reshapes ideas in their journey from thought to action, with humanity caught in a constant endeavour to translate the language of thought into the language of action.

Movements involved in Lily's act of painting symbolise life, with every stroke of the brush and every pause acting as two halves that come together to give rhythm to the chaos. It is a source of epiphanies and existential musings for Lily who, while attempting a painting, has revelations like, "…there are moments when one can neither think nor feel. And if one can neither think nor feel [she thought] where is one?" (210). Mrs. Ramsay continues this deconstruction of the complexity of human

nature when she describes herself as nothing more than a sponge full of human emotions, bringing to focus life's supreme essence - the ability to feel. Almost entirely influenced by language, this ability to feel and perceive shapes personalities, traditions and civilisations. The role of language as the foundation of our worldly experiences is highlighted in the novel through interior conversations such as the one in which Lily Briscoe differentiates between the concept of language and that of meaning. As humans, our societies, relationships and taboos are a product of the language we are subject to and however disparate our emotions, our subjugation to language automatically groups them under cliched norms of likes and dislikes to the extent that language, everyday, directs what we think and feel. The end of chapter seven and the beginning of chapter eight are connected by Mrs Ramsay pondering over, "… the inadequacy of human relationships…" (45) and "…how despicable, how self-seeking, at their best" (48) human relations are, as she is made aware of the pettiness in her own being and in society.

Even though the novel deals with universal questions of life and death, what is explored in *To The Lighthouse* is the meaning of living and dying as was understood in the post-World War I era - its expressions bound by the language of the modern human. Generations and millenniums of servitude to language has led to nullification of meaning, with man-made words limiting human thoughts. As Lily Briscoe begins to question and rebel against the mechanical nature of human language, the voice within her "which speaks too quickly to be taken down by one's pencil" (29) starts uttering "undeniable, everlasting, contradictory things" (29) and she finds herself momentarily escaping from its hold until her thoughts "exploded of its own intensity" (30). However, her brief freedom from words is described as frightening, and she is relieved when the spell breaks - further illustrating the relationship between humans

and synthesised language. This event in the novel is important in the light it sheds on the enigma of human thought. Our arguments and interpretations about Life and Death depend greatly on words and their assigned meanings - lenses through which we view the world in all its peculiarities. Set against the background of continually moving and crashing waves, *To the Lighthouse* questions what is real - rather more real than the rest - as characters begin to realise the limitations of human language and imagination. The vain and narcissistic nature of human thoughts and language, here, is seen as a hindrance to the desired union with the great force that governs life and death. With every other conversation appearing as acts upon the stage; music, dancing, literature and art like fissures on a volcano, appear in the novel as major outlets that maintain the human-ness of the various characters in *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse.*

An individual's isolation even in the company of crowds, such as is emphasised upon by the Absurdists, is a background setting that is constant throughout *The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse* and *Mahattaheen* and inspite of the society of travellers and merry-makers, it is a novel about loneliness as a way of life, for in every act and every experience the characters are but alone on their individual paths to death - "We perished… each alone." (*Lighthouse* 180). Personal experiences that shape the multiplicity of perceptions is discussed as the voyagers begin to realise that their lives are run not by them alone but are the products of institutions and interactions. Virginia Woolf illustrates societal influence and the human tendency to adhere to social structures as the voyagers go to sleep on their first night onboard and they all dream of one another. Although far from clamorous lands, they are not immune to the company of those on board with them and most importantly, the company of their own selves. Via the image of thin walls, Woolf highlights the all-

pervading force of social structures. From a distance, however, London seems smaller and smaller as does the rest of the world, as they drift closer to their personal natures. The voyage fashions entire continents into wrinkled pieces of rocks where people, ant-like and almost pushing each other over the edges, scream and brawl in microscopic voices. The vastness of the ocean between the voyagers and their home island drowns this collective clamour till the entire world falls mute (*Voyage Out* 24). One of the numerous instances in the novel where Rachel is momentarily struck by the absurdity of her physical and mental environment, isolation and detachment is illustrated as she feels dissociated upon looking into the mirror. As she realises that her face is not the face she really wanted, Woolf highlights the strangeness of things within and without an individual, and the constant search for satisfaction and familiarity as part of the daily quest to understand life. The assertion that Rachel's face was not and "never would be" (33) the face she wanted hints, once again, at the futility of human existence in the sense that there is no way of getting to the ideal familiar self and every ball one rolls towards one's destination is doomed to fall back downhill. That the looking glass holds enough space to reflect objects apart from the person looking into it, is a recognition of fact that life exists not just within the observer but also without, with the same maddening force that continues even in the absence of the observer.

Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse* continue the theme of multiple time measures as encountered in *Mrs. Dalloway*. From the extreme reality distortions caused by Septimus's psychological trauma to Mrs. Ramsay's reality perception in the light of her existential crisis, Virginia Woolf reemphasises the chasmic disparity in internal and external measures of time. The characters' relationship with their individual chasms determines their perception of life, death,

and their existential awareness. The concept of inner and outer time, the psychological and the physical, in *Mrs. Dalloway* corresponds to a portion in *The Voyage Out* where a seventy-two year old character muses on old age. That time perception, as perception of reality in general, varies greatly from one individual to another is elaborated through Mrs. Thornbury who feels youthful inspite of her physical age. Her external seventy-two year old self, as it appears to others, is very different from her internal self who feels twenty-five:

But the odd thing was that one never felt old. She always felt that she was twenty-five, not a day more or a day less, but, of course, one couldn't expect other people to agree to that…. It must be very wonderful to be twenty-five, and not merely to imagine that you're twenty-five. (307)

That external truths and internal truths are constantly in conflict with one another is presented through the narrator in *Mahattaheen* as he wonders, "*Sansaar le dekheko ma ra maile dekheko ma maa kunai samanjasya ya kunai antar cha? Ke dekhdo ho sansaar malai*?" (Parijat 87) (Is there any resemblance between the world's perception of me and my perception of myself? How does the world see me?). The world then appears as a plethora of interpretations with every individual experiencing reality - constantly altered by time - in his/her own peculiar way.

In chapter nine of *The Voyage Out*, Mrs. Thornbury refers to an article in *The Times* as "one of the million voices speaking in the paper" (105-6) before Woolf presents to the reader one of many images that illustrates the idea that change is certain and ceaseless - "The paper lying directly beneath the clock, the two together seeming to represent stability in a changing world" (106). In a world undergoing constant transition, static inanimate objects seem to be the only form of stability

surrounding the living. The frenzy of the "million voices" speaking in the newspaper stands in contrast with the clock above as it continues ticking away irrespective of circumstances. Together, the frenzy and the routine passage of time reveal the sole constant known to humans - change. Given the personal mental vexations of the characters, "stability" in the above extract may also have psychological connotations as characters value permanence over transience and stability over the psychological and physical instabilities of a constantly changing world where no two experiences are the same. This is illustrated by Rachel's glancing around the dance hall which, owing to time and circumstances, looks like an entirely different room (*Voyage Out* 296). Dances held in the room with characters forming swirling circles which spin and crash, breaking up into pieces; and the fireworks that momentarily adorn the night sky, are tributes to the brevity of life through which every being that exists passes in maddening circles towards death. It is interesting to note that *The Voyage Out* is strewn with the image of circles via which social activities and interactions are portrayed. Life in London is reduced to a routine of circular movements and the seventh chapter sees a town spring up in circles. The sun is described as the "complete yellow circle of sun" (63) and images of papers "flying round in circles" (65) or of flies "droned in a circle" (106), make frequent appearances in the novel. Across cultures the circle has stood to symbolise unity, wholeness, time, infinity, perfection and cosmic cycles among other things. The Norse myth of Ouroboros, a serpent swallowing its own tail, represents the inevitable transition of life into death. The very fact that one exists also implies that one will cease to exist. The symbol of the circle, like the Ouroboros, also represents the psychological labyrinth every individual is compelled to wander - "Is there no way out of the mind?" (Plath, line 7).

The figure of zero, symbolising what Indian philosophy terms the great void or *'Sunyata,* recurs throughout *The Voyage Out* as people's personalities are said to be enclosed within impenetrable circles - "You could draw circles round the whole lot of them, and they'd never stray outside" (*Voyage Out* 97). The narrator in *Mahattaheen* expresses a similar idea when he speaks of life, *"…chakradaar kathin yatra ho, jahan hidnu ko artha ustai thau dekhi ttyesai anuroop ko arko stithi ma pugnu ho."* (Parijat 102) (…a circular and difficult journey, where departure from one circumstance leads one to another similar situation). Characters sitting down together in circles, "the great round dance!" (*Voyage Out* 152), velvet ribbons encircling women's necks, people encircling tables, books encircling readers, sea encircling the earth, and blood circling through bodies also represent the cyclical nature of life, existence and death. It also stands for the repetitive nature of human history and society, with everything living or non-living - civilisations, people, houses - encountering birth, wear and tear, and death. The circular hand gesture as Rachel experiences her bond with Hewet intensify - "She enclosed a circle in the air with her hands" (196) - symbolises the very wholeness that represents *Sunyata*. In his preface to Parijat's *Sirishko Phool*, Shankar Lamichaney describes *Sunyata* as an entity beyond imagination, as the very definition of infinity and as an inseparable part of the eternal experience - "*sunyata jo sabai sankalpa bhanda para cha, ra cha ek ananta, anadi Anubhuti ko abhinna anga.*"(*Sunyata* is beyond imagination and an integral part of the eternal infinite experience) (*Bhumika*). *Sunyata* is described as the destination to which all thing that exist, are headed. Just as a sentence must sooner or later culminate in a full stop, the variety of experiences and works of art that mark human civilisation culminate in a wholeness that is neither dead nor alive, neither still nor moving. One attains this wholeness or *Sunyata,* according to Lamichaney, from self realisation and not from

arguments and logic - the self realisation that is facilitated by the realisation of the ever-changing nature of existence - "*...mahashunyata ko tyo anubhuti ek aadi anata nirantar prawahamaan yathartha ra tathyata ko roop ma huncha.*" (*Mahashunyata* is experienced in the form of eternal truths and facts that are consistently changing their positions). In his bid that wholeness is attainable through the grim and monotonous realities of physical existence, Lamichaney portrays the meaninglessness of life as the road to *Sunyata* as he equates "*nissar sansaar*" (meaningless world) with "*mahasunya*" inhabited by people who have far transcended the eternal conflict between hope and despair.

The Voyage Out is a constant adventure in the absurdity that is life. Rachel reflecting,"She said we lived in a world of our own. It's true. We're perfectly absurd" (*Voyage Out* 38) substantiates the idea that in a planet densely populated by the human species, each individual human exists in his/her own world and psychological timeframe, and although surrounded by so many of one's own kind, is immutably solitary and incurably absurd. One either sees the bleakness in this situation or senses a Nietzschean liberation in the revelation - "Does it ever seem to you, Terence, that the world is composed entirely of vast blocks of matter, and that we're nothing but patches of light—" (276). The absurdity and dissociation felt by characters in *The Voyage Out* is similar in nature to the self-detached existences of narrators in *Baishako Manchey, Sirish ko Phool* and *Mahattaheen*. However, unlike the alienation and dissociation experienced by Parijat's characters, Virginia Woolf translates individual truths and isolation as liberating. The ship representative of personal journey is described as the "inhabitant of the great world, which has so few inhabitants, travelling all day across an empty universe" (25), cosmic vastitude rendering civilisation microscopic and solitude amplified."Veils" (25) that envelop

Euphrosyne highlight the psycho-physical fog that surrounds lives onboard as, surrounded by uncertainty and isolation, the characters view life through their personal veils of perception. The image of a world observed through a screen/membrane is recurrent in Woolf's novels including in *Moments of Being*, her collection of autobiographical essays, where she describes one of her earliest memories in life, "the feeling, as I describe it sometimes to myself, of lying in a grape and seeing through a film of semi-transparent yellow" (*Sketch* 65). The ship, shrouded in solitude, is described as fully capable of self sustenance, mirroring the twentieth century dawning of the idea that an individual is a complete and self-sustained ecosystem on its own; reflected in twentieth century literature as it places greater importance on character than on plot. This focus on individuality leads characters in *The Voyage Out* to question the significance and purpose of their existence. Their sense of self-awareness heightens the further they sail from the prescribed norms of human civilisation, realising the insignificance of their own microscopic place in the boundless universe. In a solitude "…more lonely than the caravan crossing the desert" (*Voyage Out* 25) the character of Rachel, more than the others, slowly buy consistently strips off of her previous self. The journey into the seemingly endless sea brings her face to face with her personal void as she begins to see society as "something quite unfamiliar and inexplicable, and themselves as chairs or umbrellas dropped about here and there without any reason" (28).

Mahattaheen echoes similar thoughts with its narrator viewing the absurdity of existence through the lens of monotony, his life comprising mainly of the road to his workplace and back. He feels neither sorrow not elation upon his marriage and seems entirely uninterested in carnal pursuits. The fact that he did not choose his bride or even know her before they got married, does not bother him even slightly as he

observes "*jiwan ka kati pay icchaharu ta yahan swatantra channot garna sakkinan bhaney jaabo swasni kina channa paryo yestai lagyo?"* (Parijat 79) (Why bother marrying a person of one's choice when one does not have a say in most of the choices one has to make in life?). The narrator realises that although physically unbound, he is like a horse on the run that, at the end of the day, lands back inside its stable. He realises his own limitation as a human being who, irrespective of intellectual altitude, must submit to his absurd existence. The principles that appear to guide our lives seem arbitrary in a world where humans, like weed and fern, grow mindlessly in every direction. The narrator asks his bride as to what she would do if she found out that life ran on principles entirely different from her own, to which she responds by silently pointing at a bougainvillea plant in the overgrowth. A recurrent symbol of human life in *Mahattaheen,* the Bougainvillaea vines grow, without care or nourishment, to the melancholy songs of birds. The image of a shabby shrine surrounded by unkempt vegetation, a part of which creeps on to the shrine for support, echoes voices which speak of godlessness in *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse:*

…nirudyeshya palapiyera ayeka dubaharu, mandir jastai euta chapro jahan Kunni kun deuta bascha. Bagal ma nasyariyeka bot haru ra mandir ko Aad ma euta beskana jhyangiyeko begunbeli ko bot, tyeti matra tyo chowk ko afnu nidhi thiyo. (75)

(…scutch grass thriving aimlessly, a shrine-like hut inhabited by an unknown deity. Next to it untended plants and an overgrown Bougainvillaea tree clinging on to the shed, the only wealth these crossroads possessed).

The narrator feels like a mere sketch of a person masquerading as a living being in a world where options and choices are but illusions one is forced to endorse.

"*Vivaad nai kina? Jiwan vivaad ko parinati nai kaha ho ra*?" (76) illustrates this lack of liberty to contest and choose our directions in life. The untimely and horrifying death of his wife merely days after marriage makes the narrator wonder if she who had been so full of faith in life had been stripped off her beliefs and illusions during the final moments of her life. Her life seems to him as absurd as her death seems tragic, and as the thought of god and justice evokes in the narrator nothing but laughter he compares his wife to a colourful insect dwelling in filth:

> *euta watawaran, euta baato ra ee sab strot haru ko eutai charam bindhu ishwar. Malai haaso uthyo. Mann mann ma dohoryaye, euta rangeen kira ho meri swasni…. wastutaha: kira gobar ma pani hurkancha, jaad ma pani hurkancha. Ajha kira goohu ma badhta hurkancha.* (77)
>
> (A shared environment, a shared path and they all flow into their single shared destination, God. This made me laugh. I repeated to myself, my wife is a colourful insect…. In fact: insects thrive in cow dung, in rice beer and most excellently in shit.)

The lives of people around him are also termed meaningless as they are compared to toads hopping around inside an algae covered well inhabited by the likes of Jogi and Sia who the narrator describes as *"sadak ma milkyayeka astitwaharu"* (88) (existences tossed away into the road). Further, the narrator muses on the question human significance, the nature of truth, and wonders if the entire human history with its numerous civilisations was built by people consumed, from generation to generation, by monotony - *"Shayad yaha yestai vyaktitwaharu dwara samaaj ko nirmaan bhayo, ithaas lekhiyo ra hamro itihaas ma yahan hami sabai sattaheen*

thegra haad haru tersyayera gaaro bhaidiyeka chaun. Patra-patra yahan jhooto niskancha ra sabai satya ma dariincha" (90).

The narrator pronounces sattarood a "*yugapurush*" (91) whose face seems a clear advertisement of the dark and absurd age while he compares Jogi to a stray dog. The question of a meaningful existence is dismissed multiple times in *Mahattaheen* when the narrator makes declarations like "*... shayad mero mulya prati vishwaas nai chaina"* (85) (… it is possible I have no faith in principles) as he comes to terms with the fact that he lives life as unaware as the invalid Jogi and his promiscuous companion Sia. Disgusted by the realisation of his own oblivious existence, the narrator feels an urgency to run away and escape his circumstances to the degree that he very often contemplates suicide and wants his troubled mind destroyed. The room that hosts Sia, Jogi, sattarood and other regulars represents the monotony that inevitably draws the narrator back into itself day in and day out. He acknowledges that this realisation of one's pointless existence is essentially futile in the sense that irrespective of whether or not one realises one's condition, one is compelled to endure it to the end - "*yeso bhanau sochai naulo hos ya eutai, kunai mahatwa thiyena. Sochai matra sochai thiyo.*" (96) (One could say that it did not matter wether these were new thoughts or the same old ones. At the end of the day thoughts were nothing more than thought). The narrator perceives the human condition as helpless and aimless, and choice and free will as illusory. According to him humans possess nothing and, snug in monotonous routines, seek nothing. His city is compared to an unchanging scenery and life to a canvas that offers to the observer, from all sides, the same perspective - *"Yahan jiwan lai kunai arkai kon bata herna sakindaina ra sambhaw cha tyo kon nai chaina."* (96) (It is impossible in this place to view life from a different angle and it is very likely that a new angle does not even exist).

Life is either perceived bearable or full of suffering and humans as constantly battling existential crises owing to a bleak reality. This rebellion against illusions or against disillusionment, however, loses its meaning in the presence of death which demands complete submission. That human evolution and civilisation is perpetually subject to natural laws and primitive biological instincts is illustrated in *To the Lighthouse* through the sound of the dinner gong which compels characters to abandon whatever they were doing, "…the novels on the bed tables, and the diaries which were so private, and assemble in the dining-room for dinner." (*Lighthouse* 90). In the same strain, doomed to drown irrespective of whether one swims or not, the narrator in *Mahattaheen* paints a bleak picture of human life and its struggles in an insignificant and empty world:

> *Euta kaaranheen vidroh andadhundha khadal sanga, anakantaar hawa bhariyeko akash sanga ra antaheen parkhaal sanga…. Tyespachi jiwan lai euta virodhheen samarpan bhanda badi dina nai ke sakincha ra diyiyeko nai ke cha ra?* (Parijat 96)
>
> (An irrational rebellion against chasms, against the sky brimming with wind and against the infinite wall…. After all of this one can do nothing more, have done nothing more, than surrender and submit).

Pain and sorrow are termed "*niradhaar*" and "*satwarahit*" (96) (baseless and devoid of truth), perceived solely for the purpose of emotional or spiritual engagement by a distracted multitude. Words like *"bina uddeshya", "bina karan"* (85)*, "arthaheen haaso"* (94) (meaningless laughter) are used to portray existence in a city glittering with illusions mistaken for truth by its oblivious population even as the sky mirrors naked realities that eludes human vision - "*Raat sadhaidekhi yestai nango cha, yi ta*

aankhako antariksha bhari fijiyeka kuhira hun, jasle parda diyeko cha wastavikta lai." (99) (The night has always been bare, it is the mist in the cosmos of our eyes that curtains our view of reality).

Mahattaheen uses the image of a never ending road encountered in *Baishako Manchey* to symbolise the suffering inherent in existence. The narrator likens himself to the ceaseless road that is trampled on, day after day, by countless "*neech-haru*" (98) (lowly ones). As the monotony and baseness of his life begins to turn unbearable, he wishes for the road to swallow up every trace of his uninspired life in which the future holds nothing at all to look forward to. The narrator uses the term "*nirudheshya*" (99) as he compares life and social constructs to flimsy curtains which, according to him, are redundant in that the shade and sense of privacy they present is merely illusory - "*Ujyalo ra hawako virodh ma jhundyaieka yi parda haru sayad katu niyati bhogchan nirarthakta ko…. nirarthak parda jhundyaera hami afuharu pani ajha badi nirarthak ojhel tapchaun*" (99) (Curtains hung in objection to light and wind are possibly destined to a meaningless existence…. Most meaningless of existences being our own, we who hang these screens and bask in the futility of their shade). Similarly, his daily visits to 'the room' appear to him even more ridiculous than the base and meaningless conversations of the other regulars for the narrator, unlike the others, was not drawn to it by the prospect of physical intimacy with Sia, getting drunk or trying his luck at gambling - *"arthaat ma kehi nagarna auchu."* (103) (Meaning I come here to do absolutely nothing). The sattarood mocks at the narrator's obsession with finding value and meaning in life. He calls the young widower childish for seeking purpose in existence in a world run by routine and futile occupations, where the biological need to eat and reproduce has always been of

primary importance. This point in the novel sees a swift and brief change in direction as the narrator has a vision inspired by the sattarood's comment:

> "*movie chitra jastai mailey dekhna thaley euta vishal faat bhari charna lageka pashu haru. Ghaas khanchan, chewai ko kulo ma tirkha metchan, ekchin upranchan and maithun garchan. Baram baar yehi kram dohoryai rahanchan"* (105)
>
> (Like a movie I watched a vast field with animals grazing on it. They feed on the grass, quench their thirst from a nearby gutter, jump around and fornicate. They repeat this routine again and again).

He begins to come to terms with the fact that life is monotonous, repetitive and entirely lacking in meaning, leaving behind nothing but "*euta avyakta tirkha*" (106) (an unexpressed thirst) as its definition. And as swift as the vision was, he rises from his fear of hopelessness and wonders if he could assign his own values and meanings to the meaningless world - "*ke hami mulyaharu nirdhaarit garna sakdainaun?*" (105) (Can we not determine our own meanings?). The narrator's private space - his house, more specifically his bedroom - provides no relief from the absurdities and monotonies of the world outside. He comes back from work each day to an empty bed in an empty house. Nobody is waiting for him, nobody expects him home yet he comes back every day only to leave for the workplace in the morning. Parijat comments on human obsession with private space and individuality in the modern society and human civilisation in general when the narrator in *Mahattaheen* appears amazed by the realisation that people built walls around themselves out of their own will. Everyone wants a room of their own and people divide one room to make two or several more of these private spaces that, according to the narrator, cage the entire city

and its inhabitants. These rooms that, upon demolition, make space for even more rooms represent the human need to possess which traps one into routine and structure. The narrator saying he wants to make a house with no rooms exhibits his desire to break free from social rules that have handed down, for centuries, the dictates for what life should be while also laying down limitations on what it is capable of becoming. Just as human knowledge is derived from the bringing together of observable facets of reality, each room in each house in the city comes together to form a greater sense of isolation and solitude that defines the lives of the characters.

Nihilistic in his outlook, the narrator states that the temples and shrines that house man-made deities are merely rooms - an assemblage of four walls - that present a disoriented and ignorant population with nothing more than spaces to exercise their collective madness - *" yo mandir pani euta kotha matra ho, euta chaar bhitta matra ho, yesko kotha baulaha haru le jasto upayog garey pani huncha."* (111) (This temple too is only a room, an assimilation of four walls, madmen may use its space for whatever they like). Religion is likened to myths and stories that advertise a desired way of life to a multitude stranded in an "*arthaheen sangharsha*" (112) (meaningless struggle). The ill health and potential death of Sia, very much like the death of the narrator's devout bride, and the narrator's inaction when asked for help is compared to "*Ishwar ko ghrinit mrityu*" (115) or the death of god and conventional faith. The deplorable social conditions under which Jogi lives his life each day as he is taunted, abused and entirely disregarded add to the narrator's faithlessness to a point where the very idea of god appears farcical. His loss of faith pertains not only to religion and the idea of god but also to his own self as he realises that he himself furthers his subjugation by never having rebelled against anything in his entire life. *".... malai estai eklash, estai nirwasan, yestai khokryai ra estai shunya bes cha"* (125) finds the

narrator using the term *"Mahattaheen"* (125) to define his own complacent nature in its contentment with living a mundane, aimless and hollow existence as he comes to the conclusion that his ideas have no value and that life itself is without worth. Parijat portrays a dismal picture of existence through the narrator who, inspite of his disgust at the realisation of his own condition, finds himself bound in the meaningless routine of an empty existence that breeds nothing but "*ananta tirkha*" (147) (infinite thirst). The primary distractions of civilisations, politics and religion play an important role in the novel. While people on board the Euphrosyne discuss feminism, christianity and everyday party politics, Mr. Ambrose's statement that "If any creature is so deluded as to think that a vote does him or her any good, let him have it. He'll soon learn better" (*Voyage Out* 35) reads as an affirmation of the lack of control humans have over their affairs while also echoing the fatalistic voice of Parijat's novels where characters believe that they are fated for their downfall. Under such conditions, the right to vote is presented as a mere distraction created by humans in order to make believe that we manipulate reality as we please and that everything is under our control, when in truth we merely play our parts, anxious and delusional, as the streams of our everyday life flow incessantly unaffected by our wild ramblings. One of Rachel's epiphanies, in the latter half of the novel, confirms the unpredictability of life as she realises that life "went on beneath the eyes and the mouth and the chin, for that life was independent of her, and independent of everything else" (298). This interpretation of life is greatly contrasted by the character of Evelyn Murgatroyd who believes that good and evil, joy and suffering; depend on individual will. She believes that action over contemplation is the only way to take charge of one's life, implying one can in-fact take charge of life if one simply wills. Chapter twenty five in the novel echoes Evelyn's beliefs as it begins with a description of a hot afternoon - plants and

flowers dried up in the sun and the only surviving vegetation consisting of tough plants "whose fleshy leaves seemed to be grown upon spines, still remained standing upright and defied the sun to beat them down" (308).

Virginia Woolf, through Mr. Ambrose and Mrs. Dalloway, presents her view that neither being at the controlling end nor at the receiving end of the government rescues human lives from complications, for as humans we are mere dust in a galaxy of stars. Mrs. Dalloway contemplating, "…I suppose I feel for him what my mother and women of her generation felt for Christ. It just shows that one can't do without something" (44) and Hewet's observation that humans prefer constant movement over inaction in order "…to prevent ourselves from seeing to the bottom of things" (116) reduces the act of living to a mere pursuit of diversions that take us farther and farther away from actualisation of the self, providing an escape from the certainty of one's mortality. Hewet's unnecessarily stirring up mud in a stream further illustrates this human instinct for diversions. Communication too, is seen as a distraction where each individual is a hungry animal satisfied briefly when fed with everyday information through letters and conversations, and as Hirst compares his companions to hippopotamuses, parrots, swines and serpents, he illustrates the primitive nature of his companions as they constantly grope for amusement. Fussing over the little details of one's house and furniture and finding satisfaction in life upon occupying oneself with breeding guinea pigs is the primary occupation of some of the novel's characters. In *To the Lighthouse* Mrs. Ramsay represents the primary amusement of human civilisations - termed "recreation" (Parijat 73) by the narrator in *Mahattaheen* - the institution of marriage. The idea of marriage secures Mrs. Ramsay's link to the civilised society from which she is, through the first part of the novel, away on vacation on an island surrounded by crashing waves and holding the promise of a

lighthouse in the distance. The thought of bringing one's choice of humans together in matrimony and binding them together for life based entirely on one's own personal whim is an interesting enterprise for Mrs. Ramsay - her desired diversion from the unpredictability of life. This tendency of her's is laughable in the eyes of Lily Briscoe, who finds it amusing that someone should attempt to govern "…with immutable calm over destinies which she completely failed to understand." (*Lighthouse* 56). Lily Briscoe's hysterical laughter in this context is a comment on the ridiculousness of human need for control over events and entities beyond the range of comprehension. It refers, at the same time, to the limited nature of human understanding, while commenting on the complexity of everyday events and individuals. Her fear of change and non-existence has helped channel Mrs. Ramsay's focus towards the details of her everyday life somewhat echoing Mrs. Dalloway's indulgence with elaborate parties, the decor, clothes and jewellery, etc; as a way to escape regrets, anxieties and guilt.

Mahattaheen finds "*sansaar*" in the narrator's observation - "*katro boredom ho yo sansaar?*" (Parijat 97) - referring to society or human civilisations so bound in institutions and traditions that they fail to see the futility of their routine. Human life is represented by inanimate objects such as boots, ashtrays, newspapers - simple physical symbols which hold no independent meaning of their own. Life, then, becomes a summation of all the objects humans invent in order to feed the hunger for mindless engagement. Life appears to hold no meaning apart from the ones we assign to these objects of amusement - a series of disoriented circular movements.

Virginia Woolf highlights the departure of the Dalloways from the Euphrosyne with the remaining voyagers exhibiting feelings of emptiness and

"depression" (*Voyage Out* 70). Though they had been companions on the ship merely for a few days, the Dalloways' leaving seemingly engulfed the others in sadness. This instance in the novel focuses on the human tendency to form bonds with one's own kind and the emotional vulnerability which each parting ushers along with the realisation that other things will take their place. The fact that one will forget just as one will be forgotten makes evident the shadow of death that hovers over everyday goodbyes, oblivion making its presence felt even in the midst of lively company. Hewet's reading *He Abjures Love* by Thomas Hardy shows this acute awareness and portrayal of death in art and literature:

> "But—after love what comes?
>
> A scene that lours,
>
> A few sad vacant hours,
>
> And then, the Curtain." (100)

The tendency to romanticise this closing of the final curtain is hinted at in the novel as the characters discuss artists who, after having spent their lives in poverty and discomfort, receive recognition only post their demise. The finality of death appears to possess the power to alter our perceptions of reality whereupon appreciation of a life completed, seems as an easier task than acknowledging a life still awaiting conclusion. However the lifespans of their masterpieces, according to William Banks, appear minuscule in comparison to the eternity stretched on all sides of time - "Who could tell what was going to last - in literature or indeed in anything else?" (*Lighthouse* 116).

Frequently employed words in reference to the world and to existence in general, such as “silence”, “immense” and “desolate”, present the novel as a study in the defamiliarisation of the concept of life, where normative structures of everyday events collapse in the face of certain non-existence. Since the very beginning of the novel, Woolf places the living in a position which occupies a minuscule space when compared to the great unknown. Be it via the sea, the sky, the silence before dawn, or the island which the characters in the latter half of the novel inhabit, the reader is consistently made aware of a greater unexplored plane which outshines, even belittles, the lives of the characters. Characters in *The Voyage Out* continue their search for meaning in life in the face of chaos, suffering and the certitude of oblivion. St. John realises the meaning of life “in a flash” the morning after the dance. His epiphany occurs in the midst of nonsensical and trivial human actions - “…and you talked nonsense, and Rachel made little heaps of stones. I, on the other hand, had the whole meaning of life revealed to me in a flash” (*Voyage Out* 294-95) - as he recognises love as the driving force, the reason and meaning, behind our acts of living. Rachel analyses St. John’s conviction about love before concluding that the answer to existence “might be love, but it was not the love of man for woman” (298). Later in the novel Virginia Woolf repeats, through the character of Evelyn Murgatroyd, the undervaluing of romantic love in comparison to the harsh realities of life. A headstrong feminist, Evelyn appears to detest the selfish nature of romantic relationships that lull humans into domesticity, “like little islands in the torrents of the world”, “so secluded and self-contained” (303). The real things in life, according to her, took place in the vast world before them, “independently of these women, turning so quietly and beautifully towards the men” (303). In a godless age the character of Evelyn echoes the concluding lines from one of Faiz’s *nazm* as she searches for a

greater meaning to life beyond amorous relationships and domestic humdrum - *"aur bhi dukh hain zamaane mein mohabbat ke siwa / rahatein aur bhi hain vasl ki rahat ke siwa"* ("There are sorrows in this world, far beyond the pleasures of love / There is more to happiness than the relief of reunion") (Faiz lines 18-19).

Characters ponder on the meaning of life and their own significance as inhabitants of an ignorant world, as they realise that meaning is subjective and reason illusory. Their paths in life, veiled by individual perceptions, seem to undertake unpredictable routes where "one thing led to another and by degrees something had formed itself out of nothing, and so one reached at last this calm, this quiet, this certainty, and it was this process that people called living" (*Voyage Out* 297). Human condition is subject to the perception of familiarity and this tendency to perceive patterns in everyday life and events is emphasised upon as Rachel looks back at her mortal journey and sees in it a coherent structure. The distortion of personal and age old social, spiritual, moral and ethical structures, as seen in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Sirish ko Phool* and *Baisha ko Manchey*, make way for traumatic experiences. While differences in the severity of trauma experienced depend upon a great number of individual and social variants and shall not be elaborated in this thesis, it is important to note the fragility of psychosocial structures that constitute our conscious as well as subconscious existence. A slight distortion in the structure may cause great dissonance in reality perception in order to avoid which, humans subconsciously endeavour to make meaning out of chaos. In retrospect Rachel "could see that a meaning of some kind was apparent in the lives of her aunts, and in the brief visit of the Dalloways whom she would never see again, and in the life of her father." (297), bringing to mind Kierkegaard's conviction that "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

In its search for meaning, *The Voyage Out* often considers life as synonymous with suffering through characters like Terrence who, transformed by pain, states "…that life is hard and full of suffering" (325). Reiterative of Buddhist philosophy that had found its way into Europe and the United States in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Terrence attributes this suffering to happiness which, according to him, makes one greatly vulnerable to pain. The universal desire for happiness - the craving that leads to the desire to control/influence events, people and resources - creates suffering which, in Terence's case, leads him to realise the absurdity of his own existence just as Rachel had realised her insignificant place in the vast universe, during the first half of the novel. Human suffering seems to Terence absurd before the rivers, forests, the earth and the sea that are enormous compared to his existence and the existence of the "…little men and women, tiny men and women" (325) dwelling in tiny luminous towns scattered around the world. Interestingly, the fact that this realisation does not entirely consume Terence as he observes and declares these epiphanies parts that constitute a greater whole - the life he was yet to share with Rachel - shows the ability of the human mind to distance itself from undesirable situations while clinging on to the faintest ray of hope. The latter half of the novel sees Terence's character go through a series of conflicting emotions as Rachel lies upon her deathbed while he can only pine for her. He goes from distancing himself from his pain to accepting it, and back to dissociating from suffering so much so that Terrence even hopes for Rachel's death. On board his emotional rollercoaster, he realises that desire for happiness causes suffering and that suffering is the reality of human life. Terrence realises the "absurd and laughable" (326) nature of human existence, powerless and hopeless against cosmic forces. Eventually beat down by the dreadful monotony of days, he wishes for a change in routine even if it required for

Rachel to die. The repetition of his suffering makes reality seem unreal, converting his prior stoicism and emotional dissociation to a physical sense of numbness. Terence craves for a sense of closure and certainty that death so often provides, even romanticising her demise and feeling relieved for a brief moment after - "So much the better—this was death. It was nothing; it was to cease to breathe. It was happiness, it was perfect happiness. They had now what they had always wanted to have, the union which had been impossible while they lived." (334)

Rachel's death greatly affects the lives and perceptions of the other characters in *The Voyage Out*. It rekindles Mrs. Flushing's fear of losing loved ones to death, leading her to detest the very idea if dying. In solitude, she vows to "not submit to dark and nothingness" (339) even as it consumes herself and others around her. This illustrates the various ways in which stagnancy, sickness and suffering change human perceptions and desires, and that the human condition is subject to innumerable forces outside one's control. These forces mould us, form our personalities and perceptions, and determine our thoughts and actions in that humans seem merely puppets with their strings pulled this way and that. The event of Rachel's death also rakes up this theme of a purposeless existence as Mrs. Thornbury and Evelyn take their stands on the polar ends of purpose vs purposelessness and the former states "There must be a reason… It can't only be an accident. For it was an accident—it need never have happened" (337). Where Mrs. Thornbury perceives (or attempts to perceive) pattern, Evelyn sees nothing but chance, futility and pointless suffering. Owing to the fact that, "…she had a natural dislike of anything final and done with; she liked to go on and on—always on and on" (343), Evelyn clutches on to the idea of an afterlife and chooses to believe that Rachel is still alive and well somewhere. The narrator in *Mahattaheen* questions the finality of death when he describes a small typhoon of

office papers - *"...samapti ta esko nischit cha. Afno samapti pachi feri yo sadharan hawa huncha?"* (Parijat 125) (…it is bound to quit swirling around. After it stops doest it go back to being an ordinary wind?) affirming the truth of human mortality as a *"nirvivaad satya"* (96) (indisputable truth) . *To the Lighthouse* attempts an answer to similar questions - "Will you fade? Will you perish?" - with a simple, "we remain" (141).

Mrs. Thornbury's growing conviction that there is order in the chaos of everyday activities requires, foremost, the acknowledgement of the chaos that constitutes all events. This episode in *The Voyage Out* is a perfect demonstration of the innards of Chaos Theory which is founded on the idea that minuscule changes and actions, voluntary and involuntary, produce massive effects and this pattern of cause and effect, in its entirety, can only be viewed as Mrs. Thornbury views them - in retrospect. As she reflects on her life, Mrs. Thornbury comes to a conclusion that "...surely order did prevail" (*Voyage Out* 340) - life ends in death and new life emerges from dead things, order turns to disorder and back again, beginnings result in endings and endings give way to new beginnings. The narrow space in between is, as seen in the novel, often shadowed by suffering and existential anxiety as the universe continues its absurd cycle of existence. *To the Lighthouse* finds a rather interesting application of brackets which notify the reader of the death of several important characters in *Time Passes* while speaking of mutilation and survival in the concluding section of the novel, *The Lighthouse.* The passage of time, illustrated in great variety and detail in the first and final sections of the novel, is conveyed through mere brackets in *Time Passes* - "(for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together)" (*Lighthouse* 147). Life and death are rendered brief and insignificant with events such as Prue Ramsay getting married, her death in childbirth (144) and

Andrew Ramsay dying in the battlefield (145), all mentioned briefly within square brackets, mirroring the place of human existence in the cosmic timeframe. The square brackets which announce deaths in *Time Passes* speak of mutilation and eventual survival in *The Lighthouse* - The image of a boy cutting a square out of a fish in order to bait his fishhook culminates in him tossing the mutilated, though still alive, body of the fish back into the waters.

A scene from the concluding chapter of *The Voyage Out* describes a room full of people observing a moth as it bumps into one lamp after another:

> a young woman put down her needlework and exclaimed, "Poor creature! it would be kinder to kill it." but nobody seemed disposed to rouse himself in order to kill the moth. They watched it dash from lamp to lamp, because they were comfortable, and had nothing to do. (349)

Albert Camus elaborates on a thought similar to this in the very first chapter of *The Myth of Sisyphus,* when he states that "…the Absurd is not in man (if such a metaphor could have a meaning) nor in the world, but in their presence together" (*Absurd Reasoning* 34). The absurd then, is the only reliable variant in the chaotic universe and to be alive is to be a minuscule part of the cosmic absurdity. In *To the Lighthouse* this Sisyphean endeavour is represented by the characters' strifes and conquests in their progression towards the distant lighthouse. That death is certain and central to the theme of existence is maintained throughout the novel. In its concluding pages *The Voyage Out* readdresses the universal fear of dying as characters debate on the nature of thanatophobia with Mr. Flushing announcing "…It's not cowardly to wish to live… It's the very reverse of cowardly" (351). Beginning with a voyage that instills in its characters (especially Rachel) a sense of adventure for life ahead, the

novel comes around again, near conclusion, to a point from where characters look to the future with anticipation and allure. Having revelled, suffered and mourned together, they find themselves headed for the future and its innovations and revolutions. Miss Allan stating "It would certainly be very dull to die before they have discovered whether there is life on Mars" (*Voyage Out* 351) brings back the hope, curiosity and adventure they had been stripped off in the wake of Rachel's death. Upon overcoming the loss of one of their own, characters in *The Voyage Out* display not just a will to continue living but a fascination with the collective fate of the human race. The question of how far we might venture as a civilisation in the vast unexplored universe and the revelations that could unfold, generates in them the sense of a new beginning, a new voyage to embark upon together. Virginia Woolf ends the novel with yet another reminder of the insignificance of individual lives in the cosmic scale of existence as surviving characters go on about their daily lives as the dead are put to rest - "…a procession of objects, black and indistinct, the figures of people picking up their books, their cards, their balls of wool, their work-baskets, and passing him one after another on their way to bed." (353)

To the Lighthouse approaches life from two distinct perspectives through the intellectual Mr. Ramsay and emotional Mrs. Ramsay. Mr. Ramsay worries over the brevity of human impression upon art and life. The thought that even the best writers and artists will die out of popularity or recognition eventually, all thrown mercilessly into oblivion, demotivates him and is the origin of his existential crisis. Mrs. Ramsay, on the other hand, finds inspiration to make the best of the present moment upon realising that everything is headed towards oblivion. The characters of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay present to the reader, two major hypotheses on the concepts of life and death. Mr. Ramsay on the other hand is largely self-centred and is seen, more often than not,

craving sympathy from his wife while also patronising and dominating her intellectually. Dislodged from the present these two characters, more than any other character in the novel, exhibit the scattering of human persona throughout one's existential timeframe. Mrs. Ramsay is the predominantly maternal figure who is compassionate in her actions and philosophical in her contemplations. The initial parts of the novel sees her knitting stockings for the lighthouse keeper's son as she tends to her own children, her husband, and the guests. Unlike Mr. Ramsay, she does not rely on physical work and intellectuality to outlive and immortalise her, nor does she compete or worry over her worth as a thinking, living being. The character of Mr. Ramsay represents knowledge and the intellectual mind in *To the Lighthouse*, however, in the eyes of Lily it is Mrs. Ramsay who holds the wisdom and knowledge she desires to be one with. Mr. Ramsay is reduced to a (mostly) needy and confused individual in the eyes of Lily, while Mrs. Ramsay is idolised and adored. A twentieth century woman with little to no formal educational qualification is deemed rich in wisdom and understanding, while her husband who is a celebrated university professor, seems almost childlike in his ignorance and insecurities. Mr. Ramsay seeks shelter in self pity as an escape from his nagging sense of incompetence. His dedication to his work at the expense of his family appears inadequate to him with comparison to great thinkers and philosophers who came before him. His desire to take control of his life and work is reflected in his attempts to control and influence his children. Mr. Ramsay's character represents the section of thought which considers death as a plunge into eternal oblivion and exhibits an obsession with being a superhuman of sorts in order to survive one's own demise - solely via one's work. It represents a thesis of life that professes a dedication to creating something that outlives the self for life is considered too important to be spent on mediocre human

activities or emotions, and that as a human one must strive to make one's mark, the bigger the better, on the waters of existence. While Mr. Ramsay perceives the unavoidable cycle of life and death in all its morbidity, Mrs. Ramsay focuses on action over inaction, living over dying - "I always think it's *living*, not dying, that counts" (50).

Mrs. Ramsay's wisdom and knowledge as described by Lily Briscoe, is of the unconventional kind in that it is not dependent on formally received education but pertains to an innate wisdom. This wisdom is compared to "tablets bearing scared inscriptions" (*Lighthouse* 57) enclosed within the walls of her mind and heart - a thesis on the nature of "everything", the meaning of life, death and everything in between. However, Lily desires Mrs. Ramsay's wisdom not through the medium of human language - she does not wish to read the "sacred inscriptions" - but through union with her being. Lily makes an allusion to spiritual unison with a greater entity when she expresses a desire to be one with the being of Mrs. Ramsay, just as "waters poured into one jar" (57) become inextricably one and the same. However, upon a closer look, Lily's desire to merge into Mrs. Ramsay's being is clearly not a desire to become one with a superior being. It is, instead, a desire to understand a fellow being who is as flawed and as dazed by the intricacies of (non)existence as everybody else. Lily is well aware of the absurdity of Mrs. Ramsay's tendency to control the lives of others. When on one hand her obsession with the coupling of young men and women is laughable to Lily, her benevolence as a mother on the other hand, is almost revered. Knowledge acquired via human language and human institutions is unsought after in Lily's case whereas knowledge via union with the ideal is the ultimate aim. The potency of love in steering one towards fusion with the greater forces of existence is

questioned when Lily wonders if love could help unite Mrs. Ramsay and herself so she could know life better.

To the Lighthouse is a study in the nature of reality, and consequently a study of life as we know it. Andrew Ramsay explaining to Lily Briscoe the nature of his father's occupation - a study of "Subject and object and the nature of reality" and "think of a kitchen table then… when you're not there" (*Lighthouse* 28) - brings to mind the age old philosophical question of whether or not a tree falling in an uninhabited island makes any sound. Owing to the fact that it is impossible to observe an object without observing it, such a question appears invalid for one can neither prove nor disprove, sans observation, the existence of the object. In a world filled to the brim with these objects, people and experiences, the realness of which can neither be proven nor disproven, reality appears labyrinthine and mostly unreliable - "But how strange… that they should be going on there still. For it was extraordinary to think that they had been capable of going on living all these years when she had not thought of them more than once all that time" (96). *Mahattaheen* elaborates on the nature of reality as the narrator compares past events to nothing more than a long queue stretched out beside him. This hollow queue holds no proof that the past was real yet it is the only account one possess of one's own experiences:

…samaya bitdai jancha ra samaya bitnu ko nau maa ma sanga bigat ko euta laamo queue siwaya kehi hudaina. Nirantar ra samanantar roop le raheko tyo mahatwaheen queue, jasko astitwa matra euta khokryai ko astitwa ho ra jasko gahanta matra euta riktata ko gahanta ho. (Parijat 91)

(… I will have nothing except a long queue of past occurrences to evince the passage of time. A meritless queue that runs consistent and parallel, one with a hollow identity and empty depths).

Very much like the problem of colour perception - if colour is merely lightwaves absorbed and reflected by various bodies, what is the true colour of an object in the absence of light? Do things continue to possess colours even as they sit in the dark? - life, then, becomes a phenomenon to be observed through one's personal cognitive lens varying from one individual to another - an experience open to interpretations and propositions. Psychological reactions to stimuli - likes, dislikes, fears, despair and aspirations, among other emotions - forge our worldly interactions, thereby translating the act of living as a series of decision-making and compartmentalising of events or feelings.

Lily Briscoe is the observing eye that, in the end, demonstrates a generous acceptance of both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's disparate points of view regarding life and death. This is explored masterfully in chapter nine where Lily assesses Mr Ramsay's personality traits from an unprejudiced standpoint, acknowledging his sincerity of being and his excellence while commenting on his relationship with himself which has made him highly self- absorbed, turning him into a tyrannical and unjust figure. He is "bearing down" and "retreating" (*Lighthouse* 53) at the same time. The fact that Lily Briscoe overlooks the Ramsay family's peculiarities, faults and differences in order to "keep steady" (52), verifies her role in the novel as a non-biased body that analyses as it observes. This particular portion in the novel also touches upon the subject of love while discussing the Ramsays as a whole.

"The sky stuck to them; the birds sang through them" (53) is representative of the vehemency of human self-importance. Their world is described as one "seen through the eyes of love" (53), with the line "the sky stuck to them, the birds sang to them" employed possibly as a comment on human nature and civilisation which has, from its very dawn, been convinced of its superiority and validity over all other organisms. Lily Briscoe's realisation here, that life is a wave of separate individual moments that "…bore one up with it and threw one down with it, there, with a dash on the beach" (53) actively suggests that an individual is moulded by an innumerable variety of experiences and responses to these experiences. One's life takes a certain shape owing to one's reactions to the briefest duration of time and events, and this is perhaps the entire thesis of Virginia Woolf's body of work which explores the intricate network of human thoughts - making note of every branching out and every intersection, in pursuit of the true nature of the human mind and of coherence in human existence. The word "beach" here stands for the lucidity and security that human society promises - an arrangement bound in rules, traditions and cultures that aims at providing its people with an identity and a home. All the stability expected from civilisation is, however, determined by the fluidity of human mind and its perceptions, which elevate and expunge an individual just as waves tower and crash onto shore, driven by currents invisible to the eye.

Mr. Ramsay's character is constantly obsessed with intellectual success and a great hunger for social validation gnaws at his waking moments. A character riddled with self pity, Mr. Ramsay's tendency to underestimate the experiences of others while overestimating his own competence as a social/intellectual being demonstrates his illusory superiority. His constant need to become an intellectual/spiritual superhuman while keeping intact, even nurturing, his emotional weaknesses,

represents the section of human population haunted by ideals. While Mrs. Ramsay is seen making peace with her constantly changing world, Mr. Ramsay is seen giving in to anxiety and self pity owing to the passage of time and the evolution/transformation of the nature of being through past, present and future. In his desire to be placed among the greatest of mankind, Mr. Ramsay disregards family life and it is interesting to note that Mr. Ramsay's insecurities have been equated, in the following lines, with "barrenness" or the lack of life. The deep unease arising from this lack of life, in his case, is depicted as something that needs to be overcome and replaced with the assurance of life, i.e. the assurance of his genius :

It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life - the drawing-room; behind the drawing-room the kitchen; above the kitchen the bedrooms; and beyond them the nurseries; they must be furnished, they must be filled with life. (43)

The final paragraph of chapter six in *To the Lighthouse* serves as an important character description of Mr Ramsay, through his own stream of thought. It is also a commentary on narcissism bordering on self-pity, and how Mr Ramsay's perception of oneself as the centre of his timeline, makes his experience of life different than that of Mrs. Ramsay, James, Prue and Lily Briscoe. Existence and the idea of complete non-existence in death, therefore, envelop and control the movement of these novels in such a way that Life and Death can rightfully be termed the silent protagonists in the *The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse* and *Mahattaheen*. The concluding sentences of *To the Lighthouse* efficiently summarise all three novels explored in this chapter:

There it was - her picture. yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? She asked herself, taking up her brush again…. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (225-26)

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Chapter 4

Human Identity and the Nature of Realities in *The Waves* and *Boni.*

In continuity with the themes of life, death and existential anguish explored in the preceding chapter, this chapter attempts to analyse Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* and Parijat's *Boni* - novels highly disparate in their execution but united in theme and temperament. Studies in human vulnerability to forces beyond control, both novels follow characters from childhood to old age or death mapping their psychological evolution as they try to adapt, throughout their lives, to the world they were introduced as infants.

Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* comprises of two parallel narratives - a brief omniscient account of a single day from dawn to nightfall interwoven with pages of soliloquies revealing the natures and diverse perspectives of the six of the seven major characters in the novel. The parallel occurrence - the course of a single day against the entire lives of the characters - is significant in that it anchors the psycho-physical events as Bernard, Louis, Rhoda, Susan, Neville and Jinny course through their chaotic lives. Invisible yet unyielding, the seventh character Percival appears in the novel only through his friends' descriptions of him and is, in the *Introduction* by Angelica Garnett described thusly:

> "Although death is inevitable, he points to the fact that there is something beyond death which is worth the risk. He symbolises both death, and the possibility of God. Kept at a distance, he remains as a promise of something extraordinary which never materialises, and therefore never disappoints us. Thus Virginia transmits her belief in life, and suggests that the inevitable

> anguish of creation will transcend the brutal inconsequentiality of death." (xiv-xv).

Where internal and external lives are explored through soliloquies in *The Waves*, Parijat reveals her characters in *Boni* through the medium of letter writing - the narrator's addresses to Boni the only account of their characters at the reader's disposal. The psycho-physical observations of Woolf's characters, initially contained in one sentence each, initiate the reader into their distinct natures. Bernard's choice of rhetoric expresses his love for poetry as he sees the wind as ripples in the air and describes the sun as a ring that "quivers and hangs in a loop of light" (Woolf 2). For him the world is sublime and he feels compelled to document life around him through his unconventional use of language and images. Susan's love for the countryside is revealed as she explores and revels in the natural world around her - a green caterpillar curled up in the soil, pointy leaves by the window and birds either perched or singing all around. Susan dubbing a house in the garden, "blind with curtained windows" (33) represents, as in *Mahattaheen*, the alienation characteristic of civilisations blind behind the curtains of their own weaving. Rhoda, a character who experiences extreme social anxiety hears the same chorus of bird songs which leave behind, following their dispersal, a lone bird who "sings by the bedroom window alone" (3). The image of a snail as it slithers through the grass with its home on its back symbolises Rhoda's need for privacy - a place to withdraw into when overwhelmed by existence - that allows her space to observe "Islands of light [are] swimming on the grass....fallen through the trees" (2). The sensitive Neville sees his world as a microcosm brimming with sensory information, hanging inside a drop against the background of a great hill. Where Susan sees trees full of leaves he sees birds peering through the darkness between those leaves. He feels the coldness of the

stones beneath his feet, "each one, round or pointed, separately" (3) as a buzzing bee, here now gone the next moment, ushers him into a world regulated by time. This awareness of the passage of time is conveyed by Louis who hears the rhythmic strokes of a church bell as it dictates the time - “one, two; one, two; one, two” (4) - while the waves crash against the shore as though it were a chained beast constantly stamping its feet. Unlike the other characters, Jinny's observations involve material objects (a crimson and golden tassel), her ambitious nature relayed via the image of bubbles forming in a saucepan - "Then they rise, quicker and quicker, in a silver chain to the top" (3).

Louis’s ominous description of the railway guard blowing his whistle and dipping the flag as characters leave for different schools, and its analogy to an avalanche - “…the flag is dipped; without an effort, of its own momentum, like an avalanche started by a gentle push, we start forward.” (17) - appears almost as a warning of the tumultuous lives awaiting each of them. Although all characters experience loneliness in varying degrees amidst constantly fluctuating realities, the “avalanche” initiated by their conscious first steps into society creates in characters like Rhoda a constant and pestering sense of solitude which undergoes little to no change as eventually, burdened by its weight, she chooses to end her life. Boni equating the condition of a kidnapped child crying for home to that of a bird in a cage reflects a similar sense of entrapment and longing for freedom as Rhoda. While the circumstances leading to Rhoda’s suicide differ greatly with those leading to Boni’s death in Parijat’s novel, both experience alienation in fundamentally the same forms as they struggle to experience a sense of belonging with the world around them.

4.1. Identity and Speaking in a Borrowed Tongue:

Through characters engaged in a constant quest for order in life and in their sense of selves, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* and Parijat's *Boni* aim to communicate the idea that identity is revealed in the nature of an individual's consciousness and not in the physical form or shape that embodies it. Daily experiences, while they 'shape' characters in *The Waves,* contribute to their identity crises as they begin to realise the fluid nature of their personalities which constantly disintegrate and re-materialise to fit their socio-cultural moulds. In the absence of interpersonal conversations, all six characters in Woolf's novel voice their thoughts, confusions and revelations solely via soliloquies - solo voices talking of themselves in a sea of voices all talking of themselves. The likes of Freud and Morton Prince have long focused on the idea of mimesis as the basis of human identity in that the psycho-physical development of an individual is mostly the result of the human tendency for imitation. In simple terms, individuals learn to become 'themselves' by observing and imitating the 'selves' other than their own. Another core component of human identity, according to William Brown and Charles Richet, is memory with its affinity for retention and the "idea that the subject was incapable of forgetting anything - that even if conscious access to such memories was blocked we unconsciously retained a complete record of every single event… testifies to the extraordinary importance traditionally attached to memory as - along with volition - the defining mark of personal identity" (Leys 93). Memory as a faculty, however, is tricky in its operation in that one may not always be able to consciously recall events that shape his/her personality, retaining instead the memory of emotions once attached to them - mere holographic projections of the original emotion:

…we can produce, not remembrances of the old grief or rapture, but new griefs and raptures, by summoning up a lively thought of their exciting cause. The cause is now only an idea, but this idea produces the same organic irradiations, or almost the same, which were produced by its original, so that the emotion is again a reality. We have 'recaptured' it. Shame, love, and anger are particularly liable to be thus revived by ideas of their object. (James 318)

In this context the identities of the characters in *The Waves* are thoroughly dependent on the identities and actions of people around them and on memory (or the memory of a memory) which, brought together, act almost as a compass guiding their individual personalities. Characters engage in internal monologues that often find them in their most vulnerable conditions like the shock of Jinny's kiss altering, briefly, Louis's awareness of his own being or Rhoda acknowledging her face in the looking glass then ducking behind Susan to hide herself "for I am not here. I have no face" (*Waves* 25). Her sense of inferiority makes her extremely insecure about herself to the point that she values the realities and perceptions of her friends more than she does her own. They appear to know the right things to say and do when Rhoda, hovering ghost-like at the heart of life, finds herself unable to feel or express adequately the dream-like world she inhabits - "…my body now lets the light through; my spine is soft like wax near the flame of the candle. I dream; I dream." (27). Her dream-like existence, "a papery tree" (35), consistently exhibits fragility as it is manipulated and swayed by the slightest motions of everyday life - "But this is a thin dream.... Even the sight of her vanishing down the corridor blows it two atoms. It is not solid; it gives me no satisfaction - this Empress dream." (35). Faceless and shifting forms, Rhoda's sense of identity comes from her acknowledgement of the very lack of it - the faceless apparition donning one mask after another, several simultaneously. She is aware that

her craving for the attention and society of others arises from the fact that on her own, she is engulfed into nothingness - “Therefore I hate looking glasses which show me my real face. Alone, I often fall down into nothingness. I must push my foot stealthily lest I should fall off the edge of the world into nothingness. I have to bang my hand against some hard door to call myself back to the body" (26).

An ‘outsider’ because of his Australian accent and humble background, Louis’s constant references to images of ancient civilisations is the instrument through which Woolf’s novel focuses on the larger timeframe of human existence or of life in general instead of merely engaging in the exploration of individual characters - “Down there my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile” (4), “I find relics of myself in the sand that women made thousands of years ago, when I heard songs by the Nile and the chained beast stamping” (83). That an individual with his/her insecurities, fears and desolation is part of a larger timeframe is expressed through Louis’s holding in his hands a flower stalk which leads him to the realisation of union with all things (living or non-living) to have ever existed on earth. He becomes the stalk with his roots burrowed deep inside the earth, his eyes sometimes become green leaves, other times they are the eyes of a “stone figure in a desert by the Nile.” (4) as he finds himself one with all that is and all that will be - “I am all fibre” (4). Louis experiencing these moments of union with fellow beings and objects throughout the novel acts as a constant reminder of both, the insignificant nature of human life as well as its place in the vast history of existence. The realisation that individual lives like his are immaterial against the cosmic background becomes liberating in Louis’ case as he is driven by the need to witness and preserve every moment of his small and fleeting existence, “…to state, if only in one line of unwritten poetry, this moment; to mark this inch in the long, long history that began

in Egypt" (41). Bernard illustrates human insignificance by comparing life to a flame soon to be extinguished "the will-o'-the-wisp that dances in a few eyes" (184).

A young Louis speaks of singing hymns and praying "... that God may keep us safe while we sleep, calling ourselves little children. When we are sad and trembling with apprehension it is sweet to sing together.... afraid of much, I of my accent, Rhoda of figures; yet resolute to conquer." (14). Nietzschean in tone, Louis' monologue presents religion and prayer as essential in helping him and his friends cope with their insecurities and fears. Memories of past humiliations and injustices are soothed, in Louis' case, in the presence of authority (whether in the form of headmaster Crane or the crucifix) which stands as a symbol of the great machinery/truth/divine machinery to which he is a part - "I become a figure in the procession, a spoke in the huge wheel that turning, at last erects me here and now." (20). Even as he terms order majestic, obedience beautiful and wishes with all his heart to be part of the social machinery, Louis is not entirely unaware of the fact that the violence ingrained in this longing - to govern and/or to be governed - leaves in its wake destruction and ruin - "But they also leave butterflies trembling with their wings pinched off; they throw dirty pocket-handkerchiefs clotted with blood screwed up into corners. They make little boys sob in dark passages. They have big red ears that stand out under their caps" (28). Where Rhoda, drifting to sleep, feels centred and secure upon touching bed rails with her feet ("…I will assure myself, touching the rail, of something hard"), Louis feels grounded in his faith - "I feel come over me the sense of the earth under me, and my roots going down…they wrap themselves round some hardness at the centre" (20). This view is countered by Neville to whom religion symbolises zombie-like institutions, "grief-stricken figures advancing, cadaverous and wounded" (20) while religion's departure from truth is illustrated in the image of "Christ in a glass case" (20) paraded on the

streets as Easter decor. Religion is equated with debilitation as he ridicules the inanity of multitudes who engage in the ritual worship of illusory truths established through religious institutions offering to lead the masses to 'truth' when in fact they lead them merely to "the sad figure of Christ trembling beside another trembling sad figure" (118).

The theme of multiple perceptions and interpretations encountered in *The Voyage Out* resurfaces in *The Waves* in Bernard's description of headmaster Crane who, although symbolising social and religious authority, is compared to a drunken sailor whose actions are mechanically imitated by the other 'masters' who appear farcical in their attempts to replicate headmaster Crane's drunken demeanour. This portion in the novel illustrates human fascination with impersonation - physical and ideological - reducing life, as Nietzsche states, to a mere "continuous fluttering around the solitary flame of vanity.… their eyes merely glide over the surface of things and see "forms"" (80). Existence, then, becomes nothing more than "pitiable" (21) hollow renditions of individual notions regarding the nature of truth which create, in their wake, societies that value 'tradition' over tolerance, the sonorous chorus of barren words over personal reason and thoughts. Virginia Woolf comments on the devious nature of social and religious institutions that claim to be gateways to an ultimate truth even as they mince "the dance of the white butterflies at the door to powder", reducing the flutter of life to mere "'Butterfly powder'" (21). Bernard imagining, in his soliloquy, headmaster Crane undressing represents the desire to disrobe authority, to render it naked and ridiculous. Bernard, however, refrains from creative assumptions regarding the private life of his school headmaster, stating that "stories that follow people into their private rooms are difficult. I cannot go with the story" (31). Through this instance Woolf highlights the complex nature of existence -

physical, psychological and emotional - in that social norms and resultant surface appearances differ greatly from individual and personal realities. Social influence on individual lives in illustrated in Bernard's soliloquy as he observes the change in his disposition upon being insulted by a man he hardly knows:

It is strange that we, who are capable of so much suffering, should inflict so much suffering. Strange that the face of a person… a mere adumbration of eyes, cheeks, nostrils-should have power to inflict this insult. You look, eat, smile, are bored, pleased, annoyed - that is all I know. Yet this shadow which has sat by me for an hour or two, this mask from which peep two eyes, has power to drive me back, to pinion me down among all those other faces, to shut me in a hot room ; to send me dashing like a moth from candle to candle. (197)

The narrator in *Boni* echoes Bernard's meditations when she states that circumstances (inclusive of pleasant and unpleasant) build thoughts (inclusive of constructive and destructive) -*"vichaarharu le vikaas huna ko nimti vatavaran paunu parcha"* (Parijat 195). In a satirical vein this statement highlights human tendency to feed the development of an external locus of control, holding external factors or factors beyond personal and individual control responsible in determining the course and nature of one's existence. The narrator acknowledges social influence as an important factor in moulding individual states of being but also argues that in spite of the limited sense of control sanctioned in human existence, attributing each and every response to circumstances outside one's domain of control is perverse and unforgivable -*"yo sampurna watawaran nai meena bajar bhayera timiharu jasta lai sauti gardai bolai rheko huncha bhaney bichari timro pani ke dosh? Tara hoina boni, manchey ka sabai galtiharu shamaniya huncha bhanney kuralai ma mandina"* (200). This is further illustrated through the example of pottery-making, in that individual

evolution differs greatly from the physical transformation of clay into objects of artistic expression and daily utility. The narrator highlights the fact that clay is non-sentient and essentially powerless in the hands of change while an individual, complex in its form and being, possesses the power to alter internal realities and reactions to external events, thus exercising whatever meagre form of control existence permits. In light of these observations human nature, then, appears far from being entirely passive and helpless in the face of physical and social influences - *"Ho watawaran le manchey banaucha tara yas feriney kram ma manchey le pani watawaran lai banaucha"* (200) (Yes environment shapes the individual but it is also true that individuals possess the ability to change their environment). This brings to mind Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen's statement on the relationship between human identity and the expression of desire which argues that individual identification is shaped not through "desire" but through the realisation of its own; desire being merely the outcome of the personal sense of character:

> If desire is satisfied in and through identification, it is not in the sense in which a desire some- how precedes its "gratification," since no desiring subject (no "I," no ego) precedes the mimetic identification: identification brings the desiring subject into being, and not the other way around. (*Freudian Subject* 47)

In the same strain Rhoda refuses to submit to external forces causing her misery, vowing to find inspiration in her solitude highlights the ability of the human mind to create rather convincing gods and heroes as a shield against unpleasant experiences and pledges to fashion her own anchor amidst tumultuous seas - "I will seek out a face, a composed, a monumental face, and will endow it with omniscience, and wear it under my dress like a talisman…. I promise myself this. So I will not cry." (Woolf

19). The sense of being an outsider greatly amplified in Rhoda, as in Louis, is evident in her experiences through childhood to her suicide years later. She exists in a space between the one inhabited by Percival who eludes language completely and by the other five for whom language is the sole means by which they explore themselves and the world around them. She has access to language and expression but at the same time feels perpetually excluded from the activities of the world. In a state between sleep and wakefulness, Rhoda feels grounded as her feet touch the bed rail almost as though she were unsinkable, indestructible:

> …I will assure myself, touching the rail, of something hard. Now I cannot sink; cannot altogether fall through the thin sheet now…. I am no longer upright, to be knocked against and damaged. I am turned; I am tumbled; I am stretched, among these long lights, these long waves, these endless paths, with people pursuing, pursuing. (15)

The Waves attempts to portray the complex nature of existence by revealing the underlying mechanisms that have, since time immemorial, regulated the clockwork of human society. Language more as a cause for alienation than a means of communication is highlighted in the novel which consists of absolutely no conversations or verbal/physical interactions between its characters. They are engaged in internal monologues occurring in the blind spots away from the range of society's vision. The image of the eye is recurrent as characters' soliloquies escape external social surveillance and often, in sleep-induced trances, escape their own internal vigil. Through the character of Bernard Virginia Woolf highlights a third type of 'eye' - the imaginary observer that symbolises the human search for meaning through external validation. Frederich Nietzsche elucidates - "…just as every porter wants to have an admirer, so even the proudest of men, the philosopher, supposes that he sees on all

sides the eyes of the universe telescopically focused upon his action and thought." (*On Truth* 79). The characters' altered demeanours upon Jinny's arrival illustrate the extent to which external observation and social presence change human behaviour - "Now she sees us, and moves, and all the rays ripple and flow and waver over us, bringing in new tides of sensation. We change" (Woolf 78). The sight of Jinny ushers in memories and sensations that grip the characters with anxiety and a strong sense of inadequacy. Louis adjusts his tie, Neville fidgets with cutlery, Rhoda looks on with surprise and Susan is reminded of Jinny's near-hostile criticisms regarding her appearance - "…feel her laughter curl its tongues of fire round me and light up unsparingly my shabby dress, my square-tipped finger-nails, which I at once hide under the table-cloth" (78).

Woolf highlights the vulnerability of human existence through the change in Neville's temperament in the absence and presence of food. "Weighed down with food" (90), he exits the philosophical/intellectual realm of thought, entering the world of bodily sensations as he feasts his tastebuds and revels in the resulting sense of rootedness. This instance in the novel presents a thesis common to most novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat which professes that an individual is not the assemblage of fixed behaviours and thought patterns but is the vibrant interplay of numerous external and internal stimuli that control and steer their existence. While resilient under testing circumstances, the physicality of human existence symbolises both, the limits it imposes upon individuals as well as the promise of gratifying bodily sensations - "The delicious mouthfuls of roast duck, fitly piled with vegetables…have stabilised my body. I feel quiet, gravity, control. All is solid now…. Now I can look steadily into the mill-race that foams beneath" (90). Though constantly evading

supervision and in perpetual conflict with their psycho-physical natures, characters are not immune to thought control as a result of the limitations of human language.

The novel speaks directly to the reader with no conversations and no middle man relaying its contents but solo voices talking to themselves, within themselves, in a sea of voices all attempting to speak their personal truths. In the absence of active social interactions in the novel, characters are stripped off of their social identities and physical appearances rendering them as only a voice with a name that separates it from other names. Amidst, characters struggle to cling on to their own selves and to the idea of a fixed identity even as everyone and everything around them is continually changing - “What I call ‘my life’, it is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am - Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs” (185).

Restrained by the mimetic nature of language and words which have trickled down, separated from their original experience, over centuries and generations, the characters cannot help but speak in a borrowed tongue even as they attempt to bare their innermost individual selves. Human dependency on language is explored by Nietzsche in his *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* which establishes that our reality is only as strong as our choice of words. Reality becomes, then, merely one of the many constructs of language as it shapes perceptions and illusions of the relevancy of human life in the vast cosmic expanse:

Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of "world history", but nevertheless, it was only a minute. (Nietzsche 79)

He goes on to say that even the above description does not and cannot express how insignificant, absurd and aimless human intellect appears against nature. The human need to communicate has treasured language in all its variations, parroting words and metaphors that have been handed down generations bound in socially accepted sequences or grammar. Nietzsche terms language, "…this great Columbarium of concepts, the graveyard of perceptions" (88), something long dead and no longer true, through which humans attempt to express their thoughts and reveal the meaning of life. All characters in *The Waves* rely on language to communicate with others and with themselves with the exception of Percival. Percival's lack of speech manifests in his absence from the world of his friends although he is constantly present in their lives. This materialisation of being and thought, occurring in the form of language, can only derive its truth from the known which is recycled ad nauseam till it loses its authenticity. Bernard, on his first night at school, comments on this embalming and preserving of language and its truths when he observes that his headmaster speaks "tremendous and sonorous words" (Woolf 18) which, through repetition, embody the deception he has convinced himself to be a part of. Just like an overtly recurring dream holds at some point the promise of authenticity/reality, words repeated over generations forge themselves into socio-psychological institutions that imprison entire civilisations within the promise of a false ideal - "All here is false; all is meretricious" (19). Percival having no use for language, is godlike (89). His name - our one important link to the existence of the invisible character - is termed insufficient in containing the essence of his incomprehensible vastness as characters view him as a pilgrimage that has drawn them together. However, it is interesting to note that they do not attribute to Percival the eternity vested upon divinity. Amply aware of the impermanence of life, the six characters strive not to create something perennial,

instead to view together and with multiple eyes the one thing they most cherish - "No, that is too small, too particular a name. We cannot attach the width and spread of our feelings to so small a mark. We have come together... To make one thing, not enduring - for what endures? - but seen by many eyes simultaneously" (82). This is further illustrated in Bernard's description of a red carnation in a vase before him. Symbolising Percival, the lone flower under observation by the characters offers the possibility of numerous perspectives - numerous angles from which to view the flower - with each perspective influencing the nature of the object observed - "a single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, read, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves - a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution" (82).

Unbound by social rules or the rules of language Percival, both before and after death, exists as an entity complete and whole in himself and that feeling of wholeness originating from him is perceived by the other characters as flawless and incapable of disappointment. The sense of closure humans derive from death is reflected in Rhoda's musings - "There is this mystery about people when they leave us. When they leave us I can companion them to the pond and make them stately" (27). Upon Boni's death the narrator attempts to find closure in thinking that some part of her still clings on to the earth and "ether" - *"prithviko kakshya ma, hawa ma, ether ma katai na katai aljhi rahekai hola. Sambodhan tehi awaz ra Haaso haru lai natra kasari tungyau timro ra mero sambandhagatha lai…"* (Parijat 217). It is interesting to note here that the narrator's sense of closure depends fundamentally on her ability to address the other. Implying that something or someone that does not exist cannot be addressed, Parijat addresses the absurdity of existence where in spite of ceasing to exist physically Boni lingers on in the mind of the narrator, before

coming to the premise that both these states of existence are, to the 'other', interchangeable under dire circumstances. The focus of the argument is not the nature of the addressee but the narrator's ability to address, highlighting the replaceability of human life with memories. The moment of death is, then, and the most humbling experience as it is that moment which marks the transition from life to death, palpable to abstract. Life goes on even as hundreds cease to exist every single day as the narrator states:

> *yaad rakha boni, ma mile dhunga hoina timilai birsera mero gatisheelta aghi badhcha-badcha…. timi ghaitey bhayera mareu ma ghaitey bachchu. Dinacharya swabhaawik bhayera chalne cha. (218)*
>
> (Remember Boni, I am not a mile stone for I will forget you and move on with life…. You died wounded I will live wounded. Daily life will resume its normalcy).

The limits of language impose upon the six characters limits to their individual personalities. Ever so often, in the course of the novel Bernard, Susan, Louis, Jinny, Rhoda and Neville sound uncannily like one another to the point that they themselves undergo moments of crisis. They often realise that their interactions with their friends, close relations and society in general have moulded their present sense of identity and that they are but pieces of different people they have encountered physically or within the linguistic boundaries of imagination, "For this is not one life; nor do I always know if I am man or woman, Bernard or Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny, or Rhoda - so strange is the contact of one with another" (Woolf 188). In the light of such realisations *The Waves* dismantles conventional concepts of character and fixed personality as it questions the notion of self and the nature of truth.

Susan's insufferable agony upon witnessing the kiss comes from her love for Louis. Her preference of one person over the others makes her vulnerable to the pain and suffering which she wishes to wrap “inside my pocket-handkerchief. It shall be screwed tight into a ball.... I will take my anguish and lay it upon the roots under the beach trees.... I shall sleep under hedges and drink water from ditches and die there.” (5-6). This theory of suffering finds affiliation with novels and lies in chapter two as they pronounce bias and attachment the prime cause of suffering inherent to human nature. Susan's suffering becomes her reality, her biases her truth. Nietzsche attributes this truth to human need for peace, society and language. This ‘peace’, as illustrated in Rhoda’s soliloquy, is demanded of her as though it was but natural to aspire, of all things, to suppress all diversity - “But here I am nobody. I have no face. This great company, all dressed in brown serge, has robbed me of my identity. We are all callous, unfriended” (19).

Compelled by nature, as social beings, humans strive for social existence which demands a certain degree of peace among individuals, bringing divergent consciousnesses together in a mosaic of a socially approved ideal. Bernard's comment, "Soon I fail, unless talked to" (21) highlights the tendency of humans to flounder, in the absence of society, over their own personal identities - devoid of social interactions, one does not know who or what to embody. Here Woolf equates the human mind with a lake which, “unbroken by oars” (21) of society, plunges into an “oily somnolence” (21), suspended in a state of befuddled inactivity. Through Neville, Woolf states that variety is a natural state of existence and that “Each tense…means differently. There is an order in this world; there are distinctions, there are differences in this world, upon whose verge I step. For this is only a beginning” (10). While Bernard's stories bring amusement and delight to his friends, their absurd

and hurried endings leave characters like Neville in a state of utter desolation. Neville's observation that Bernard "sees everyone with blurred edges" (31) illustrates the problem of expression through and representation in language and literature. The "sympathetic understanding" (31) attributed to Bernard and through him to literature in general, is portrayed as devoid of potency in its tendency to reduce human passion and endurance to mere blurry stories.

The treatment of past, present, the self and the other in *The Waves* is fluid, so much so that they often merge, disrupting the characters' routine sense of identity. These fluctuations in identity are levelled however, consciously or subconsciously, by the very company and society that disrupts it, turning reality into generalised set of rules and perceptions and people its "unanimous, indiscriminate, uncounted" (130) components:

> It is strange that we, who are capable of so much suffering, should inflict so much suffering. Strange that the face of a person, whom I scarcely know…. has power to drive me back, to pinion me down among all those other faces, to shut me in a hot room ; to send me dashing like a moth from candle to candle. (197)

Casting differences or "bellum omni contra omnes" (Nietzsche 81) aside these individuals decide upon a truth which is essentially nothing more than common ground(s) where human intellect and emotions intersect. This truth passed on via language creates psychophysical and moral dichotomies that trap human intellect, described by Nietzsche as "a device for detaining them [humans] a minute within existence" (79), in a prison of its own making. The theme of inadequacy of words and of language as a means of expression, runs through The Waves with its characters

falling short of words and metaphors as they grapple to give form to the formless. Woolf highlights, through Neville, this redundancy of expression when he muses, "-but what are words? Do I not know already how to rhyme, how to imitate Pope, Dryden, even Shakespeare?" (Woolf 29). Like a curious and daft dog chasing its own tail, the characters' internal monologues bring them, full circle, back to their confused and shifting selves - "their senses nowhere lead to truth; on the contrary, they are content to receive stimuli and, as it were, to engage in a groping game on the backs of things" (Nietzsche 80). Groping for truth then, are individuals with the ability and will to evade deception so fragile that they surrender to their illusions as they do to the fleeting reality of their dreams each night. Experiences devoid of language, such as Louis' moments of union with the past and present, find characters peering through the keyholes of their existence which hold within them all lives, past and present.

The initial portion of the novel i.e. the portion containing the characters childhoods find Louis describing his friends in a Nietzschean tone - "They skim the butterflies from the nodding tops of the flowers. They brush the surface of the world. Their nets are full of fluttering wings" (Woolf 4). His brief union with the vastitude of of existence renders the ignorance and innocence of his friends, their limitations and illusions, repulsive. Through this instance Virginia Woolf illustrates the urgency with which human life strives towards illusions and bias. From the very dawning of their lives, the young characters display personal preferences ensuing from their sense of self as they fling themselves in the process into the heart of social conditioning, human language - "But I am already set on my pursuit. I see insects in the grass. Though my mother still knits white socks for me and hems pinafores and I am a child, I love and I hate" (7).

Nietzsche describes the human condition as "...a continuous fluttering around the solitary flame of vanity" (*On Truth* 80), the "vanity" being delusions of knowledge and truth. Woolf highlights the emptiness inherent to existence through Jinny's kiss to Louis - "my heart jumping under my pink frock like the leaves, which go on moving, though there is nothing to move them" (Woolf 5). The "nothing" that facilitates psychological and emotional reactions and the formation of habit in humans is compared to the wind that moves tree leaves, setting in motion an invisible mechanism which animates existences which are otherwise stationery. Virginia Woolf portrays in *The Waves* existence which eludes reason and meaning - existence driven by the emptiness which is reason enough for collective pursuits of truth. The invisibility of the wind that stirs the surface of the world is analogous to Percival's lack of speech and his overall existence in the novel. On the other hand, Bernard with his obsession for words and a hankering for meaning, represents language which has, since time immemorial, expressed little more than mere presumptions of reality. His words, despite variations in their arrangement and creativity, are the same known words which have trickled down from their original occurrence, from one generation to another through human history. Human expression, in spite of linguistic diversity, repeatedly fails to ensure reliability as it "...only designates the relation of things to men" (Nietzsche 82) rendering the unknown incomprehensible. *On Truth* states that "The various languages placed side by side show that with words it is never a question of truth, never a question of adequate expression, otherwise, there would not be so many languages" (82) and that the truth attained through language is conceived not from the essence of things but from metaphors mistaken for the truth (82). The search for a singular conclusion, a singular reality in a world brimming with multiple perceptions is then rendered futile in that the question of which reality holds more

truth over others, is essentially one that is unanswerable - "… the insect or the bird perceives an entirely different world from the one that man does, and that the question of which of these perceptions of the world is the more correct one is quite meaningless.... a contradictory impossibility" (*On Truth* 86).

The transient nature of life and the inevitability of death is mirrored in Virginia Woolf's employment of words and images which rush past one another in their frenzy to depict characters' internal and external lives. With images of sinking and drowning, Bernard presents death or non-existence as the only invariant in life. Be it images of beech leaves meeting above heads or of being submerged under waves, the symbol of restraint and eventual oblivion runs unbridled throughout the novel. The shining hands of the clock are a reminder of the inescapable sinking which, according to Bernard, draws near with every ticking while we exist content with what we have already seen and known. The image of the clock appearing numerous times in the novel is a reminder of the boundaries of human existence enclosed, within boundaries, and petty - "We shall sink through the green air of the leaves, Susan. We sink as we run. The waves close over us, the beech leaves meet above our heads. There is the stable clock with its gilt hands shining. Those are the flats and heights of the roofs of the great house" (Woolf 7).

Bounded by time and the certitude of disintegration the characters are allowed, as in *Baishako Manchey*, manoeuvres within limited emotional, psychological and physical spaces fossilised by the weight and ignorance of millennia. They attempt, to their best ability, to express themselves and the world they inhabit in a hollow and sonorous language thriving "…in the light of this great clock, yellow-faced, which ticks and ticks" (10). The image of a "wood-pigeon" (8) flying over treetops with its wooden wings beating the air hints at the violence which is part of daily existence.

The bird that does not "beat[s] the air with wooden wings" (8) is one devoid of flight, implying that it is not cooperation with the wind but the constant struggle against it that prompts the bird's flight. Through her characters, Woolf attempts to disrobe human life of its illusions to reveal in its essence a struggle for meaning. The struggle that optimists would consider flight is made heavier through ideas and beliefs, stories assigned to us by language - "In Paradise there are no stories, because there are no journeys. It's loss and regret and misery and yearning that drive the story forward, along its twisted road" (Atwood, *Blind Assassin*). In *Boni* Parijat equates the act of living with the violence of slaughter - the 'I' a butcher condemned to mutilate, for survival, its internal and external realities and their relationship to each other. The narrator's conversation with Boni regarding the violent nature of being reveals the brutish nature of the latter in addition to her general disregard for life. The fact that physical slaughter appears, to Boni, the only perceptible act of violence - violence she doesn't flinch to commit, *"hami bhitrabata nakaraayeko bhaye timi euta kukhura ta kaatisaktheu, dhanya ho!"* (Parijat 191) - exhibits the apathy achieved through an impulsive and frivolous way of life.

Bernard's commentary on the human condition is countered by Susan declaring that his phrases elude her understanding, rendering his articulation inadequate. The image of the ship in *The Voyage out* and *To the Lighthouse* recurs in *The Waves:*

> And I will now rock the brown basin from side to side so that my ships may ride the waves. Some will founder. Some will dash themselves against the cliffs. One sales alone. This is my ship.... They have scattered, they have foundered, all accept my ship, which mounts the wave…. (Woolf 9)

In the above soliloquy, Rhoda amuses herself with a basin of water and toy ships. In an environment fully under her control, the ship she assigns herself prevails in its journey while the others sink or wreck themselves - in Rhoda's story it is her ship alone that triumphs. The staged victory is, later in the novel, replaced by a stoical outlook as Rhoda finds herself trying to come to terms with Percival's death. The confirmation of his demise leads Rhoda to realise and surrender to her own mortal nature - "I should stand in queue and smell sweat, and scent as horrible as sweat; and be hung with other people like a joint of meat among other joints of meat" (106). Rhoda illustrates her solitude through the analogy of a tree which, upon nightfall, assumes a shadowy form greater than its own - "Every tree is big with a shadow that is not the shadow of the tree behind it" (153). Closed within the boundaries of their individual basins every character places themselves at the centre of the meaning of existence - meanings distinct to each of them, predefined by their individual and social natures and in their sense of self-importance each character appears a phantom in the eyes of the other - "And I, too, am dim to my friends and unknown; a phantom, sometimes seen, often not" (184).

Even as children Woolf's characters exhibit a strong sense of time and its fleeting nature ("This is here... This is now. But soon we shall go"; 12). This concept of time almost always results in their subjugation social ideologies and structures which direct their lives from one activity to another - "Now the bell rings and we shall be late. Now we must drop our toys." (9). The "must" suggests compulsion and urgency often found to masquerade, owing to social conditioning, as free will just as social agreements masquerade as the truth in a world that is "flowing and curving" (22) incessantly.

Physical signs of human existence symbolised by its buildings appear weightless and pervious to Neville as he spies "behind the leaves the grave, yet eternally joyous buildings, which seem porous, not gravid; light, though set so immemorially on the ancient turf." (52) Neville's psychological shock upon hearing about a particularly violent murder highlights the nature of the human mind which is, at every moment, vulnerable to events and experiences beyond its control. Exposure to unpleasant experiences such as Nevilles', as he himself states, is not unique to an individual but is a universal occurrence which, by virtue of the fear and anxiety it induces, condemns human existence to drag along perpetually on an illusionary path to an imaginary truth. The gory details of a man murdered in the gutters build an obstacle insurmountable to the young child who realises the memory of the incident will never pass - "I shall call this stricture, this rigidity, 'death among the apple trees' for ever…. 'I cannot surmount this unintelligible obstacle,'…. we are doomed, all of us, by the apple trees, by the immitigable tree which we cannot pass" (13).

The monotony of existence looms early over the young characters as they are conditioned to obey, to revere repetition and rely on it almost entirely to pave the way to truth. Their days filled with lessons, "with orders to wash, to change, to work, to eat" (24), ring sonorous with hollow repetitions of words, action, outcomes and expectations. Characters in The Waves are groomed, via school and routine, for life within their specific social institutions. Woolf's yearning to break free from such an institutionalised existence is echoed through Susan who counts each step, each day spent at school as she pines for the countryside and its natural order.

4.2. Jinny, Boni and the Physical World:

While the other characters are engaged mostly in the exploration of their internal worlds Virginia Woolf addresses, through Jinny, the external materialistic world with its fascination with physical beauty and pleasures. On her own path towards the fabled truth, Jinny appears as Woolf's tribute to the corporeality of existence with her extreme awareness of her physical self. She revels in her blood "slapping against my ribs" (27) and the breathlessness caused by physical activity. She delights in the tingling of the soles of her feet as she is made more aware, her vision more clear, of the pulsating, ever-changing, tangible world around her. The vividness with which she views worldly activities reveals to her the erratic nature of life - "I see every blade of grass very clear. But the pulse drums so in my forehead, behind my eyes, that everything dances - the net, the grass; your faces leap like butterflies; the trees seem to jump up and down. There is nothing staid, nothing settled, in this universe" (27-28). Every moment is, to Jinny, a celebration of the ever-shifting ephemeral and she among the few street lamps that keep burning through the night, "as lamps burn when nobody needs them" (65). When her friends shun the glamorous and materialistic life, Jinny opens herself up to the surface of things, to the obvious, the visible forms of existence. Her refusal to live as the others do - entangled in their own internal worlds - demonstrates her desire to view people and circumstances precisely for what they appear to be sans personal judgement and presumptions - "But we who live in the body see with the body's imagination things in outline…. I cannot take these facts into some cave and, shading my eyes, grade their yellows, blues, umbers into one substance" (116).

Parijat's Boni exhibits a similar fascination with material and glamorous things or events - foreign wear, Hindi cinema, romance novels, makeup - as she questions

the narrator, *"naachera gaayera ra abhinaya garera khaanu ramro ho ki hoina"* (Parijat 192). In response to which the narrator draws before her the image of a Vietnamese woman with a baby on one shoulder and a gun on the other, working in the fields. This reference to the Vietnam War appears as a symbol of the varied adversities and humanitarian crises faced by multitudes on a regular basis and their perseverance in the face of these calamities. In the same vein as the narrator in *Baishako Manchey*, the narrator in Boni terms celebrations and glamour ridiculous ("*timi cake kaatera utsav namanaunu";* 193) in the light of social injustice and hypocrisy. Where the suffering of characters in *Baishako Manchey* is attributed, for the major part, to economic destitution and their need to fend for survival on a daily basis Boni's suffering lies in her inability to see through the illusions and propaganda of her physical world. The narrator presents the bleak reality of a world in which Boni inhabits her own distorted territory, utterly oblivious to suffering. Her call to acknowledge and empathise with people who lack the security, support and leisure availed by Boni expresses the narrator's disillusionment with a parasitic capitalistic society where material desires and dreams like Boni's are essentially unachievable, a society desensitised to the inhumane extent that it facilitates, even normalises, grave human rights violations such as child labour and child sex trafficking:

> *Tiniharule lagayeka luga haru jiu mai bhijcha, jiu mai sukcha ra jiu mai makkincha pani. Timi yesta unmukh hau boni yei hun timra sahi sathi haru. Yiniharu sanga timi haathemaalo gara kinaki timi jahan uklina chahancheu tyaha pugna timro nimti sambhawa chaina.... yi pasina bagauneharukai saath timile dinaparcha Boni... timro itihaasko aniwaaryatanai yahi. (199)*

Boni's contradiction of the narrator's argument highlights the shallow concept, rather illusion, of freedom which has chained, since time immemorial, the human potential to be free. Boni differs from Jinny in her fundamental nature for where Jinny hopes to find meaning in life through her interactions with the physical world Boni engages in a superficial way of life both physically and emotionally. Jinny's longing to arrive at a higher truth and Boni's infatuation with the surface of things contradict one another in spite of their origin in virtually the same love for materialistic existence. In an interview with Dr. Aruna Upreti Parijat elucidates that Boni represents not just the character traits of a single individual but is a synthesis of modern human life in general - "*jun Bonibata shuruaat bahyeko thiyo, tyo Boni jiudai chhin... tara sabai Boni euta hoinan. bhinda-bhindai chhan"* (177).

Through the narrator's letters to Boni Parijat questions social beliefs and the systematic manner in which the few in power alter mass realities. Boni's middle class existence allows her leisure to indulge in popular entertainment, to desire objects she wants but does not need. As she grows up the reality she begins to prefer is the fabricated one painted by various media - language, culture and politics - owing to which an object of consumption is rendered as the focal point, reducing individuals to mere dumping arenas of consumerism. Under the illusion of a fabricated reality individuals like Boni mistake their own subservience to the system for freedom. Parijat comments on the deceptive nature of physical 'beauty' and surface appearances when the narrator says *"roop bhaneko dantey katha ka rajkumariharu ko hathiyaar ho.... adhunik sansaar ma swastha manasikta ko chhap nabokeko roop kati kurup huncha…"* (201-2). She categorises human society into two kinds - the *"abhijaat warga"* (201) endowed with enough leisure to spend their time and energy on appearances, and the likes of Boni, herself and multitudes of others who cannot

afford to base their reality perceptions on social standards of physical beauty.This discourse appears as a memory of the conversations the narrator had had with a young Boni, and despite the fact that Boni was then just a child the narrator does not hold back from baring before her the ugliness, the horrors or disfigurements of life. This early intervention, the utter urgency to tear away at Boni's illusions as early in life as she possibly could exhibits the narrator's desperation to acquaint her with ground reality of survival in a capitalistic economy - *"...galaicha ma tekne ra watanukul motor ma chadne ti thorai haru ko nimti yaha maato rang ka asankhya haath haru le jata sukai salbalauna parcha - khet, aali, baato, ban, khani, karkhana jatasukai"* (202). It is interesting to note here that the narrator's treatment of Boni is purely on a personal and individual level irrespective of age and mental faculty, stressing on the fact that the suffering embedded in varied individual realities can not be erased simply by one, intentionally or unintentionally, ignoring its existence. This echoes the ostensively chaotic and disorderly existences of Virginia Woolf's characters in all four novels studied in this thesis, with a character's dominion over life events rendered insignificant in the light of external cosmic as well as socio-political forces influencing 'free will'.

Parijat comments on modern society with its luxurious palaces nurtured by the *"bhal, pasina, aasu"* (202) (sweat and tears) of its underprivileged population and roads paved by the blood sacrifice of others. Set in the post-war era *Boni* is an account of a 'third world' population adapting to the realities advertised in a globalised world of rapid technological and communicational developments, the era of the Space Race, of "…one giant leap for mankind"; yet a world blind and out of touch with itself more than ever before. Boni's concept of freedom is reflected in her *"bhokhadtaal"* (205) (hunger strike) as she refuses to eat until her demand for an imported nightie is met

with and in her statement which blatantly glorifies appearance over reality and trivialities over issues of importance she remarks, *"pet bhitrako ta kasley dekcha, yo umer ma nalaaye kahile laune, baru huncha gundruk ra bhaat khaana taiyaar chu"* (205).

4.3. Details of daily life in *The Waves*:

The Waves finds everyday events and objects illuminated in a crisp new light as they relay, via natural and artificial scenarios and images, the most vulnerable and expressive states of the characters' existence. Details of daily life and surroundings mirror characters' reality perceptions. In his moments of solitude Neville, revisited by his childhood trauma upon having overheard gory details of a murder, perceives readily the distortions around him as a ray of light renders chair legs dysfunctional - "a crack of light kneels on the wall, making the chair legs look broken" (Woolf 13). His psychological and emotional fragmentation in the presence of the "unintelligible obstacle" (13) of trauma is reflected onto his surroundings that, for a brief while, appears as an extension of his troubled psyche. Characters' lives and experiences are, then, not limited within their physical selves but extend beyond bodily constraints and in their desire for expression and understanding the individual, in some ways, becomes the environment or vice versa. The theme of trauma reappears in the novel in Susan's soliloquies as she terms her time at school "crippled days" (33), comparing it to the desiccated wings of a moth incapable of flight. Even as she thinks of home and the freedom of the countryside she is not oblivious to the psychological changes she has undergone during her stay at school - "For something has grown in me here, through the winters and summers, on staircases, in bedrooms." (33)

Vivid descriptions of physical reality are aided by moments of heightened awareness of characters' physical surroundings, endowing their fluid and dream-like existence briefly with an "architectural solidity" (58) as "the fire leaps and sinks, making some knob bright" (55) and "the light falls upon real objects now. Here are knives and forks. The world is displayed, and we too…" (83). These moments, however, are fragile and do not last very long in the face of grief and longing. Foreshadowing Percival's death in India the detail and "solidity" of the physical world disintegrate as Bernard is gripped by distress over his friends' departure - "he snatches the poker and with one blow destroys that momentary appearance of solidity in the burning coals. All changes.... Percival, Tony, or another, will go to India. We shall not meet again" (58). Placed against the backdrop of eternity, Louis' coming face to face with "a stigma burnt on my quivering flesh by a cowled man with a red-hot iron" (62) symbolises his existential angst initiated by the realisation of his limitation as a human being incapable of controlling the course of his own existence. The "cowled man" represents the unknown forces that direct human journey through innumerable existential crises, trauma and suffering - "stigma burnt on my quivering flesh" - into eventual death and non-existence. Where Susan's kitchen fire stands as a symbol of life and civilisation, the flies buzzing around it represent impending death and decay as she goes about her daily life in the tranquil countryside. In the concluding parts of the novel images of fruits covered by a mesh with a gardener digging the earth reiterates this coexistence of life and decomposition, the inevitable descent into putridity inspite of attempts to 'net over' and preserve life. This relationship between life and death is aided by the gardener tilling the field in preparation for new harvest as the old produce begins its transition, with every passing moment, from ripeness to

decay - “The vine that had been killed by last year's frost was putting out a leaf or two” (184).

Bernard illustrates the looming presence of death and memories associated with the dead as he hints at the hold death has over human conscious or subconscious existence - “It is strange how the dead leap out on us at street corners, or in dreams” (184). In placing vibrant life and inevitable death side by side and in the same room, Virginia Woolf attempts to view death for what it is - an occurrence as normal, unpredictable and uncontrollable as life. Bernard’s description of tree roots - “roots that were hard as skeletons” (160) - further illustrating the fact that whether death is part of life or life a part of death, they are both inextricably intertwined in spite of human preference of one over the other. Bernard shaping bread into pellets and calling them “people” (14) mimics his tendency to define or even create the people around him while also representing the insignificance of human existence:

Did he not only wish to continue the sequence of the story which he never stops telling himself? He began it when he rolled his bread into pellets as a child. One pellet was a man, one was a woman. We are all pellets. We are all phrases in Bernard's story, things he writes down in his notebook under A or under B. He tells our story with extraordinary understanding, except of what we most feel. For he does not need us. He is never at our mercy. (44)

The simple act of bathing induces in Bernard a trance-like state which amplifies his sensory perceptions to a point where his blood is rendered audible - “Now hot towels envelope me, and their roughness, as I rub my back, makes my blood purr” (14). Naked under Mrs. Constable's sponge, Bernard revels in his bodily sensations - a tiny throb in the great pulse of the universe. Neville illustrates this symbiosis between the

individual and the whole when he describes Percival lying down on his bed unclothed and unshielded from the world outside of him. His existence is independent of his physical form as he merges with the weather - “Not a thread, not a sheet of paper lies between him and the sun, between him and the rain, between him and the moon as he lies naked, tumbled, hot, on his bed” (29). It is in these moments that often, prompted by characters' internal sense of disorder; the self and the other, the psychological and the physical blend with one another momentarily in their desperate attempts at making sense of the fragments of existence in order to deduce from it a coherent sense of reality. Seemingly insignificant acts such as conversing with one another, dining together or simply spending time in each other’s company leads to their realisation “that we can add to the treasury of moments” (96) by indulging in the world outside themselves. Momentarily liberated from his internal existence, Bernard realises the human potential, unrestrained by its nature, to become master of itself and to create history:

> We are not slaves bound to suffer incessantly unrecorded petty blows on our bent backs. We are not sheep either, following a master. We are creators. We too have made something that will join the innumerable congregations of past time. We too, as we put on our hats and push open the door, stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can subjugate and make part of the illumined and everlasting road. (95-6)

Jinny, symbolising this very freedom, delights in the “wandering moths… lovers roaming to adventure” (117) as she observes every sensation, every sight, sound and smell presented to her by her surroundings, becoming more aware, with each sensation, of herself and of the world around her.

The mirrors in *The Waves* are media through which Woolf portrays the multi-dimensionality of her characters, revealing to the reader thoughts and ideas that had previously, consciously or unconsciously, been omitted from their narratives. Caught off guard by their own reflections characters react by cowering away, ill-equipped to face their physical selves - the embodiments of their psycho-physical limitations and discontent. Jinny's reverence for the tactual and palpable aspects of existence - "I like what one touches, what one tastes. I like rain when it has turned to snow and become palpable" (146) - wavering at the sight of her own reflection reveals her insecurity in her own image which is, for a brief moment, displayed to her in all its crudity -"It was only for a moment, catching sight of myself before I had time to prepare myself as I always prepare myself for the sight of myself, that I quailed" (128).

4.4. Parallel Narrative of the Advancing Day:

A parallel narrative in The Waves places the characters' soliloquies against the description of the changes in nature from dawn to sunset. Beginning with "The sun had not yet risen" (1), the primary description of the advancing day precedes the characters' childhood musings, implying a state where "The sea was indistinguishable from the sky" (1), where the restraints of preference and desire are almost absent. This changes, however, as the first rays of the sun divide land from sky and lead to the gradual awareness of the landscape revealed in their light. It is interesting to note that the very sun that symbolises joy, life and knowledge/wisdom/intelligence, as in *Baishako Manchey*, casts deep shadows and reveals in its light a world flashing past in the light-show. In its drive to obliterate darkness, the sun merely displaces it, cramming it in corners and letting the shadows define the boundaries between things.

Images like a woman's arm raising a lamp from below the horizon imply cosmic forces - "as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan" (1). The monochromatic scenery gradually develops its own details as trees, their individual leaves - "one leaf transparent and then another" (1-2); "blue finger-print of shadow under the leaf by the bedroom window" (1) - and chirping birds scattered over and under them bring the canvas to life. Amidst all this, however, the symbol of human civilisation - a house - standing "dim and unsubstantial" (2) behind heavy blinds as birds sing their "blank melody" (2) outside illustrates human alienation echoed by Susan later in the course of the novel. Where Mrs. Dalloway attempts to contain characters' entire lives in a single day's events *The Waves*, through a day's progression from sunrise to sunset, sets characters' lives against the cosmic backdrop, their transitory existence against greater forces of nature "pursuing each other, perpetually" (1).

Representing individual lives, numerous dew drops revealed by the sun's light appearing "like a mosaic of single sparks not yet formed into one whole" (16) alludes to the yearning for coherence persistent throughout the novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat. Aided by the human fascination with meaning this need for coherence initiates every 'significant' and 'insignificant' activity in the novel as characters undergo internal turmoil in their attempts to comprehend the world around them. Sun rays that "sharpened the edges of chairs and tables and stitched white table-cloths with fine gold wires" (16) also bestow upon these objects a fluidity "as if the china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid" (16). In setting antithetical concepts - solidity and liquescence, life and death, day and night, light and darkness, internal and external - against each other Virginia Woolf hints at the rewriting of traditional

semantics as a means to break loose from limitations imposed by a world governed by metaphors.

Birds singing "together in a chorus, shrill and sharp; now together, as if conscious of companionship, now alone as if to the pale blue sky" (46), "birds sang in the hot sunshine, each alone." (70), reflects the essentially solitary nature of characters' existences as they persist, amidst desolation, in their pursuit for higher meaning. Each bird sings its own melody with utmost intensity, each encased in its own world built of its distinctive perceptions, self-obsessed to the point of being intolerant, "as if to let the song burst out of it, no matter if it shattered the song of another bird with harsh discord." (70). While the image of birds in flight operating as though they were a single organism shredded into a thousand different parts hints at the philosophical 'whole' referenced in almost all novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat, it also alludes to the theme of social standardisation with its penchant for monotony and similitude as it attempts to mould individual identities into a single common form/ideal. Characters' epiphanies resulting in moments of extreme self awareness are paralleled in the narration of the advancing day by images of a fin cutting through the surface of its own safe haven, momentarily slicing through familiarity and 'normalcy'. This laceration ushers in sensations which illuminate the details of everyday life - "…as if a fin cut the green glass of a lake. Now and again some level and masterly blast blew the multitudinous leaves up and down and then, as the wind flagged, each blade regained its identity" (120). Similar to Bernard's "wood-pigeon" metaphor these birds accomplish flight solely through their acts of swooping up and down, "escaping, pursuing, pecking each other" (46 - 7). Disoriented by constant flight (a symbol of psychological and physical violence), their eyes and minds seek refuge in the sight of snail shells "rising in the grass like a grey cathedral"

(47). Tiny and irrelevant against the sky and the sea, the dreary edifice illustrates the extent of human susceptibility to trivialities and illusions. Considering the definition of the word "Cathedral" - "a very large, usually stone, building for Christian worship. It is the largest and most important church of a diocese" (Cambridge English Dictionary) - the image of "a grey cathedral" on a snail's back echoes discontent with and resentment towards religion or any such authoritarian institution which repress masses to make them all look the same while dangling in front of them the prospect of a better life even as it surrounds them with illusions of the 'absolute'.

Woolf dwells on the insignificance of human social structures through Bernard's view of authoritative and often glorified figures of kings as mere mortals, their crowns "mere tinsel" (Woolf 186), and also through the metaphor of a slug dragging along in its "Yellow secretions" (47). Representative of the endeavours and accomplishments humankind proclaims as immortal, these "secretions" are celebrated and 'preserved' when in fact the edifice of civilisation holds within it little more than darkness. Enveloped in a dense shadow, objects and furniture within this house are illumined, in the absence of direct light, by sun rays stealing in through thick windowpanes:

> Sharp-edged wedges of light lay upon the window-sill and showed inside the room plates with blue rings, cups with curved handles, the bulge of a great bowl, the criss-cross pattern in the rug, and the formidable corners and lines of cabinets and bookcases. Behind their conglomeration hung a zone of shadow in which might be a further shape to be disencumbered of shadow or still denser depths of darkness. (98)

Birdsong analogous to their soliloquies resonate the characters' fears and insecurities - "Fear was in their song, and apprehension of pain, and joy to be snatched quickly now at this instant" (47) - along with their sense of alienation persisting in its solitary quest for meaning inspite of society and the company of others like them. An offshoot of this fear the birdsong, or language in general, is clamorous and confused, succeeding only in amplifying the violence fundamental to existence as they sing "…as if the song were urged out of them by the pressure of the morning. They sang as if the edge of being were sharpened and must cut, must split the softness" (70). Woolf brings together contradictory ideas of unison and solitude in an attempt to illustrate the nature of collective human suffering within individual confines as characters confront their existential crises and anxieties - "They swerved, all in one flight, when the black cat moved among the bushes, when the cook threw cinders on the ash heap and startled them" (47).

Visions of rotting leaves, fallen flowers, a bird repeatedly pecking at a worm then, with no intention of feeding on it, leaving it to rot, "Gusts of dead smells…drops formed on the bloated sides of swollen things" (47); stress on the certainty of death and the absurd nature of life which appears to be sustained, more often than not, by desires and impulses that seem to defy reason and logic. With the sun sinking in the sky and characters nearing old age, the image of a moth shadowing the "immense solidity of chairs and tables with floating wings" (121) transforms the certitude of early years into ambivalence as the image of a corn harvest sans the corn - "Now only a brisk stubble was left of all its flowing and waving" (138) - reflects the residual emptiness experienced by characters towards the end of their lives as they are failed by language, society and their own sense of perception. The 'truth' and 'absolution' promised by institutions (religious or academic) throughout the characters' lives

widens their personal voids as life is reduced to a single fragment of the skeleton, a single bone lying "rain-pocked and sun-bleached till ti shone like a twig that the sea has polished" (138). In its concluding parts this parallel narrative describes a sunken sun and a return to the initial "The sea was indistinguishable from the sky" (1). The day comes full circle, as it does perpetually, to the monochromatic beginning of its journey - "Now the sun had sunk. Sky and sea were indistinguishable" (157) followed by images of fallen leaves "await[ing] dissolution" (157), the silence of birds, and black, grey and dark shadows shooting in all directions and out of all corners, worms retreating into their holes, old nest, whitened and hollow straw blown, dark grasses, rotten apples, light faded from the walls of the tool-house and an adder's skin hanging from a nail.

4.5. Literature and the Human Experience:

Bernard's obsession with words and phrases leads him initially to believe that language and its preservation in literature has the ability to provide consolation in solitude and anguish such as experienced by Susan upon witnessing Jinny kiss Louis amidst the leaves - "I shall go gently behind her, to be at hand, with my curiosity, to comfort her when she bursts out in a rage and thinks, ' I am alone'…. We melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory" (6-7). His attempts at distracting a distraught Susan through words "…moving darkly, in the depths of your mind will break up this knot of hardness, screwed in your pocket-handkerchief." (7) highlights the insignificant nature of human suffering in an unfathomably vast universe as Bernard places side by side Susan's agony and the image of a "beetle…carrying a leaf on its back" (7). Both considered insignificant, a mere observation or acknowledgement of the beetle's struggle (the 'other') possesses

the power, according to Bernard, to relieve the observer of his/her own suffering. Woolf further illustrates this through Neville's question "Who am I?" (53) to which Bernard's reply is a detailed description of trees outside, of how he wakes Percival and the objects present in his bedroom. As in Susan's case, Bernard's conviction in the hypnotic, anaesthetising power of his story-telling is predominantly narcissistic in nature despite his self-proclaimed stance of detachment. A commentary on human striving for glory, preservation and the flawed nature of its execution, Woolf underscores the problem of bias which curtains multitudes or entire civilisations from their psycho-physical realities, leading them down the beaten path of ancient metaphors and imagination. This bias which runs through generations, as Bernard later realises, leads one into subjugation instead of the promised liberation as he struggles to put to words the "bubbles…images and images" (34) that form in his mind, his letters always incomplete owing to the inadequacy of his expression - "More and more bubbles into my mind as I talk, images and images. This, I say to myself, is what I need; why, I ask, can I not finish the letter that I am writing? For my room is always scattered with unfinished letters" (54). His struggle to pursue 'truth' through the veil of idealistic views such as ones stated above personifies adequately the human pursuit of absolution through the highly inadequate human language. One of the most efficient tools of mass surveillance and control, language motivates Bernard's actions to the point that he spies on himself through the eyes of his "biographer" (50) and can not boldly and comfortably express himself unlike the narrator in *Boni* who is incredibly blunt and individualistic in her expression when she makes statements like:

> *kunai-kunai desh le khunkhaar janawaar harulai maaschan, kunai desh le surakshya dinchan. ma maasne pakshya ma chu. Malai lagcha, hamilai chituwa ko kunai awashyakta chaina* (Parijat 220)
>
> (Some countries believe in exterminating predatory species while others work to conserve them. I stand with the former. I feel that we have no need for leopards).

As a poet and a seeker of 'truth' Bernard's childhood exhibits the dilemmas he faces throughout his life. Virginia Woolf relies on momentary realisations and seemingly insignificant events in order to reveal characters' deepest fears and confusions at the core of their personalities around which revolves their entire world or their interpretation of the world. Bernard finding himself in a position wherefrom he could choose to either rescue a fly trapped in a spiderweb or ignore it and let it die reflects his belief, unfaded by age, in the illusion of control. In his childishness, perceives illusory options as though death was avoidable if one only tried. Language is a medium through which psycho-spiritual emancipation, to Bernard, appears attainable in the mortal race against time and the fluidity of existence - "I must make phrases and phrases and so interpose something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids, the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces, or I shall cry" (Woolf 17). To the other characters, however, Bernard's "phrases" posses little more than the traditional literary tendency to generalise and compartmentalise different aspects of the human condition "…so that it becomes a sequence" (22) communicated and established via the 'unconventional' variations of conventional vocabulary and cliched metaphors. Woolf highlights the tendency of language and literature to categorise, through prosaic metaphors, the human condition into stories while dodging

underlying individual primary psychological and emotional narratives - “Bernard says there is always a story. I am a story. Louis is a story. There is the story of the boot-boy, the story of the man with one eye, the story of the woman who sells winkles” (22).

The concluding parts of *The Waves* find Bernard, his previous illusions of control and free-will disintegrated, attempting to define existence in acknowledging the fact that existence cannot be defined, it cannot be chained in metaphors or changed by any human interpretation of it - “Life is not susceptible perhaps to the treatment we give it when we try to tell it.… Pigeon-holes are not then very useful” (179). The term “pigeon-hole” is polysemic in that it implies a letter or message compartment thus aiding in human communication while also symbolising compartmentalisation and categorisation of objects, people and personalities. Moments of realisation are, as they have proved throughout the lives of the characters, fleeting as they find themselves reverting back to their ceaselessly monotonous mortal natures ignorant of their limitations. The Sisyphean boulder swiftly rolls back down, the “pound[ing] on the shore” (179) resumes as do their belief in their boundlessness and the certitude of their materialistic and social truths:

> I was surprised, opening a door, to find people thus occupied;…And the light of the stars falling, as it falls now, on my hand after travelling for millions upon millions of years - I could get a cold shock from that for a moment - not more, my imagination is too feeble. But some doubt remained. A shadow flitted through my mind like moths' wings among chairs and tables in a room in the evening. (179)

The image of a room shadowed by a moth against the light echoes the parallel narrative of the advancing day, reasserting the fluidity of existence and its ever changing nature. Bernard transitions swiftly and continually, back and forth, between realising his insignificant position in the cosmic canvas and positioning himself at the centre of the universe. One moment "rhythmical, and half conscious and like something wrapped in mist" (179), his reality solidifies in an instant - "…but suddenly one hears a clock tick. We who had been immersed in this world became aware of another. It is painful" (183) - until a vision or a memory briefly slices through the uncuttable reality like a fin cutting through water. The deep existential crisis owing to his fluctuating states of being births contempt for his own condition while also instilling in him life's tendency to persist in his "perpetual warfare…. the daily battle, defeat or victory, the absorbing pursuit" (180). This is illustrated by the image of a "clay-coloured" (181) animal moving against the backdrop of woods, fields and grazing sheep - every motion and every moment of its existence a fight against illusion and ovine docility. Parijat equates this perseverance central to life with garden plants that thrive inspite of bad weather and moisture constantly whipping them - *"tusharo ra siitko maar khayera pani yiniharuko vikaas rokiyena, yiniharu hurkay"* (Parijat 195) (moisture and frost could not terminate their development, they grew).

The frenzy with which youth establishes pleasure as authentic is compared to the human attempts (and the distortions caused by these attempts - through language, religion, art or plain herd mentality) at interpreting life and death in a constant need for self-validation as though "pleasure… must exist; it seemed that grass-lands must roll for it ; and the sea be chopped up into little waves ; and the woods rustle with bright-coloured birds for youth…" (Woolf 181). The theme of multiple perceptions

and interpretations explored through the allusion to Christ's teachings in the preceding chapter reappears in *The Waves* via Bernard's references to Shakespeare and Peck whose art is described as "a shock of knowledge which is endlessly delightful, though not to be imparted" (183). Woolf, through Bernard, does not nullify artists' and philosophers' understanding of the world or their impact upon it but warns against the various interpretations of this understanding and their containment in words. The way out of this cage, as Bernard realises, lies in the very differences in perceptions where a single philosophy or work of art is observed through multiple eyes at multiple angles, the coming together of different perceptions and ideas - "So we shared our Pecks, our Shakespeares ; compared each other's versions ; allowed each other's insight to set our own Peck or Shakespeare in a better light" (183) - in an attempt to perceive a better picture of reality. His reality constantly fluctuating under the giant fluttering shadow of the metaphorical moth, Bernard journeys through childhood, youth and old age; through past experiences and speculations about the future, to finally arrive in the present moment.

In a gradual shifting of perspectives, *The Waves* repositions its spotlight from the internal lives of individuals to the collective existence of humans as a single entity. The looking glass which had previously reflected the characters' individual forms reflects, in the concluding portions of the novel, Bernard's "pinioned body" (187) against the backdrop of people moving incessantly. At the glimpse of the larger picture he finds himself powerless when confronted by events as commonplace as getting a haircut, his sense of control over his own life "cut and laid in swaths… so we lie side by side on the damp meadows, withered branches and flowering" (187-88). It is interesting to note that Bernard's knowledge of his nature, his awareness of fluctuations in his reality perception remain, to the end, as vulnerable to change as

they had been since the beginning of his life. A fixed state of mind is, therefore, unattainable in a world which thrives on change as he continues to shift focus - aided by daily events, objects or memories - from intellectual reality to the palpable physical reality - "It is thus that I am recalled. (For I am no mystic ; something always plucks at me - curiosity, envy, admiration, interest in hairdressers and the like bring me to the surface)" (188). Bernard's fluid existence and the repetitive grindings of psycho-social order appear ridiculous in that these fluctuations and repetitions achieve little more than the standardisation of monotonous absurd pursuits through social and linguistic institutions as he realises that he is nothing more than an old man who has whiled away his life enchanted by ideas of grandeur and illusions of 'truth'. After a lifetime of cherishing words and phrases, stories and absolution, Bernard's complete disillusionment with previously held notions of reality and expression gives way not to morbid pessimism but to an unrelenting sense of freedom. The revelation that nothing is known/knowable endows Bernard not only with the burden of an absurd and meaningless existence (owing to the unverifiable nature of 'life's meaning'), but also with a great sense of power. A symbol of human resistance against inaction and oblivion, Bernard's labelling death as "the enemy" (197) reveals his Nietzschean sense of fortitude in the face of repetitive "must[s]" (196) and eventual nonexistence:

> However beat and done with it all I am, I must haul myself up, and find the particular coat that belongs to me; must push my arms into the sleeves…. I, I, I, tired as I am… must take myself off and catch some last train…. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear…. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death! The waves broke on the shore. (199)

In conclusion *The Waves* and *Boni*, though very unlike one another in numerous ways, share the desire for truth and substantiality. The novels embrace the insignificant nature of human existence as characters express their convictions that as valuable as they are individual lives or humanity in general constitute, by no means, the nucleus around which ever-fleeting time and cosmic existence revolves. This realisation culminates in a reawakening of sorts which presents character and reader alike with clarity pertaining to the awareness that the seemingly purposeless universe can only offer opportunities to craft one's own purpose as the absence of meaning can only initiate the freedom to invent one's own meanings. In this sense the two novels appear as clarion calls to shed the familiar, to do away with the old and established and to embrace the undefined semantic, psycho-social and existential possibilities:

> *pratyek purana bastu haru prati bhaawuktawash unawashyak maya paali rahana ramro hoina, naya lai chiyauna dina parcha. timro pariwaar ka sadasya haru le juju barajudekhiko rookh bhani maya gari rakheko dakshin kuna ma ubhiyeko rittha ko budo rookh dhalna parcha natra kshati huna sakcha bhanda koi taiyaar hudaina thiyo, tyo rookh afai dhalyo dhalne samaya bhaisakeo rahecha.* (Parijat 211)
>
> (It is ill-advised to cling emotionally and unnecessarily on to every old object, the new should be allowed to peek through. On being alerted to the damage posed by the old Soap-nut tree planted by your ancestors your family had refused to fell it, that tree toppled on its own clearly it was time for it to collapse.)

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Chapter 5

Conclusion:

The novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat undertaken in this thesis are accounts of the ways in which trauma, questions of existence and of non-existence are inherent to human life and even more so in a globalised world with capitalist institutions that thrive on the exploitation and suffering of the vulnerable. Through the medium of interior monologues, Virginia Woolf and Parijat uncover the turmoil behind social appearances and existence in general. The internal workings of characters' minds, their varied socio-economic backgrounds and the irrational thought processes that sustain their desolation communicate, through these novels, the fluid nature of the human psyche - the identities it assumes, the anguish it endures and the realities it perceives .

Service at the front-lines decorates characters like Septimus and Suyogbir with little more than distortions in their reality perceptions, inflicting upon them traumas that oftentimes culminate in suicide as observed in the case of the former. The knowledge that the impact of war and violence does not end simply with ceasefire and peace treaties but is re-lived - sometimes across multiple generations as is evident in the study of the aftermaths of the explosions of the two nuclear bombs, Little Boy in Hiroshima and Fat Man in Nagasaki; the intergenerational impact of Agent Orange in Vietnam or the post-partition trauma of the Indo-Pakistani population - draws parallels between the violent mechanisms of war and trauma. The psycho-physical violence endured by Septimus and Suyogbir in the war front and by Clarissa Dalloway upon witnessing her sister's untimely death alter the personalities, beliefs and perceptions of these characters to the point that their trauma often becomes their

identity. Trauma initiated by violence inflicted against the tribal woman in *Sirishko Phool* impacts the one that survived - the perpetrator Suyogbir - so much so that it affects his mental and physical functionings on a daily basis. The guilt he experiences for having raped and murdered a fellow human complicates his interactions and relationships with women in general as their presence constantly reminds him of his disgraceful actions. Even as he tries to justify his offence in an effort to tranquillise his guilt Suyogbir finds himself revisiting the past and, in the process, repeatedly re-living the injuries he inflicted along with the injuries he continues to suffer in consequence.

Through such instances in their novels, both Woolf and Parijat reveal the resilience and fragility of human identities in their susceptibility to swift and drastic changes and distortions on account of personal experiences. Trauma of war alters the personalities of Septimus and Suyogbir, witnessing death and disorder transforms Clarissa and the narrator in *Baishako Manchey,* and simply an acute awareness of injustice and subjugation reshapes the personalities of the narrators in *Boni* and *Mahattaheen.* The narrator in *Baishako Manchey* endures psychological violence owing to civil socio-economic structures that ensure his destitution as they severely influence his psycho-physical perceptions and trains of thought. His constant fight-flight state of mind, much like that of war veterans Septimus Warren Smith and Suyogbir, leads to an overtly anxious way of life. This, however, is not to generalise human suffering or to imply that all forms of trauma, irrespective of contexts, are synonymous to one other; for the mere range of traumatic afflictions and the psychosomatic operations regulating them are evidence that suffering is personal as are its interpretations and torments.

Parijat's novels, namely *Baishako Manchey*, *Sirishko Phool* and *Mahattaheen* employ symbols of stationary life and stagnant ideas in order to mirror the internal experiences and perspectives of their characters, the most frequent images being immobile flora thriving unattended, a wall that hosts alcoholics, thugs and silenced voices represented by the mute girl Goldyangri (*Baishako Manchey*) and *mandirs* or shrines which house gods overpowered by the wild unkempt overgrowth surrounding them. This sense of stagnancy is implied in Woolf's novels via internal monologues that coil around characters' memories of past events and their anxieties for the future so that their departure from one train of thought proves merely illusory as they find themselves revisiting the same memories and events, unavoidably running in circles around their definitions of the past. Memories of past events are often the centre around which characters' thoughts, actions and traumas revolve and flashbacks form integral parts of the novels of Woolf and Parijat in that they steer the course of the characters' lives and sculpt their personalities. Syntheses of their respective pasts, presents and futures these characters, crafted by authors from two distinct geographical, cultural and temporal backgrounds are studies in the universal process of personality development and the boundaries assigned to humanity across millennia via servitude to time and memory. With past influencing perceptions in the present which in turn determine future responses and endeavours human nature, in the works of Virginia Woolf and Parijat, is perpetually caught in a repetitive loop or circle simulating constant motion but essentially merely venturing in the same stagnant waters.

Though the novels studied in this thesis emphasise upon two distinct forms of reality in pursuit of their own separate timelines - the internal or psychological reality and the external or physical reality - they also dwell upon what can be termed, for the

sake of convenience, the subdivisions of the two kinds of existences. *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Waves*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Voyage Out*, *Sirishko Phool*, *Mahattaheen*, *Baishako Manchey* and *Boni* all contain references to the multifarious nature of reality and the various institutions and devices through which humans continue to alter the same. Realities moulded by nationalism, by the idea that one nation holds supreme against others and the perpetual urgency of civilisations to define and adhere to their notions of a nation are reflected in the works of Woolf and Parijat through their comments on popular culture, newspapers and others forms of media and entertainment which, more often than not, favour glamour and propaganda over routine human suffering. Inherently multi-faceted, reality acquires additional layers under such conditions as is portrayed in the novels studied in this thesis. Reality in *Baishako Manchey* and *Boni* acquires its dimensions owing to norms that govern and organise individual and social lives so that a structure defining individual realities is established and maintained across generations through agencies of capitalism and consumerism in the globalised world. *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Sirishko Phool* and *Mahattaheen* are accounts of psycho-social constructs such as those of masculinity and femininity, the glorification of war and of soldiers who live through pandemonium in battlefields and social constructs regarding love and sex defining the traumas and perceptions of their characters. Similarly, characters in *The Voyage Out* are governed by patriarchal norms and the institution of marriage that shape their sense of reality and by the same patriarchal train of thought being turned on its head as they question the existence of a divine sovereign. Mr. Ramsay's obsession with a highly intellectual existence appears ridiculous in *To the Lighthouse* given that in the wake of his narcissistic way of life he very often loses sense of circumstances and people around him. This reduces him, inspite of his academic accomplishments and

theoretical philosophical brilliance, to a self-centred and insecure individual who is perpetually craving praise and attention. Mrs. Ramsay appears antithetical to the personality of her husband, thus providing the reader with two distinctive lenses through which these characters view their realities.

The Waves - arguably Woolf's most experimental and revolutionary work - is practically a summation of this discourse of internal and external nature of existence addressed by Virginia Woolf and Parijat in their respective novels. Along with the concept of diverse internal and external realities these novels also deal with the cavernous discord between psychological and physical time which, combined with faculties of memory and perception, create individual breeding spaces for trauma. Characters inhabit different psychological and physical timelines on a daily basis illustrated by Woolf in the hourly striking of the Big Ben in *Mrs. Dalloway* even as characters are shaped through their reliving of years worth of memories and emotions every passing moment. Woolf and Parijat attribute the variety in reality perception, to a major extent, to psychological afflictions with characters such as Septimus, Suyogbir, Clarissa Dalloway, Peter Walsh, the narrator in *Baishako Manchey,* Bernard and Rhoda interpreting reality according to their respective fears, anxieties and traumas. Feeling like a mere puppet whose strings are pulled by some unseen force, Peter Walsh's soliloquies referring to an ancient stream symbolising a predetermined course of existence and Bernard's allusions to a primitive norm governing modern day lives delve into the theme of human subjugation to external forces that define the route of their lives.

Another point of convergence for the above mentioned novels is their multi-dimensional characters and their sense of awareness regarding their own subjugation

and restraints. Characters like Parijat's narrator from *Baishako Manchey* and his friends at the wall or Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway and Bernard realise their psychological, physical and socio-economic boundaries but are unable to escape them. This is a pattern mirroring real life conditions and the complex nature of human existence wherein, inspite of sensibility and self-awareness, one more often than not finds oneself subject to the absurdities of life and the anxieties ushered in by the idea of death. Sisyphean references in both Woolf and Parijat as self-realisation in their characters entails no reward other than self-realisation itself. Irrespective of their affiliation to a certain social stratum or their educational station the characters in the novels of the two authors, much like ordinary people in the real world, exhibit commitment to the search for meaning in life in their own distinctive ways. The issue of identity is a mutual concern in these novels with the narrator in *Baishako Manchey* experiencing disorientation and a distorted sense of identity owing to his socio-economic conditions that propagate his lack of accessibility to basic human necessities and nurture his traumatic experiences. Likewise, *Sirishko Phool* and *Mrs. Dalloway* are predominantly concerned with identities formed in the wake of severe psychological and emotional trauma cause by the characters' anticipation of non-existence, by their bearing witness to the same or by their becoming the reason for somebody's suffering and death. Where war-trauma defines the personalities of Septimus and Suyogbir, Clarissa Dalloway witnessing the violent death of her sister shapes her philosophy of life - one that acknowledges that existence is a dungeon made sufferable only in the light of its decor. Combining Nietzschean chaos with the chaos of the external physical world, characters in the works of Woolf and Parijat maintain their grip on the illusion of reason and justice - their only hope - in their absurd existence. Existence, then, is greatly influenced by external realities and

individual interpretations of and responses to the same, revealing that individual perceptions are as relevant (if not more) as collective truth(s) that continue to govern human behaviour. Although doctors fail to empathise with his trauma, Septimus's experiences in the battlefield to his visions of death and destruction to his frenzied notes represent a reality as lucid as anyone else's. Universal human short-sightedness, the indulging in surface appearances is emphasised upon by both authors when inspite of the fact that Septimus has access to some form of medical care the nature of his affliction is mostly entirely misunderstood, often scorned upon, by 'experts' Dr. Holmes and Dr. William who consider his recovery merely a matter of will. Suyogbir in *Sirishko Phool* finds himself in a similar situation as he faces curious questions about the glories of war and his battle scars - physical aberrations - when the psychological trauma he has endured goes entirely unnoticed by civil society. This tendency to acknowledge only what is physically apparent - with regards to trauma or otherwise - is an underlying theme in all the eight novels analysed in this thesis in psychological, socio-religious and political contexts.

The identities of the narrator in *Boni* and of Boni as a character are shaped by social institutions, politics and their perceptions of the same. The same holds true for the identities of characters in *The Voyage Out*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Mahattaheen* as they attempt to persevere through situations fabricated by centuries of psycho-social ideologies and sense of rationale. The identities of characters in *The Waves* are moulded from childhood through adulthood and old age by their exposure to various social, religious and educational institutions and by the various encounters with distressing experiences and emotions. The only exception to this norm in the novel is the physically absent character of Percival who, devoid of new experiences post

demise, represents a life completed, an ideal sought after by the other characters - an ideal represented by the image of a circle in *The Voyage Out.*

Characters in the novels of Virginia Woolf and Parijat portray existence through their engagement with detailed thought processes and everyday objects and occurrences that are often devoid of conventional language structures and meaning, highlighting the inexpressibility of trauma and of the act of living in general. Observed in a different light everyday objects and events are defamiliarised and rendered strange allowing characters to assign to them their own meanings and claim their own freedom. Observing individual facets of existence, much like Septimus when he perceives Lucrezia one body part at a time, these novels explore the absurdities of human life and the ever-looming possibility of death that motivates and bridles human spirit. Reminded of their insignificance - existential and socio-economic alike - by the vast sea and sky, dark nights, a never changing town, natural deaths and suicides or deplorable living environments, characters progress from one circumstance to another in their constant struggle for coherence and permanence in a seemingly indifferent universe. Despite the debilitating sense of insignificance, trauma, nightmarish loops of thought processes, intense cynicism and faithlessness the selected novels of Woolf and Parijat undertaken in this thesis communicate human resolve and perseverance in the bleakest of circumstances.

To conclude *Baishako Manchey, Sirishko Phool*, *Mahattaheen*, *Boni*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Voyage Out* and *The Waves* assert that the developing world has extensively experienced (and continues to experience) trauma and existential chaos so much so that the repercussions reveal themselves, very potently, as foundational to the socio-cultural, political and individual catastrophes of

the modern age. Representations of psychosomatic suffering, in the above novels, are crucial to the understanding of trauma and of human nature in general in that they portray the modern world as one unified across cultures, topographies and timelines by suffering. Memory, cognition, time perceptions, concepts of mortality, the very act of existing, then, imply trauma - the impressions and indentations that often shape identities. The novels of Woolf and Parijat, instead of imposing upon the reader a single rigid reality, portray realities as elaborate and diverse as their characters. These multiple reality perceptions interact among one another in order to form multifaceted existences striving for coherence in a world defined by interpretations. In the absence of clear and perceptible traumatic events, Woolf and Parijat represent trauma through the devices of repetition, images, synesthesia and chasms that punctuate characters' daily lives - the gaps in narration expressing trauma through the very fact that they do not entirely and adequately express it.

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