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# DISCOURSE

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## IN-BETWEEN REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING: MNEMONIC NARRATIVES IN SVETLANA ALEXIEVICH'S *SECOND-HAND TIME*

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### Abstract

Narratives that attempt to summarize the past are wedged in between remembering and forgetting. They can never recapture the previous moment, or the event, in its complete form, yet it can recognize and validate the weight of an individual experience. The writings of the Nobel laureate, Svetlana Alexievich are acknowledged for their polyphonic capabilities that perceive an event from multiple perspectives. They also unfix and destabilize accepted narratives of history. In *Second-Hand Time* (2016), Alexievich employs the possibilities of field memory from the interviews that she conducted and she records the stories of party workers, students, housewives, soldiers, artists and others who lived and witnessed the fall of Soviet Union and survived the subsequent years. Alexievich's text voices the emotions and experiences that are never discussed as a part of traditional history. The paper attempts to read memory and remembering as a resistance to social amnesia. It reads forgetting as a malicious and a political act that marginalizes individual experiences.

**Keywords:** Witnessing, Testimony, Remembering, Polyphony, Field Memory, Archive

### Introduction

Memories from testimony run counter to that which is often inscribed as history. Since archives are the body of knowledge that help to understand and connect with the past, they are also narratives that are controlled and mediated

by power, or in Louis Althusser's term, the apparatuses. The role of the historian in archiving is problematic on many levels because the material the historian collects, selects, interprets and combines, changes the course of history. "The historian does not only use the archive but also funds the archive...It is inevitable that the historian, who shares in the production of knowledge about the past through archiving, privileges certain persons, texts, stories or events while neglecting and repressing others" (Vosloo 378). Jacques Derrida's arguments in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1996) interfere with the concept of archontic principle i.e. the power to unify, identify and classify (382). According to Derrida the archive refers to the word *arkhe* which means commencement and commandment (379). It also refers to the Greek word *archeion* which is "initially a house, a domicile, and address, the residence of the superior magistrates. The archons, those who commanded" (Derrida 2). The location was a recognized authority that filed the official documents (Vosloo 380). The archons were responsible for the physical safety of the documents and also possessed the "hermeneutical right and competence to interpret the archives" (380). Since the archons hold the power of a patriarch these documents verbalized the law. Derrida underscores the way in which power can be reconfigured by the archives as "it is not merely stores and includes, but also testifies to a narrative of exclusion" (381).

The writings of the Nobel Laureate, Svetlana Alexievich are acknowledged for their polyphonic proficiencies. They run counter to the established narratives of history, and voice the accounts that failed to be recorded. *Second-Hand Time: The Last of the Soviets* (2016) carries first-person accounts of people who witnessed the fall of socialism and the dawn of consumerist culture. When history has continually chosen to emphasize the battles of great nations and encounters between important people, Alexievich selects the lives of the ordinary people to narrate their experiences and to write the course of history. Her writings provide a multifaceted perspective into the events rather than deliver a straight account of facts.

Helen L. Williams, Martin A. Conway and Gillian Cohen in *Memory in the Real World* (2008) provide comprehensive research in the area of everyday memory. They give a theoretical description of autobiographical memories; how they are organized and retrieved; the impact of the self on memory and the fallibility of memory (21). They quote E. Tulving who distinguished between episodic memories and semantic memories. Episodic memories “consist of personal experiences and the specific objects, people, and events that have been experienced at a particular time and place” (21). They focus on subjective reality and the self, and are organized chronologically by time and space (22). Whereas semantic memories involve general knowledge and facts about the world (21). They are organized in schemas or categories, and focus on objective reality (22). Both episodic and semantic knowledge are not separate and compartmentalized structures, but are in “an interactive and independent relationship” (22).

According to Williams, Conway and Cohen, autobiographical memories have directive, social and self function. They are directive as it “involves using memories of past events to guide and shape current and future behaviour, as an aid to problemsolving, and as a tool for predicting future behaviour” (24). The social function is seen as the fundamental one by some theorists as it helps in social interactions and to create communities. Exchanging personal information also helps to build a believable environment for the listener. Whereas the memory of the self is an essential element in the development and maintenance of personal identity and agency. Specific autobiographical elements are indispensable to be in coherence with the self (25).

Williams, Conway and Cohen advance to give two distinctions to understand the perspectives involved in reading autobiographical memory; field memory and observer memory. According to G. Nigro and U. Neisser when people examine their own memories some are remembered for the “original viewpoint of the experiencer” and they are termed field memories (Williams et al., 23). They are



more likely to be copies of the original as they seem to have been re-experienced from the same perspective. But a huge number of memories are viewed from the outside i.e. from the perspective of an external agent. They are observer memories, and are more likely to be reconstructed ones.

In *Second Hand Time*, Alexievich employs field memory by collecting interviews of people directly associated with the Soviet Union and thereby she captures the significant voices and opinions of people who had personally witnessed the events. Alexievich provides a plethora of voices that experienced the fall of an empire, the intermediary war and the suffering of the people. She collects the memories of Elena Yurievna S., third secretary of the District Party committee. Yurievna that nobody wanted to listen to her. “Everyone wants to shut us up... We’re all criminals, even though there isn’t a single drop of blood on my hands. Still we are branded, every last one of us” (Alexievich 65). Yurievna remembers how the supporters of the Party instantly changed with perestroika. “People performed incredible transformations: yesterday they were communists, today they are ultra-democrats. Before my very eyes, ‘honest’ communists turned into religious liberals” (67). She recounts how her communist father had spent six years with the emblem of a traitor in the Soviet camps because he was taken prisoner by the Finns while fighting the Russo-Finnish war. After his return it took ten years for his disfigured body and disturbed self to begin talking. Yet she believed in socialism and decent communism. “Our Soviet life... you could say that it was an attempt at creating an alternative civilization” (79). She shares how her people condemned Gorbachev, “He betrayed the USSR!’ ‘He sold our country out for pizza” (86). Yurievna remembers how people started to hate calling themselves communists. Some confessed that they hated communism from the day they were born. “They returned their Party membership cards. Some showed up and handed in their Party cards in silence, others slammed the door behind themselves” (94). Yurievna confesses that “there was dead silence” as there were no orders from the higher authorities whether

they could accept or reject the cards (94). There were hundreds of declarations of resignations from the Party piled on her desk. People blamed her and the Party. An unfamiliar woman she met at a shop questioned her, “Are you happy now. Commies, you squandered the country to shit!”(101). Yurievna recalls the fate of the fellow Party members. “One of our Party instructors killed himself...The director of the Party bureau had a nervous breakdown and spent a long time in the hospital recovering. Some went into business...The second secretary runs a cinema. One district committee instructor became a priest” (102).

In 1991, after the suicide of Sergey Fyodorovich Akhromeyev, who had been the marshal of Soviet Union, Hero of the Soviet Union (1982), Chief of General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces (1984-88), and Laureate of the Lenin Prize (1980), Alexievich’s collects the interviews at Red Square and N. (anonymous identity) narrates the destiny of the USSR after Stalin.

We were an almighty superpower that called the shots in many countries. Even America was afraid of us. To win a nuclear war, you need the latest in missiles and bomber aircraft, not pantyhose. And we had them. First class weapons. We could have won any war. The Russian soldier was not afraid to die. Stalin created a state that was impossible to puncture from below; it was impenetrable. But from the above it was vulnerable and defenseless. No one thought that they would start destroying it from the top, that the top leaders would be the ones to betray it first. (161-162)

N. states that Gorbachev had destroyed the USSR with his reforms. Gorbachev had stopped being a communist a long time ago (170). “To have French hippies wearing T-shirts with his face on them...He represented our country’s interests worthlessly and humiliatingly. The army was forced to withdraw into the forests, into the Russian fields. Officers and soldiers lived in tents. In mud huts. Perestroika...It was like war, it was no renaissance...” (171). N. describes how Gorbachev loved luxury. “In Foros, they built him a dacha with Italian

marble, a German tile stove...sand for the beach shipped in from Bulgaria... not a single western leader had anything like it. Gorbachev's dacha made Stalin's Crimean dacha look like a dormitory" (173). N. observes how the old heroes were forgotten instantly. Neither was there any military salute for Akhromeyev's funeral nor an obituary in the *Pravda* (official newspaper of the Communist Party of Soviet Union) for the former chief of General Staff of an army numbering four million (174).

Alexievich collects the testimony of Marina Tikhonovna Isaichik who reminisces the suicide of neighbor and friend, Alexander Porfirievich Sharpilo (Sashka). He had set himself on fire in his garden. Marina expresses her disbelief, "nobody believes in Communism anymore...The thing I don't understand is, why didn't anyone ask us? I spent my life building a great nation. That's what they told us. They promised" (119). She comments, "after Stalin died, people started smiling again; before that they lived carefully. Without smiles" (121). Marina remembers how Sashka and she had devoted their lives. Sashka had even spent winters in tents in Virgin Lands, where they slept in freezing temperatures without any sleeping bags, but in their clothes. "He almost froze his hands off...but he was still proud! ... He had a Party membership card, a little red book with a picture of Lenin on it, and he treasured it" (121).

Marina recalls the gruesome memories of war. They sang, "'From the tiaga to the British sea, There's nothing more mighty than the Red Army'" They sang it proudly until the ice melted in spring. The whole river behind their village became choked with corpses. "Naked, blackened, only their belts shining. Belts with red stars" (115). Marina remembers the German invasion of their village and the persecution of the Jews (Avram, Yankel and Morduch), "They rounded up every Jew in the district and shot them all in a single day. Tossed them into a pit...thousands of them...Thousands...People said that for three days afterwards, their blood kept rising to the top of the pit...Like the ground was breathing" (116). Yet they sincerely believed in the dictum of the Soviet Union. "We

believed that one day, we lived to see the good life. Just wait and see, wait and suffer... Yes, wait and see... We spent our whole lives shuttling between bunkers, dormitories and barracks” (122). Marina recalls what was left of Sashka after his death, “two rooms in a barrack house, a vegetable patch, some red certificates, and a medal: ‘Victor of Socialist Emulation’” (111).

Alexievich interviews Margarita Pogrebetskaya who served as a doctor in the Soviet Union. Margarita remembers how she celebrated 7 November in her childhood. The day was remembered for the October Revolution of 1917. She reminisces how she as a child had sat on her father’s shoulder with a red balloon tied to her wrist and how she had participated in the military parade on Red Square. In her family it was a day of celebration with wine and cake.

Red everywhere. My favourite colour in the whole world. The colour of the Revolution and of the blood spilled in its name... The Great October Revolution...My whole life, I’ve believed that we were the luckiest people on earth, born in the most beautiful and extra ordinary country in the world. There’s no other one like it! We have Red Square, the Spasskaya Tower clock that the whole world sets its time to. (123)

Margarita later recounts how the times had changed to a situation where her people reduced themselves to a state where they were selling their Soviet Army uniforms, medals and Orders. “There was a mountain of red flags and pennants, Party and Komsomol membership cards. And Soviet war medals! Orders of Lenin and the Red Banner. Medals! ‘For Valour’ and ‘For Military Service’” (127). In her childhood too Margarita was a devoted Young Pioneer. On the day after which she was accepted as a Young Pioneer when the anthem played on the radio, she leaped and stood on her bed in attention and recited the oath; “I hereby am joining the ranks...in the presence of my comrades...I solemnly swear to passionately love my Motherland” (129). She retained her Komsomol membership card. For Margarita the Komsomol oath were not just words, “I am prepared to give up my life if my

nation should need it” (130). She admits that she had been a ‘Stalin girl’ for a long time (133). She had also felt proud of her neighbor, Vanya who had returned without any legs from the war (133). But later she states, “I’m one of the people who’s fallen behind...Everyone else transferred from the train that was hurtling towards socialism onto the train racing to capitalism...it turns out that everyone who had given up their lives for others had been a fool” (131).

Alexievich also records the people who uncritically supported the principles of socialism to the very end. She includes the testimony of Vasily Petrovich N. (87 years), a member of Communist Party since 1922. According to him, his empire was defeated without a bomb. “Without Hiroshima. It’s been conquered by Her Majesty Salami! The good chow won! And Mercedes- Benz” (214). He had worked very hard in his life to build Communism that his work won him two medals and three heart attacks (216). He acknowledges his dream to create Heaven on Earth and for that, “My homeland is October. Lenin, socialism... I loved the Revolution! There is nothing more precious to me than the Party! I was in the Party for seventy years. My Party membership card is my Bible” (217). To Alexievich he shared his spirit of communism. He condemns the people who then represented socialism and criticizes that their “socialism has no relation to the socialist idea” (223).

In “A Man’s Story”, Alexievich interviews a few people who remembered the lives of the invalids from the war. People had forgotten the horrors of those agonizing lives as many of them were literally and metaphorically wiped away from the memories.

Invalids rolling around on homemade boards with ball bearing wheels. They lived in basements and sub-basements. They’d get wasted and lie around in the gutters. Beg. Trade their medals for vodka. When life got a little better, people started outright hating the invalids. No one wanted to be reminded of the war, everyone was busy living in the here and now. One day all the invalids were

cleared out of the city. Policemen caught them and tossed them into cars like they were piglets. Swearing, squealing, yelping... (258)

Another person remembers, “We had an Invalid’s Home in our town. Full of young men without arms, without legs. All of them with medals” (258). In “A Woman’s Story”, Alexievich provides a different perspective of the German invasion of Soviet Union. In this section a woman remembers that her life had improved under German rule. “The Germans reopened the churches, dissolved the collective farms and redistributed the land – two hectre per person... Everyone was satisfied. Under Soviet rule, we’d been poor... Now we had meat and butter. It was a totally different life!” (260).

Olga Karimova, a middle-aged musician, describes the predicament of the women of her times. War and prison were two important words in the Russian language. The men in their families were martyrs either from the war, or from the prisons. All of them were traumatized and incapacitated. She declares that the Soviet women never experienced normal men in their lives. The women “kept healing and healing them. Treating them like heroes and children at the same time. Saving them. To this very day. Women still take on that same role. The Soviet Union has fallen... and now we have the victims of the fall of the empire” (273). The country was also filled with unemployed people.

The market was full of engineers and doctors peddling their wares. PhDs... We have thousands of out-of-work army men, people who only know the gun and the tank, unsuited for any other kind of life. Our women are forced to be stronger than men. They are forced to travel with their giant chequered bags. From Poland to China. Buying and selling. Carrying the weight of their entire household, the children and the old folks, too. Plus their husbands. Plus the entire nation. (273)

Alexievich also provides positive views on Perestroika with the testimony of Olga. Her husband, Gleb, had returned from the camps and he had been a writer. Publications of manuscripts from camp narratives were prohibited during the Soviet

Rule. But with Perestroika, “Freedom was in the air” (280). Olga confesses that Gleb had desired to see the fall of communism. She says, “We’d all grown up on *samizdat* (clandestine or illegal production and circulation of literature within Soviet Union) and *tamizdat* (refers to Russian writings that were published abroad and smuggled back into the USSR). We were children of the word. Literature” (280).

## Conclusion

Alexievich’s mnemonic narratives refrain from taking a unified or monolithic opinion of events but pitch on a multitude of perspectives of the same. They reflect a postmodern attitude of writing that deconstructs metanarratives and focuses on little narratives, i.e. individual memories to an event. These narratives display a plethora of voices before the reader, and suggest that it is natural to adopt and live by various politics, but also underscores the need to consider different stand points before arriving at an interpretation or opinion. Alexievich’s text showcases that literature can be a rich medium to mirror the diverse perspectives that people of similar ethnicity or community may live with. They display that similar and contrasting voices can coexist in a single text. Alexievich’s *Second-Hand Time* emphasizes that history works on the exclusionist principle and remembering is a highly selective process. As a curator to the numerous testimonies she employs the field-memory approach to consciously bring the forgotten memories of the post-Soviet era to the forefront of discussion.

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## HAS LITERATURE GOT A CURATIVE POWER?

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### Abstract

*Every Last Word* and *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* are fictions which go deep into the complexities of the human psyche. Samantha and Eleanor Oliphant, the protagonists of *Every Last Word* and *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* respectively, undergo severe mental illnesses. Samantha's Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is cured by the mesmerizing healing power of poetry and Eleanor Oliphant is able to tackle the horrible mental trauma through the magical effect of her friend Raymond's words in her life. Bibliotherapy with poetry and affectionate human presence along with guiding and soothing words maximize the 'positive affects' and minimize the 'negative affects' can relieve us from our mental traumas to an extent, thereby explores the scope of bibliotherapy and interpersonal relationships in relieving mental stress.

**Keywords:** Bibliotherapy, Positive Affect, Negative Affect

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### Introduction

Numbers of people with neurocognitive disorders like depression are increasing day by day. In this modern world, people are caught up between numerous social and political problems such as bio-wars, rapes and deadlines of works to be done, which has made their lives chaotic. Cluttered lifestyle and nervous tension due to work pressure and mental illness are the major reasons for



such a situation in which there is a hike in the number of people who are depressed. Non-pharmacological self-help methods such as bibliotherapy may improve mental well-being and be integrated into clinical or social service. Bibliotherapy showed positive effects on reducing depression, improving self-efficacy of dealing with problem

### **What is Bibliotherapy?**

Bibliotherapy generally refers to the use of literature to help people cope with emotional problems, mental illness, or changes in their lives (Pardeck, 1994), or to produce effective change and promote personality growth and development (Lenkowsky, 1987; Adderholdt-Elliott & Eller, 1989). By providing literature relevant to their personal situations and developmental needs at appropriate times (Hebert & Kent, 2000), bibliotherapy practitioners attempt to help people of all ages to understand themselves and to cope with problems such as separation and divorce, child abuse, foster care, and adoption. Bibliotherapy was taken up by medical professionals such as Benjamin Rush and Anna and Sigmund Freud.

Bibliotherapy allows us to gain insight into the personal challenges we are dealing with and helps us to develop strategies to address the most concerning issues. It can also help to promote problem solving, understanding, and self-awareness.

“But now, everything is so quiet. Not just the pool, but my mind, too. I don’t even feel the urge to swim to the beat of a song. I’m mentally spent. Out of words. Out of thoughts. It feels so good to be this empty. It’s so peaceful. Is this what it’s like to be normal” (Stone,130)

In “Every Last Word” Samantha is very much depressed due to her loneliness. She often feels alone even though she has six smart friends. Samantha never feels comfortable with her friends even though she spends time

and laughs with them. She has a burden to carry with her, to conceal the matter of her OCD from her friends and others. Whenever she became emotional or scared she had to confront the panic attack as a part of OCD, But after she was introduced to the Poet's corner by Caroline she became a completely changed person. She became a refined person and felt better after writing down poetry, through which she expressed her emotions. She started with expressing her apology to AJ, a member of Poet's Corner, for ill-treating and insulting him in the past. After that she made it a habit to express herself through poetry. Expressing herself through poetry was a kind of relief to her. That is why she felt better after becoming a part of the Poets' corner.

In "Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine", Eleanor Oliphant, who leads a monotonous life with fixed routines had to pass through a terrible mental trauma after realizing the facts about Johnnie Lomond, a singer to whom she was infatuated very deeply. The infatuation towards Lomond brings about drastic changes in her life, but she falls into a traumatic condition after knowing his reality. In such a terrible situation her friend Raymond, who is also her colleague tries to bring her back to normal life by solacing her with soothing words. Raymond advises Eleanor to seek professional psychiatric help and she does so. The therapy along with Raymond's strong support and affection help Eleanor to get back to a normal life. Finally she realizes that 'she is completely fine'. It was Raymond's soothing words which played an integral role in bringing Eleanor back than the medical support. When Eleanor returned after therapy, Raymond had arranged some fresh flowers beautifully in a vase on her desk at the office. This made her feel good, normal and relaxed.

"All those lost years, wasted years. Terrible things happened to you. You needed help back then and you didn't get it. You've got a right to it now, Eleanor- 'He shook his head unable to find the words'" (Honeyman, 382). These words of

Raymond itself reflect his care and affection to Eleanor, which had helped her to get back to normal life.

Towards the end of the novel “Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine”, the protagonist Eleanor Oliphant says to Raymond that “I survived, Raymond”. These words of Eleanor are filled with gratitude towards Raymond for her cure.

Literature and human words possess some cathartic effect which can perform wonders, especially to those people who have disturbed minds. When we are in some kind of mental pressure or trauma, reading books which contain the protagonist facing a similar situation like ours and writing our feelings down either through poetry or prose can provide some kind of relief to us. The soothing words of our friends or family members when we are passing through a difficult mental trauma can also provide a magical cure to a great extent. In this novel the actions of Raymond affected Eleanor in a very positive manner by which she was able to tackle her mental trauma successfully.

In the present scenario, people are facing myriad kinds of mental pressures and trauma due to their workload during the pandemic, relationships or even due to any psychiatric problems. In the current situation of Covid 19, we are spending our whole day at our own homes with our family. We can read good books and spend quality time with our family as well. Sharing our feelings and thoughts to our family members and listening to their opinions can be a remedy for our stress. We can also make our creative side even stronger by engaging ourselves in some kind of creative things like writing poetry, stories etc.

Samantha McAllister found her way to mental stability through poetry by joining the Poet’s Corner. And Eleanor Oliphant was able to achieve normalcy by the strong support and care provided by her friend and colleague, Raymond. Both poetry and Raymond were integral in the cure of Samantha and Eleanor respectively.

## Conclusion

From the two instances we can derive the fact that literature along with human touch can provide wonderful cures to the mental illness of people to a great extent. In this modern world, which is full of political and social problems along with the pandemic Covid 19 have created havoc in the minds of people, especially those who are suffering from various neurocognitive disorders. Economic challenges are also haunting people, nowadays. All these problems make the modern man vulnerable to varied mental problems and stress. One can rely on books, articulate his or her feelings through poetries, or even can seek the help of a good friend, who can be a positive influence and can act as a guide, just like Samantha and Eleanor Oliphant did in order to find a way out of their mental traumas. Creative writing and a friend, who can elevate the optimism hidden inside you, are the miraculous medicines for your mental traumas and stress.

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## REVIVING THE INDIGENOUS SPIRIT: AN OIKOPOETIC READING OF AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE NUTMEG'S CURSE*

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### Abstract

History is rich with the accumulation of indigenous knowledge and oriental wisdom which was viewed with contemptuous eyes by the British throughout colonisation. Rituals expressing gratitude to nature were considered savage attributes as they deviated from the traditional Christian outlook. While the earth was merely a means of income for the colonizers, it was considered mother Gaia by the aboriginals. These traditions rooted in a deeper ecological understanding were disregarded by the invaders and the practitioners of these rites were the victims of cruel slaughter as their ideology was considered to be barbaric. The British disregarded the warnings of ruin that the indigenous foresaw and continued to extensively terraform every part of the earth and the culmination of four centuries of terraforming and commodification of nature has resulted in the disastrous climatic patterns that we are experiencing today. The concept of Oikopoetics originates from the Greek language where Oikos represent a peaceful concurrence of man, nature and the divine where each sect has its rights and responsibilities which reinforced stability within the ecosystem. An Oikopoetic reading of Ghosh's *The Nutmeg's Curse* traces the degradation of man's outlook on nature from an integrated Oikos perspective to that of anarchic Oikos. The Bandanese led a life of communion with nature before the arrival of the Dutch as they worshipped the elements of the earth. This harmonious coexistence of man and nature was labelled as a primitive lifestyle and the natives were stamped as uncivilized savages. The advent of colonization triggered the parallel formulation of a hierarchical system where the divine, man, and nature were estranged from each other and classified based on their levels of power. The colonizers hence successfully separated man from his god which was synonymous with nature, and also the earth which was once considered to be the source of life was viewed as an inert lump of mass. This research paper traces the need for a reversion to the integrated perspective of viewing nature, the divine and human beings as kin and kith, which was followed by the aboriginal forefathers to tackle the looming threat of climate change.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Knowledge, colonisation, paganism, Oikopoetics, ecology

## Introduction

Before the advent of colonization, many parts of the world followed the ways of the first men who believed in an animistic world. They revered nature and its elements and observed the interconnection between the seen and unseen worlds. Such animistic undertones were evident in most religions of the time and adopted the name of Prana in the Vedic culture, Chi for the Taoists, Nwyfre for the Celtic Druids and Manitou for Algonquians.

## An Exploration of Indigenous Lifestyle and Knowledge

Myths with tales about this great spirit reverberated through the centuries with songs and poems singing its praise. Sacred scriptures of the Hindus prescribed that God used Maya to create humans who are finite and nature which was infinite. The first seed of chaos was sown when the finite started to dominate over the infinite by assuming that nature's very creation was for man's benefit. Eg:

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have **dominion** [emphasis mine] over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (*The Holy Bible*, Gen 1:26-28).

The anthropocentric worldview can be traced back to the command in the Old Testament of *the Bible*. The wise sages of Indian history were keen on living an ecologically conscious life themselves and making others follow suit which is why they devised rituals and traditions which helped incorporate a sense of belonging between man and nature. Such rituals were in the form of fasts on auspicious days like the Vishhti Karna when the moon is full or in the form of celebrations like Holi which commemorates the advent of spring. The indigenous view of the world is significantly diverse when compared to institutionalised religions. Their animistic vision helped them view creation as extensions of the

same universal spirit hence establishing a sense of kinship among all beings. The famous ecologist E.O Wilson coined a term called Biophilia which encapsulates these feelings of love for life. This worldview of seeing the entirety of creation as one created a sense of appreciation for nature within them to the extent that they never took a sip of water or a bite of food without chanting a few words of thanks to the great spirit for the blessings they have in life. An example of such a prayer of gratitude was cited by a Cahuilla elder named Ruby Modesto, which says, “Thank you mother earth, for holding me on your breast. You always love me no matter how old I get.” A Native American teacher named ‘Slow Buffalo’ once uttered wise words when he recited:

Remember . . . the ones you are going to depend upon

Up in the heavens, the Mysterious One, that is your grandfather

In between the earth and the heavens, that is your father

This earth is your grandmother

The dirt is your grandmother

Whatever grows on the earth is your mother. It is just like a sucking baby on a mother. . . (Forbes 285).

Such poems that associate ancestry with nature are imprinted in the aboriginal minds at a young age and even though we “modern men” dismiss these as mere children’s fables, each word of such a tale is pregnant with ancient wisdom meant to guide the future generations. Even giants in the field of psychology like Sigmund Freud in his book *Totem and Taboo* have explored animism and established that children are inherently gifted with an animalistic sway which is unfortunately lost in the system of modern education. Another cultural ecological philosopher, David Abram has supported this notion through his studies which prove that animism is exorcised from individuals with the written language and the seductive quality of T.V screens (Ghosh 253).



Colonizers and literature have long endorsed ideas of individualism and propagated ideas of competitive survival of the fittest. *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding is a work which promotes this theory by using the tale of a bunch of English school kids who get stranded on an island in the middle of the ocean. Under such dire circumstances, Golding says that ideals of empathy and law break down, causing humans to revert to their barbaric roots, however, eleven years after the publication of this book nature put this theory to the test when six school kids got stranded on an island. The results when the children were finally rescued after fifteen months were contrary to the postulations made by Golding as they had set up rules and aided in each other's survival. This deviation from Golding's assumptions was a result of the upbringing and education of the children who were Tongans and not English which highlights the difference in the interpersonal relationship between the indigenous people and the colonizers.

Indigenous people bore a perspective of life that was divergent from ordinary society as tales about the earth's vitality and kindness were woven into their narratives and folklore. Mukul Sharma who is an environmental historian observes one such Dalit narrative according to which the Earth is the resting place of their forefather's souls and is therefore given due respect. They reaffirm this belief by keeping aside a sacred earthy corner in their homes for this Duma (soul) to reside (Ghosh 276). This idea of forefathers living in the land is reflected in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where ancestors are given offerings and prayers before any auspicious event. Even movements such as the Chipko movement which unravelled in the forest-clad terrain of Uttarakhand demonstrate this level of intimacy shared between the Adivasis and nature where tribals chose trees over their own lives. A similar occurrence unfolded in Niyamgiri in Odisha where Adivasies were able to fight off attempts of invasions into their lands by miners of bauxite. These two Indian movements of "livelihood environmentalism" which were started and led by natives make it evident that the people who believe in the sacredness of the earth and its creations are endowed with a genuine desire

to preach nature's divinity and act as a voice for the voiceless (Ghosh 280). The words of Pope Francis re-emphasise this idea when he says that "a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as we hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

The religions of the colonizers viewed man as an exceptional creature and as god's crowning creation who is always favoured over the rest. The indigenous people embody the understanding that humans have evolved from other beings and have close ties with them which create a feeling of fellowship. Most of the religions followed by forest dwellers involve the worship of nature spirits and communication with them. Shamanism is an example of such a religion where the shaman learns to use a powder-like substance called *yākoana* which can elevate the state of mind of its user. Its main ingredient is derived from the bark of the *yākoana* tree and the continuous use of the substance grants shamans the ability to take their spirit form and enter into a higher realm of *xapiri* spirits where all the beings of the forest including trees, water, humans, animals, etc exist in their spirit forms. *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman* is a text published through a collaboration between Davi Kopenawa who is the leader of Yanomami shamans and French anthropologist Bruce Albert which speaks about the personal experiences of shamans and directly addresses the issues of the planetary crisis in the Amazon rainforests (Ghosh 250). Another legend is that of the oldest creation myth which takes root in the legend of the Budj Bim volcano in Australia which includes such mystical beings of nature. The tale narrates the story of four giants who came to the shores of Oz out of which three entities disappeared into the other parts of the land and the fourth being's crouching body transformed to take the form of a volcano with its teeth becoming the lava which came erupting out. Australia is not the only place where volcanoes are given significance as the same trend is observed in Java where volcanoes are believed to help strike a balance between humans, nature, and the universe

(Ghosh 44). The magnanimous volcanoes are praised in many folk tales and novels, one such story which stands out is Nukila Amal's novel called *The Original Dream*. A sequence in *The Original Dream* narrates a scene where a shaman treads the rocky slopes of Mount Gamalama to reach the top of the crater and talk to the volcano. As she stood at the top with her eyes shut and her two feet planted firmly on the ground, she felt something surging into her from the earth, a whisper at first that magnified into a roar and left her feeling overwhelmed and touched at the same time. This story could not be better narrated by anyone other than the author as she herself was a dweller of Ternate where the sacred Mount Gamalama is located (Ghosh 46).

Another striking feature of the aboriginals who lived close to nature was the sense of satisfaction that enriched their life. Their unadulterated love for nature did not permit them to take more than they needed to survive. They never killed anything they could not use nor did they hunt for the sport of it like modern men. Everything they did was to sustain themselves and this resonance with nature cleared their hearts of greed. If their ways were followed, we would never have to set up programs to conserve and protect nature as that was their assumed way of life. Their lack of material desires infuriated the white settlers as they had no means of bribing such people who were so utterly fulfilled and satisfied in life. The only way out of the knot was to poison their minds with an ache for more that could never be filled and this was considered the white man's way of curing the forest dwellers of their savagery and civilizing him.

The term 'savage' was frequently employed to describe such people as a result of the beliefs they harboured of the divine nature of earthly creations like forests and volcanoes. For the whites who took pride in their logic, being "civilized" meant considering the earth to be an endless stream of resources meant just to satisfy the ever-growing needs of humans. Any other inclusive way of thinking which concerned the earth or any of its billions of other more worthy

species was considered to be primitive. The unwillingness of the colonizers to accommodate any other beliefs other than the traditional Christian notions is evident in their attitude towards such people. Francis Bacon takes this issue to a higher level of inhumanity when he says that it's the duty of the British to cut such wayward countries off the face of the earth. He justified genocide by saying that it is god's will that such monstrous beings be wiped off the face of the earth (Ghosh 38). The indigenous were dehumanized to the point that they were no longer considered human which made it easier to eradicate them with a guilt-free conscience. Such cruelty was again enforced by the British to confront women who were in tune with nature. Such women who regarded nature as sacred and worshipped it were considered to be witches with the power to control the weather and place curses and spells on others. These witches who were just women who connected with nature along with other innocent female victims were burned alive for their beliefs during the witch hunts which took place in the 17th century.

### **Man's Estrangement from Nature: An Oikopoetic Analysis of Amitav Ghosh's "The Nutmeg's Curse"**

Amitav Ghosh in his *The Nutmeg's Curse* (2021) combines elements of ecocriticism, environmental communication, and environmental psychology to produce a compelling narrative that exposes readers to the dangers of man's detachment from nature. This eye-opening contemporary work allows the readers to realize how climate change is not some distant nightmare that would perish with time but is an imminent threat that has already hooked its claws on earth. Ghosh educates his readers on the origins of climate change and elaborates on the effects of colonization on the ways of the Orient and its contribution to the current climatic scenario. The book illustrates how the colonizer's imposition of the western ideology of viewing nature as a commodity wiped out the Eastern ideologies of respecting nature as a maternal figure and how this ultimately led to the creation of an unstable environment, completely out of sync with the

rhythm of nature. Ghosh employs an amalgamation of mythology, animalistic spirituality, and vitalistic policy in his narrative to enlighten the readers about tales of the colonial path riddled with terraforming, genocide, and slavery which played an instrumental role in upsetting the balance of nature. Even though the triggers of the climatic crises are multidimensional, most people only discuss its scientific and technological roots, however, Ghosh diverges from the mainstream stresses on the need to establish a more vitalistic perspective to steer towards lasting sustainability.

Modern human beings view their bonds with the earth as shackles as opposed to the traditional perspective of viewing it as bonds of love which is reflected in modern works like *High Flight* written by John Gillespie Magee. The lines of the poem recite: “Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth / And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings” (Magee, lines 1-2).

John Gillespie was a Canadian pilot during World War II who wrote these lines to praise the advancements in aviation. The poem was later employed by President Ronald Reagan in his speech to honour the astronauts who lost their lives in the Challenger disaster. The President had introduced a small addition to the poem modifying it as ‘slipped the surly bonds of earth’ to ‘touch the face of God’, to bid farewell to the heroes. The address seems to point out that to touch the face of God one has to escape the shackles of the earth. Upon a closer reading of these lines, man’s yearning to escape the bonds of the earth becomes painfully evident. Tennyson’s masterpiece, *In Memoriam*, uses a similar verse which says, “Move upward, working out the beast, and let the ape and tiger die.” These verses seem to imply that, to rise to the top, humans have to cut off all ties to the earth and dominate over all other living beings. He sees this destruction of the other species as inevitable for his ascent as the crowning race. Man’s sheer brutality is fueled by his conception of the earth as a prison that is holding him back and whose chains must be broken to reach God.

While the modern vision endorses such perspectives, the traditional Eastern practices promoted a more harmonious coexistence with all the spirits of the earth. The oriental ideologies can be perfectly summed up with the aid of Nirmal Selvamony's "Oikopoetics" which talks about an environment where the divine, humans, and animals live in oneness. The Greek term "Oikos" means household which denotes that humans, animals, and nature live together like a family. This study observes man's relationship with nature and comes to the conclusion that nature is God as she acts as our creator and protector. Even traditional religious scriptures like those of Hinduism worship the elements of nature like the sun as Surya, air as Vayu, the moon as Chandra, etc. to praise nature's purity and sacredness. An example of this can be seen in the Yajur Veda which says:

Live in complete harmony with Nature,

Experience the grace of God in the splendour of the universe.

Be blessed by God's reassuring love,

The sweet dawn will sweeten your soul,

The dazzling mid-day will set your hearts aflutter,

And the serene music of your soul will guide you towards peace and prosperity. And when the day's task is over, you will sleep in the lap of Mother Nature, All the deities will be favourable to you (*Yajur Veda* 34.37).

During the colonization of the Native Americans or the Red Indians, the British considered their lands to be wild and unproductive as the landscape was dotted with marshes and forests as opposed to the fenced farmlands of European countries. What the colonizers failed to see was the fact that the natives employed techniques of agriculture, animal husbandry, and hunting in a way that was beneficial not just to them, but also did not harm the environment. They did not clear out forests for cultivation like the Europeans did, instead, they only

harvested produce that they themselves had consciously helped develop within the forests. Even for the practice of hunting, tribes used fire as an instrument of taming the shrubbery and creating patches of hunting grounds in a sustainable manner. However, since the Europeans were unfamiliar with these eco-friendly methods, they considered them to be primitive and mocked the natives for their way of life. The disparities in the colonial and indigenous perspectives of nature are made crystal clear by Oglala Lakota chief Standing Bear who said, “We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth as ‘wild’, only to the white man was nature a ‘wilderness’ and only to him was the land ‘infested’ with ‘wild’ animals and ‘savage’ people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery (Ghosh 82).”

Oikopoetics can be divided into three levels consisting of the integrative oikos which occupy the highest level followed by hierarchic and anarchic oikos. Integrated oikos is the highest form of oikos which presents an environment where the divine, man, nature, and her manifestations live in harmony and oneness. Here man is close to the divine and nature as he sees them as extensions of himself or as kith and kin, therefore, he carries out his duties to protect nature as his dharma and responsibility out of love for it as opposed to seeing it as an obligation. This integrated way of life was a reality in many countries of the east prior to the colonial invasion which is made evident in *The Nutmeg's Curse* where Ghosh uses the tale of the Bandanese to illustrate this integrated way of life which was prevalent before the islanders were subjugated by the Dutch for obtaining the precious spice. The natives of the islands considered their land to be sacred and their lives were interwoven with its spirit and spice trees but for the Dutch, the land was seen as inert and the trees were lifeless resources.

The second division of oikopoetics is a system of hierarchy where the divine, nature, and man are ranked according to their authority. A power system

is formulated here with the divine occupying the highest level of authority followed by a man and then nature. Here nature is considered to be inferior to man and the divine is considered superior or 'holy'. Hence the concept that 'God is nature' is lost allowing humans to exploit nature. Due to the division of power among various sectors, the oneness is lost at this level creating a distance between man, nature, and God. A class system is developed even in the case of nature's manifestations as mountains, plains, marshes, etc.. which were once considered to be equals take on different levels of authority. This perspective is evident in the actions of the British as they considered marshes to be wild and continued to level them to create expansive green meadows which were considered to be much more civilized. During the colonization of America, the Red Indians lived embracing the wilderness of swamps by following subsistence farming and foraging while the colonial masters viewed them as a hindrance to construction, agriculture, transportation, etc., and moved to level these lands to parade America as an agrarian land. The colonial hatred of marshes and swamps is illustrated in Thomas Jefferson. J. Hector St John de Crèvecoeur's book *Letters from an American farmer* (1782) when he states, "the world is gradually settled, how the howling swamp is converted into pleasing meadow, the rough ridge into a fine field." A similar attitude is reflected in William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* where he stamps native America as "a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men' where 'the whole country, full of woods and thickets represented a wild and savage hue." The colonizers merely viewed the nutmeg and mace which was a part of the folklore of the islands in terms of their utility and transformed the land into a capitalist machine churning to make them rich. This mindset led to the formulation of the mechanistic philosophies which laid the foundation for the West. The new western perspective of viewing nature and even other humans as mere resources constitutes the third division of oikopoetics called anarchic oikos which is a level where even the divine loses its significance and all authority breakdown as



humans opt for logic and reason above all else. This modern principle of weighing nature, animals, and even other humans in terms of their utility has turned everything into an economic transaction. Feelings of kinship with nature and its manifestations are completely lost as man continues to exploit every natural resource to levels beyond sustainability. This loss of this kinship and humanity can be observed in sectors of animal husbandry where animals are reared in pathetic conditions and treated with brutality without the consideration that they are dealing with another sentient being. Sectors like ‘factory farming’ which aims to produce maximum profits with minimum investments employ methods of extreme confinement and only provide the bare necessities in order to save money. These animals are considered inert machines and are subjugated to inhuman treatment like being operated on without an anaesthetic or being forcibly impregnated only to have their babies stolen away from them after a matter of hours. This materialistic outlook of men has triggered omnicide in every corner of the world. The British wiped out Native Americans to colonize America and the Dutch wiped off the indigenous of the Bandanese Islands to procure its nutmeg-producing mountains. When the Nutmeg became ubiquitous, its trees, which were so precious that an entire cluster of islands had to be obliterated for it, were burned to the ground to limit the supply of the spices. The precarious changes in the demographic and geographic terrain triggered by Western principles of materialism and exploitation are the poisonous seeds that have sprouted into the scores of environmental problems that we face today and our only hope for lasting peace is the reintegration of man and nature.

When the concept of communion with nature was echoed by Western philosophers and poets who understood the depth of Eastern traditions in the later centuries, they were praised and glorified as transcendentalists and Romantics. Ralph Waldo Emerson preached ideas of a universal spirit which is parallel to the concept of Brahman in Hinduism. Thoreau similarly borrows eastern notions of viewing nature as a teacher and learning from its cycles which is evident in his

seminal work *Walden*. These very ideas which were once labelled as “savage” and “primitive” when practised in the East became some of the most celebrated works when written by Westerners.

Even as the citizens of the West slowly open up to the ideas of the East, we still continue to remain oblivious to the significance of our own rituals and practices which have more depth than we care to understand. Men and women of this generation should not repeat the fatal mistake of disregarding such sacred traditions as mere superstition as the British once did. The science and wisdom behind customs practised to revere nature should be understood and integrated into daily routines to revert our society into the integrated oikos that we were once a part of. This change in perspective would allow humans to feel that oneness they once experienced with nature and help control their materialistic urges and ideologies allowing him to design a system where human needs are not placed over the balance of the planet. This sense of duty would allow humans to bring their heads together and formulate innovative solutions to environmental threats and follow the greener alternatives instead of opting for the same old destructive options for convenience.

## **Conclusion**

Ghosh with the aid of his book *Curse of the Nutmeg* is successful in tracing the degradation of man’s relationship with nature. The domination of Western theories of utilitarianism over the Eastern philosophies of oneness opens the gate to centuries of climate catastrophes. The indigenous way of leading a life of integration where man, nature, and the divine live together as kin and kith under one household need to be revived in order to elicit a meaningful change in society’s current trajectory towards chaos. Man needs to understand that ‘nature is god and god is nature’ as she is our source and creator. Practices as small as saying gratitude for the abundance that nature provides us or building empathy with fellow creatures go a long way in creating a shift in our anthropocentric

society which would help humans realise that we are mere pieces in nature's grand puzzle. As Arne Naess says, "The smaller we come to feel ourselves compared with the mountain, the nearer we come to participating in its greatness".

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## **KUMARI: FROM MYTH TO LIBERATION**

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### **Abstract**

*Kumari* (2022) is a Malayalam mythological thriller movie directed by Nirmal Sahadev. The narrative moves around the multilayered dynamics of patriarchal hegemony, caste and occult practices that rule a land named Illymala, described as “the cursed land”. *Kumari* is the story of liberation of the subaltern people in Illymala. The elders of Kahnirangat family maintain patriarchal hegemony exploiting the lower caste people of the land who live in constant fear of the spell of Illymala Chathan- a cruel demi-god who attacks the land. Kumari, the titular character realizes that the widespread narrative of Illymala Chathan as a cruel demi-god is false. Chathan’s rival Gari-devan worshipped by Kanhirangat family members is the cruel one, who demands sacrificing the first born male child in the generation to save the land from Illymala Chathan. Gari-devan is shown as a blood- thirsty vicious creature with forked tongue and fair body whereas Illymala Chathan is black and ugly. Through a series of mysterious events Kumari realises the reason behind the vengeance of Illymala Chathan and with his help restores peace and prosperity in the land. The movie engages questioning and problematizing the myth and ritualistic practices nurtured in the name of power. The hegemony and oppression practiced by the males in the family ends with Kumari liberating the entire land, restoring prosperity and peace.

**Keywords:** Hegemony, subaltern, caste, myth, gender

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## Introduction

Myths have been defined and interpreted in different ways across cultures and societies. From being considered as alternative realities to visions, myths can be considered as “. . . logical model[s] that overcome contradictions in a people's world view” (Over 1). Primitive societies sans scientific knowledge used myths to explain nature and its secrets. There are various definitions of myth. Tracing the trajectory of the historical development of a myth, it can be defined as “. . . a traditional story that is thought of by a specific community to be of a fundamental importance . . .” (Lugli 53). Myths help the people of a community to lead a peaceful life when religious beliefs and traditional rites form part of their lives. Myths open up a world of extra ordinary figures and events that eventually form the basis of everyday reality.

## Analysis

The movie *Kumari* is set in Illymala, a land described as “the cursed land” which is a place of poverty and multiple crop failures. Myth pervades the land which is under the control of the landlords of Kanhirangat family. According to the myth, in the ancient times, a goddess marries a human being and gives birth to demi-gods, who are deformed yet possess immense powers. When the demi-gods start fighting against each other, the goddess goes back to heaven leaving her love. Eventually, human beings start appeasing these demi-gods to receive blessings. The worship of demi-gods becomes part of their tradition and belief. One of the demi-gods is Illymala Chathan is described as the protector of Illymala forest and the tribal people. Illymala Chathan resides in a dark cave in the deep forest, inaccessible to the nearby villagers but close to the forest-dwelling tribal people. The tribal people worship Chathan and he loves them. The village around the Illymala forest is under the control of Kanhirangat family, who owns the land. The tribal people and the villagers are exploited and ill-treated by the family. Though it is believed that anyone who visits Illymala Chathan’s cave at the top

of the mountains will not return, Chokkan- Chathan's friend roam around unharmed. Chathan becomes the enemy of Kanhirangat family when the family head Lord Thuppan kills Chokkan – a tribal boy who runs errands for Chathan. Chokkan is killed for polluting the family pond by entering it, for the family upholds caste system. Killing his favourite devotee for playing in the Kanhirangat family pond enrages Chathan. He wants to avenge Chokkan's murder and is determined to ruin the village along with the family. Chathan's wrath is manifest through strange incidents, mysterious contagious diseases that kill many people and as drought/ crop failures. Lord Thuppan is also infected with a mysterious disease. When all treatments fail, Lord Thuppan who is desperate to save himself discards the family Goddess in the underground cellar and appeases another evil demi-god Gari Devan. Through sorcery and magical powers begotten from Gari-Devan, Lord Thuppan manages to save himself, his family and the village from death. The village does not regain its lost glory though.

Kumari, the protagonist of the movie hails from a land far away from Illymala, an ancestral house on the decline. She is an orphan brought up by her uncles and aunts and in spite of her brother's disapproval she agrees to get married to Dhruvan, the youngest descendant of Kanhirangat family, an incompetent man. The Kanhirangat ancestral house is full of mysteries, occult practices and sorcery. Kumari unravels the myth of Illymala Chathan as a cruel demi-god in her desperation to save her unborn child and she helps the liberation of the people of Illymala from their hegemonic social system. The natives are the subaltern who are not allowed to have a conversation with the members of Kanhirangat family except to proclaim their loyalty and firm belief on the magical powers of the sorcerer, the patriarch of the family. The relationship between the villagers and the landlords is built upon class/caste oppression. Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak in her seminal essay on native subjugation, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), was concerned with how the oppressed can communicate with their oppressors when they don't even share the same terms of

reference. This problem is intensified, as Spivak notes, when dealing with subcastes, women, and other second-class citizens-in effect the deprived Other of the native race and therefore at a second remove from the master narrative of the colonies (276-81). The patriarchy in Kanhirangat family dominates the villagers by giving them false assurances of safety from the atrocities of Chathan. The fear of Chathan is the villagers are exploited to dominate them and centered on the myth of Illymala Chathan, *Kumari* is a complex narrative of caste, gender and hegemony. The women of Kanhirangat family also share the subaltern space devoid of speech and voice; Dhruvan's mother and his sister –in –law are examples of women trapped patriarchal hegemony. When Kumari tries to have a conversation with Dhruvan about the absurdity of practicing human sacrifice to please Gari Devan, he exaggerates its importance in the name of “duty” towards saving a land from the wrath of Chathan. What escapes his argument is the illogicality of caste system which is the root cause of all actions. The unquestioned hegemonic practice of caste system blinds Dhruvan and all his actions are desperate attempts to wield absolute power.

Kumari is lured by Illymala Chathan's friend Chokkan as she roams around the Kanhirangat family property. She comes face to face with the female Shaman of the tribe who worships Illymala Chathan and warns her child's death by her own husband. Kumari and her husband Dhruvan become the family favourites as she becomes pregnant. The family head chooses Dhruvan over his elder brother as the sorcerer and the powerful landlord of the village. Though Kumari disbelieves the Shaman, she happens to know that the first born child of the about the lack of offspring in the present generation of Kanhirangat family through her elder sister in-law who tells her another mysterious story. Every twelfth generation family head has to appease Gari Devan by sacrificing the first born child in the family and after Thuppan Thampuran's sacrifice of his child many years before, it is the responsibility of the present generation. Though she

disbelieves, after seeing Thuppan Thampuran in the attic as he lies untouched by death, Kumari goes to Chathan's cave at the top of the mountains and pledges her allegiance to Chathan to save her unborn child. The next morning after she knows the secret of Thuppan Thampuran, her elder sister –in law is found dead in the family water well. Upon instructions from Lord Thuppan, Kumari restores the family Goddess and kills her husband who tries to sacrifice her child to Gari Devan. With Illymala Chathan's revenge to Gari Devan fulfilled, the land restores prosperity and happiness. The oppressive atmosphere of Illymala is replaced by the gentle, serene landscape where there is equality and egalitarian love.

Various images of the film open up binaries that offer multiple interpretations. Kumari hails from a beautiful village where nature is in full bloom. The place is rich with communal harmony and happiness which is shown through the introductory song. When Kumari goes to Illymala after her marriage to Dhruvan, there is a mysterious old woman who warns her not to go to the cursed land as it will kill her. Unaware of the mystery, she ignores the woman, upon instructions from the Kanhirangat family head who is present. The journey that Kumari takes up from her homeland to Illymala is the journey from East to West, the land of fertility to the land of sterility. The demi-gods Illymala Chathan and Gari- Devan are portrayed as opposite to each other. The caste politics can be seen in the portrayal of fair skinned Gari- Devan worshipped by the landlords and the ugly-black skinned Chathan worshipped by the tribal people. Chathan, the black ugly one is just whereas Gari-Devan is white, with a forked tongue. The white evil Gari-Devan can be pleased only through human sacrifice, the first born child of the generation. Chathan defeats Gari-Devan plucking out his forked tongue restoring peace and prosperity in Illymala.

## **Conclusion**

Women in patriarchal societies are powerless and they are silent spectators of all injustices that happen around them. The movie highlights the subjugation



of women in patriarchal societies through the women characters in Kanhirangat family. Nangakutty, Lord Thuppan's wife who kills herself in the agony of losing her son as human sacrifice to Gari-Devan, Kumari, her sister-in law and mother in-law are all victims of hegemony. Kumari emerges as a liberated woman suffering huge personal losses and abandons the age-old tenant farming system, gives away the land to the villagers. The movie shows the liberation of women and a community from toxic masculine patriarchs and superstitious beliefs respectively. Economic liberation and peaceful atmosphere bring about prosperity in the land. Kumari transforms as a liberated young woman and loving mother who brings hope and peace to the family and the village. As a fantasy horror movie set in a world of imagination, it engages with crucial questions of class/caste, gender and hegemony based on traditional story telling style. It opens up multiple frames of interpretation centered on myths and superstitious beliefs. Myth and superstitious beliefs are retold through mysterious ritualistic practices making them a reality.

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## A STUDY ON THE CONSUMER PERCEPTION TOWARDS OTT PLATFORMS

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### Abstract

The present study is an enquiry into the consumer perception towards web based Audio- Visual platforms, especially the OTT Platforms for entertainment. The study was conducted to find out how the consumers choose the OTT platforms and the content. It also looks at how these platforms influence the society and their attitudes. The survey was conducted to find out how effectively the OTT platforms served the various sections of the society for information revolution and development during the COVID pandemic times.

**Keywords:** OTT, Online media, Web based entertainment

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### Introduction

OTT stands for Over The Top, which is a platform that offers video and audio streaming of content over the internet. It has removed any interference of the cable operators, satellite connection, or broadcast mediums. In recent years, OTT platforms are gaining wide popularity around the world. The first dependent Indian OTT platform was BIGFlix launched by Reliance Entertainment in 2008. It has more than 2000 HD movies in nine Indian languages including Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Gujarati, Marathi, Bhojpuri, Punjabi, and Bengali. In 2010 Digivive launched India's first OTT mobile app called nexGTV, which provide access to both live TV and on -demand content. OTT began as content hosting platform but quickly evolved in to the creation and distribution of movies, feature

films, documentaries and web series. Eventually, OTT started thriving in India in 2013 after the launch of Zee TV and Sony liv. Currently; there are about 40 providers of OTT services in India, which distribute media streaming media over the internet. Some of them are Hotstar (now Disney + Hotstar) Amazon Prime, Netflix, Nee stream etc. Hotstar is the most subscribed OTT platform in India, owned b Star India as of July 2020, with around 300 million active users and over 350 million downloads.

In India, no fixed body has ever been assigned to regulate the OTT platforms. But in 2019, amid various complaints and issues raised against the digital content on these online mediums, the Government decided to take action against the same. It was in October 2020 that the supreme court ordered the central Government to take up the charge of the digital content show cased on these mediums and finally, the OTT platforms will now be administered by the Ministry of Information Broadcasting (MIB) .In January 2019, eight video streaming platforms had signed a self regulatory code that stated a set of guiding principles for content which can be displayed online. However, the union Government disapproved of this code formed by the internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), and Digital Curated Content Complaints Council (DCCC) as no specific and elaborate set of rules were released. Thus finally, the government decided to undertake OTT platforms and their censorship rights under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

In the awake of COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, one noteworthy trend was the accelerated consumption of content through OTT platforms. And with the closure of theaters, the pandemic compelled the media and entertainment industry to innovate like never before.

In the last one year, travel and other restrictions led people to seek entertainment from online platforms. One of the biggest disruptions that happened last year was the accelerated shift of consuming content from big

theatre to small screens after the closure of theatre. This coupled with the continued proliferation of internet users with the availability of cheap data and smart phones, led to a rise in subscriptions.

Rupinder Kaur, Co-founder and CEO of Cinemapreneur, quoted some numbers to highlight the same, "The pandemic accelerated the subscription trend (of OTT platforms) as a result of increased in-home spending. Subscription for top OTT's grew by 55-60 percent". She also said that this trend is here to stay more because almost all content is available on these platforms.

While Netflix, Amazon prime video, among others were some of the reigning players in the OTT market, COVID 19 presented many new players an opportunity to make an entry in this space. Sharmin Ali, founder and CEO of in storied, added that the rise in digital entertainment platforms has created massive opportunities for content creators, leading to, employment generation. 2022 is going to be an exciting year for OTT platforms as the content pipeline will be stronger than ever. In India it is expected to grow at a CAGR of 22% by 2022. With such a huge user base comprising a large number of smart phone consumers under the age of 35, OTT platforms will focus more on youth-friendly content. While the pandemic has leapfrogged growth in terms of viewers and subscription we expect 2022 to further amplify the reach and will witness growth not only in the metro cities but also in tier 2 and tier 3 cities.

## Review of Literature

**Laghate (2017)** Discussed about how people have experienced an increase in the use of OTT especially through handheld devices. People prefer watching movies on OTT platform rather than waiting for movies and show to be released on linear platforms. People in India have more option of OTT platforms than people in other country. Although there were a few companies that tried to establish themselves in the Indian market it started when Hot star was launched

in 2015 with a huge budget and marketing .The increase in the assumption and set the trend in Indian consumer life was the launch of Jio with the access of high speed 4G internet more number of people were able to consume content on the OTT. Most of the OTT platforms provide quality content and smooth user experiences. OTT players are concerned about the users mentality as they fear people will reduced their consumption because of limiting data.

**Purdy (2018)** provided preliminary evidence that consumer perception about OTT platform services. The OTT market is a complex space dominated by three powerful players – Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu-the Big 3.It is the challenging for small players for finding their place in fierce market where content rules but more consumers can be dragged if they focus on providing curated content limiting account sharing, getting the price right and reducing churn through improved customer relations. The survey result indicates that although price is an important factor while purchasing OTT services, content still drives most consumer choices. A bread mix of quality content tends to be what consumer value from the Big 3 with ‘access to the vast library of content’ proved to the top most reason users subscribe to these services. The small players who promise to provide the services taking one of the above mentioned factors are more likely to attract a big crowd for their subscription.

**Singh.D.P (2019)** conducted a comparative analysis of the development level of the OTT Platform. This study focus on literature review in order to present the latest trend of Indian cinema very rapidly. Reduced price of internet services laid the foundation for increase in OTT services like Netflix, Hot star, Amazon Prime and Alt Balaji. Many ventures are producing video content solely for these OTT services. These new ventures are changing the way of Indian Television and Cinema .The OTT services analyses the video content watched by the users and keep providing them the content on similar genres . People liken to enjoy the services for free. Hence, OTT like Hotter provides very limited

content for free. Also subscription rate of these services are very low. The users enjoy the variety of International and national content. According to survey users spend on average 2 hours a day watching OTT services. Web services are watched more often in OTT services. Entertainment is the biggest reasons behind the use of OTT. Second biggest reasons behind the use are the mobility of the gadget and availability of content on demand.

### **Statement of Problem**

OTT is a means of providing television and film content over the internet at the request to suit the requirement of the individual consumers. So now people have a multitude of options at their finger tips. They have more control over the content they choose to purchase and watch. Now many people are switching to OTT platforms from traditional media. Past studies conducted regarding OTT platforms revealed that consumer preference towards OTT platform is increasing year after year. There are various factors that contributes to the increased consumption of OTT platforms in India. Low data price, variable pricing model to suit different user budgets , the premium quality content on OTT , the current pandemic situation that spread all over the world are some of the factors that helped OTT platforms to become more popular among the audience. The study of Kaneenika Jain on the rise of OTT platforms in India found out that the consumption of OTT platforms by different age group of people has been increased especially during the lockdown time. In the study of factor influencing the growth of OTT platforms in India Rohit Jacob Jose pointed out various factors such as rich content, viewing behaviour, user friendliness which leads to the growth of OTT platforms. Sujith T S remarked in the study to find out consumer satisfaction towards OTT platforms and the growth of OTT, that the OTT platforms appear bright because of use of Internet and mobile device are growing at an exponential rate. Whereas Singh D P analysed on the development level of OTT platforms and find out that the entertainment, mobility of gadgets, availability of content on demand are the most influenced factors on the growth

of OTT platforms. The present study is to analyze consumer preference towards OTT platforms. With the help of advanced technology and creativity OTT service providers are trying to meet the expectations of their audience and satisfied their needs to increase and maintain their consumer base. The significance of OTT platforms are increasing now a day's. So it is relevant to held this study.

### **Significance of Study**

This study is about consumer perception towards OTT platforms. OTT platforms are the ultimate platforms to reach the target audience directly and it gives the OTT providers an opportunity to collect immediate user feedback through direct interaction with them. For audience OTT platforms enable easy access to various entertainment platforms. Due to COVID pandemic entire country goes to lockdown. People were not able to enjoy outside programs. Theatres were also closed. So most of them depend on OTT platforms for spending leisure time irrespective of ages. As the technology changes OTT service providers are trying to improve their performance by providing rich and valuable content. Creative minds are creating innovative ideas and offer new features and benefits to their audience. These will affect the consumption pattern of consumers and growth of OTT. The OTT consumption is increasing as the time passes. Therefore it is very significant to conduct this study.

### **Scope of Study**

Scope of the study is limited to study of various OTT platforms and mostly focus on consumer perception towards OTT platforms. OTT platforms have wide scope for study. This study evaluates consumer satisfaction towards OTT platforms and thereby understanding various factors affecting consumer choice about OTT platforms. This study can be further use to understand the type of consumers and the growth in the usage of OTT platforms during COVID pandemic situations.

## Objectives

- 1) To identify factors affecting consumers choice for OTT platforms.
- 2) To measure consumer level of satisfaction towards OTT platforms.
- 3) To identify type of consumers mostly influenced by OTT platforms.
- 4) To find out and understand the changes in consumption of OTT platforms during the COVID pandemic.

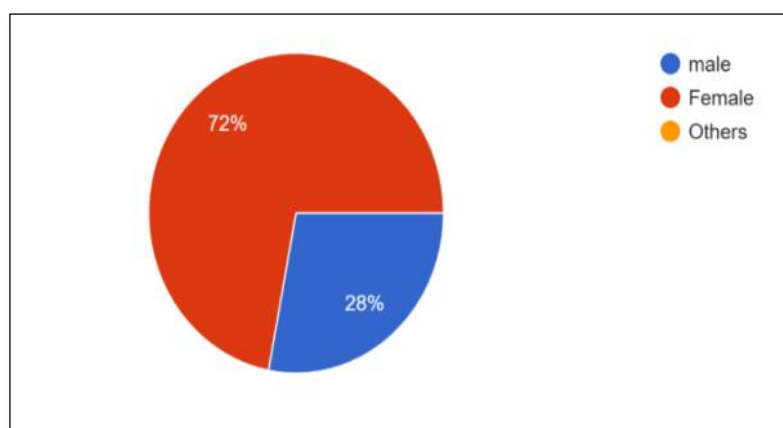
## Methodology

The study is descriptive and analytical. Primary data was used for the study. Additional information was collected from websites, journals etc. The primary data is collected with the help of a set of structured questionnaire which is distributed among 100 respondents. The data collected through questionnaire is classified and tabulated according to the need of the study. Tables and graphs are used for systematic presentation of collected data.

## Research Period

This study was conducted for a period of 1-3 months.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

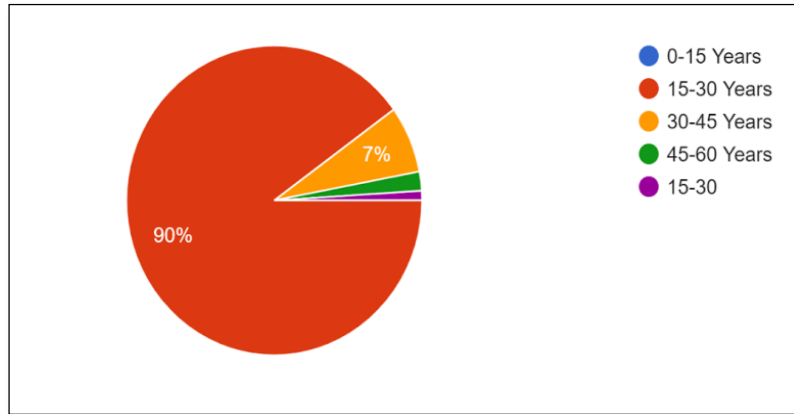


Source: Primary Data

**Figure A: Gender of the respondents**



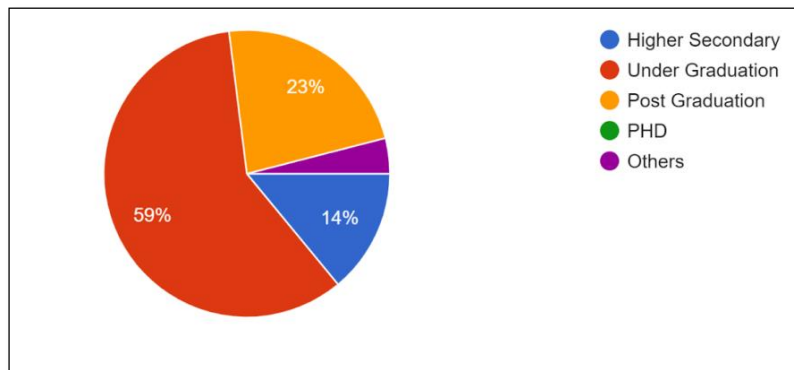
Table and graph shows that among 100 percentage respondents 72% are females and 28% are males.



Source: Primary Data

**Figure B: Age of the respondents**

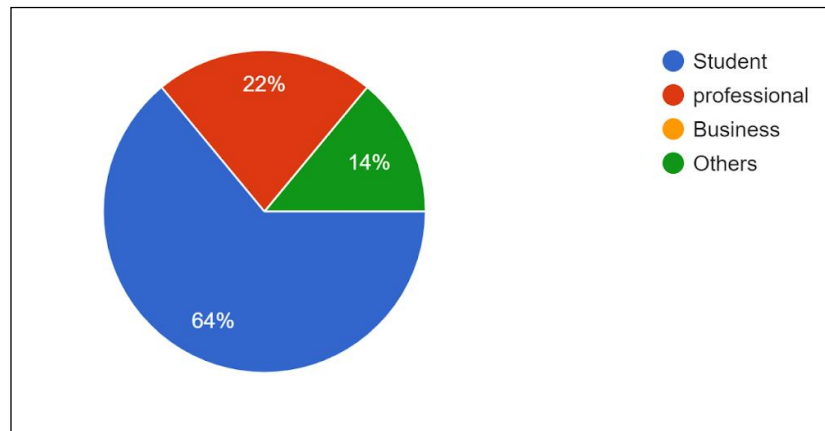
The table and graph reveals that 91% respondents are in between 15-30,7% are in between 30-45,2% respondents are range from 45-60 years.



Source: Primary Data

**Figure C: Qualification of the respondents**

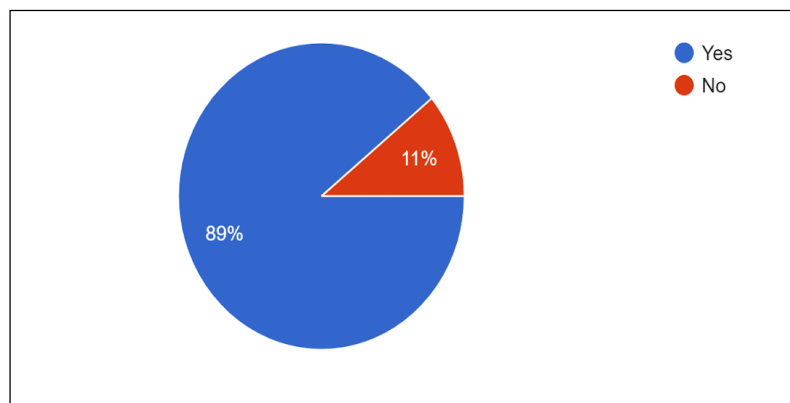
This table and graph reveals that 14% are having higher secondary qualification, 59% are graduates, 23% are post graduates, 4% belong to others.



Source: Primary Data

**Figure D: Type of respondents**

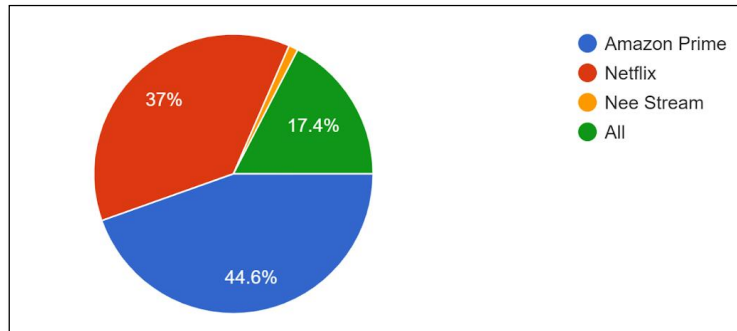
This table and graph reveals that 64% of respondents are students, 22% are professionals, 14% belong to others.



Source: Primary Data

**Figure E Usage of OTT Platforms**

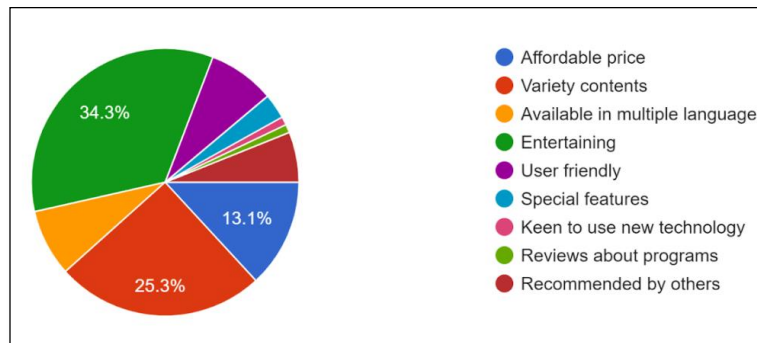
This table and graph reveals that 89% percentage of respondents are using OTT platforms and 11% are not using OTT platforms



Source: Primary Data

**Figure F: OTT Platforms used**

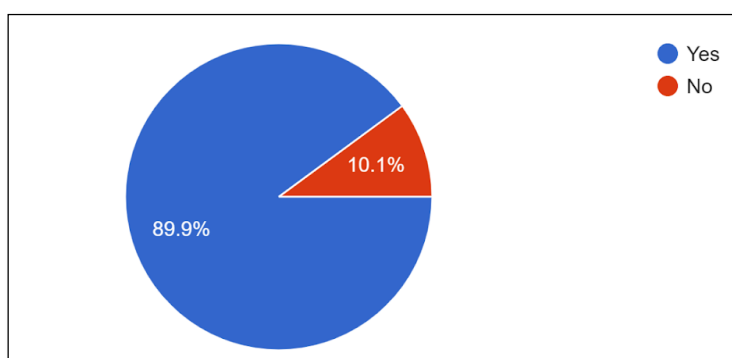
This table and graph shows that among 100% of respondents 44.6% of respondents are using Amazon prime, 37% are using Netflix, 1.1% are using Nee stream, 17.4% are using all of them.



Source: Primary Data

**Figure G: Reasons for usage**

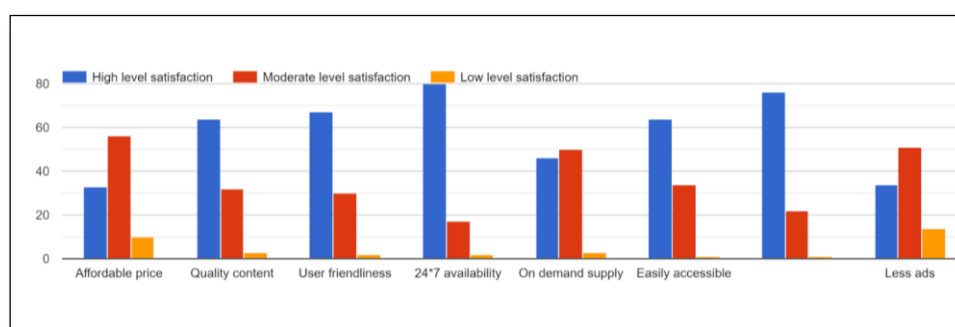
This table and graph shows that among 100% respondents 13.1% of respondents are using OTT platforms because of affordable price, 25.3% are using because of variety content, 8.1% are using because if available in multiple languages, 34.3% are using because of entertaining, 8.1% are using because of user friendliness, 3% are using because of special features, 1% are using because of keen to use new technology and reviews about programs, 6.1% are using by the recommendations.



Source: Primary Data

**Figure H :Satisfaction**

This table and graph shows that among 100% respondents 89.9% are satisfied with OTT platforms and 10.1% are not satisfied with OTT platforms

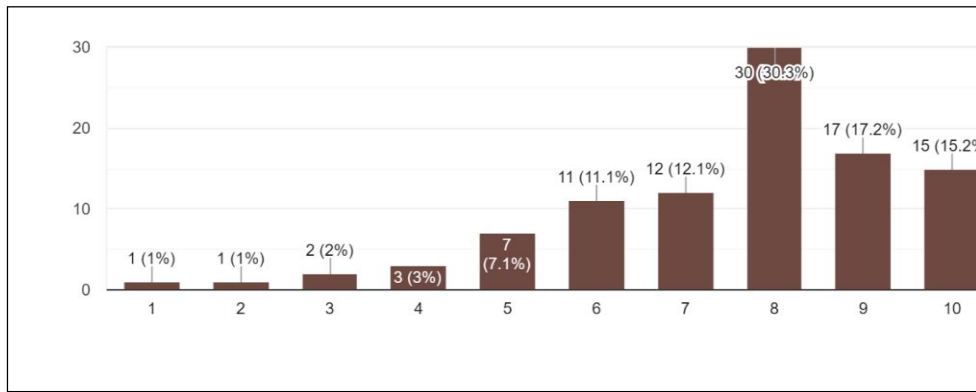


Source: Primary Data

**Figure I Evaluation of Satisfaction Level of OTT Platforms**

This table and graph shows that among 100 respondents regarding affordable price 33 respondents are highly satisfied, 57 are moderately satisfied and 10 have low satisfaction. About quality content 65 respondents are highly satisfied, 32 respondents are moderately satisfied, 3 respondents are having low satisfaction. Regarding user friendliness 68 respondents are highly satisfied , 30 respondents are moderately satisfied and 2 are having low satisfaction. About 24\*7 availability 80 respondents are highly satisfied ,17 are moderately satisfied and 3 are having low satisfaction. About on demand supply 47 are highly

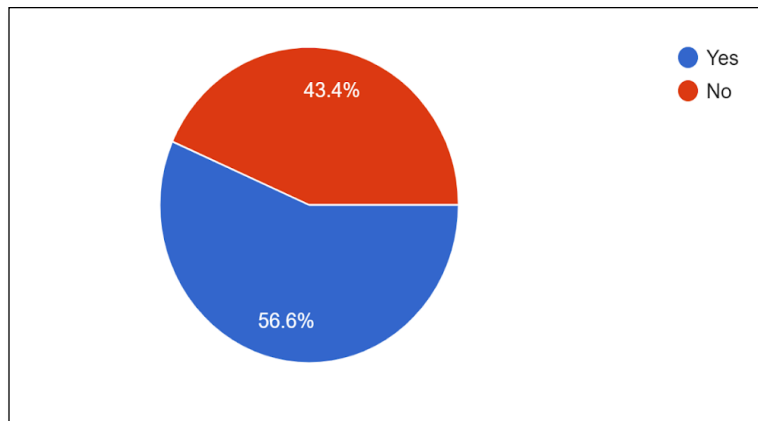
satisfied 50 are moderately satisfied and 3 are having low satisfaction. Regarding accessibility 65 are highly satisfied ,34 are moderately satisfied and 1 are having low satisfaction. On video and audio quality 77 are highly satisfied ,22 are moderately satisfied and 1 is having low satisfaction. Concerning less ads 34 are highly satisfied,52 are moderately satisfied and 14 are having low satisfaction.



Source: Primary Data

**Figure J : Rate of Satisfaction on OTT Platforms**

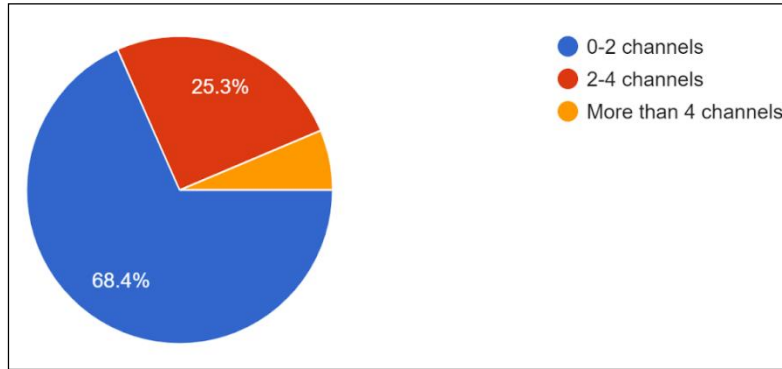
This graph shows that 93% of respondents are rating their satisfaction 5 and above.



Source: Primary Data

**Figure K: About Usage of Multiple OTT Platforms**

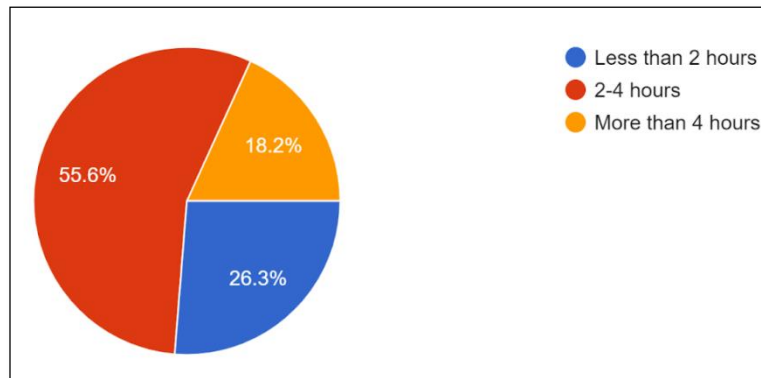
This graph shows that among 100% respondents 43.4% respondents are not using multiple OTT platforms and 56.6% are using OTT platforms.



Source: Primary Data

**Figure L: No of OTT Plaforms Subscribed**

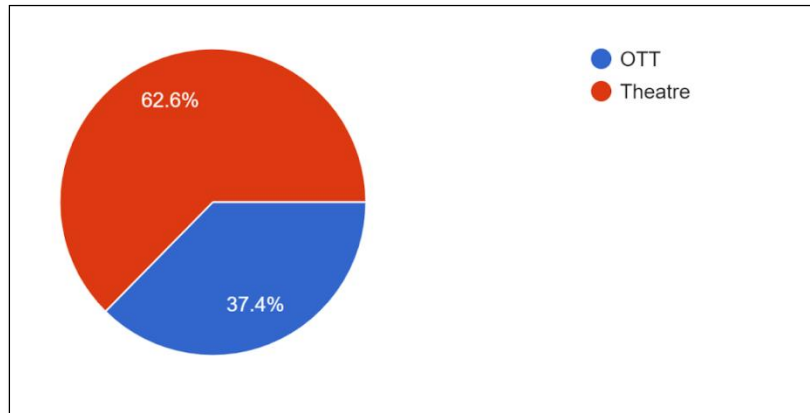
This graph shows that among 100% respondents are 68.4% respondents are subscribing to 0-2 channels, 25.3% are subscribing to 2-4 channels and 6.3% are only using more than 4 channels.



Source: Primary Data

**Figure M: No of OTT Plaforms Subscribed**

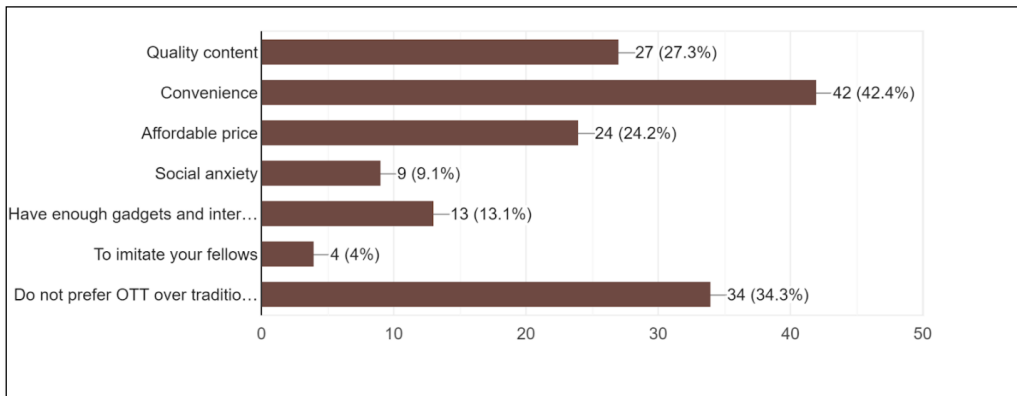
This graph shows that among 100% respondents 55.6% of respondents are using OTT platforms for 2 to 4 hours in a day, 26.3% of respondents are using OTT for less than 2 hours and 18.2% are using more than 4 hours.



Source: Primary Data

**Figure N: Consumer Preference of OTT Over Theatre**

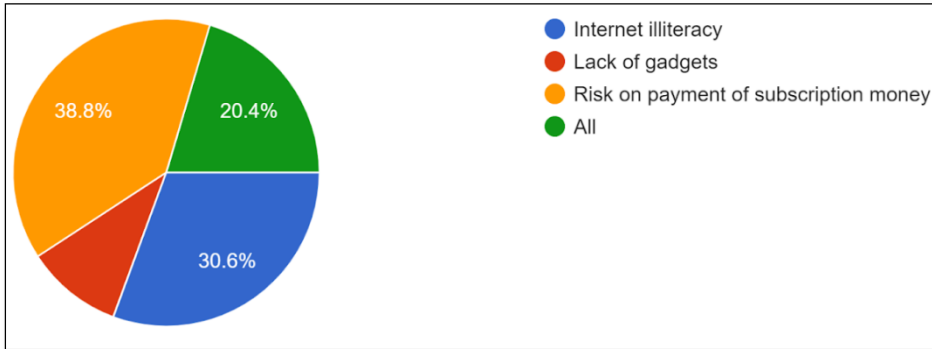
This graph shows that among 100% of respondents 62.6% of respondents shows preference towards theatre releases whereas 37.4 % selected OTT platforms.



**Figure O: Factors Affecting Consumers Preference On OTT Over Theatre**

This graph shows that among 100% respondents 42.4% of respondents choose OTT over theatre due to convenience, 27.3% respondents because of quality content, 24.2 % due to affordable price, 13.1% due to enough gadgets and

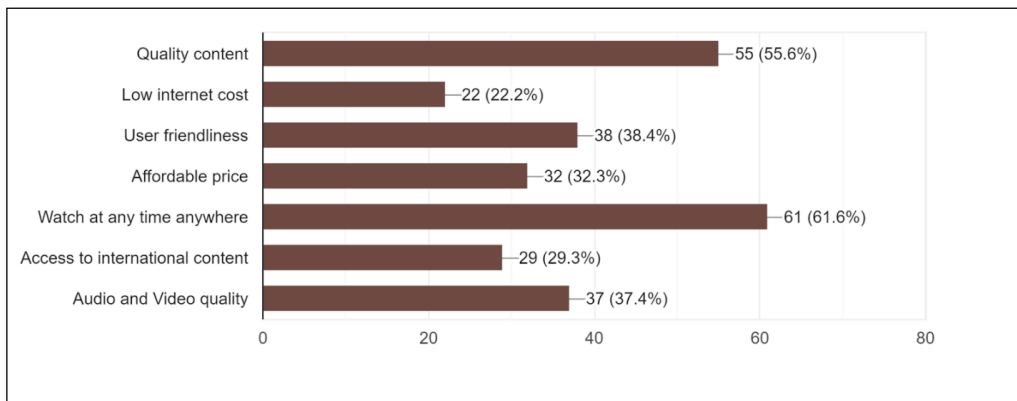
internet connection,9.1% due to social anxiety and 4 % to imitate others .While 34.3 % respondents do not prefer OTT over theatre



Source: Primary Data

**Figure P: Reason for Not Using OTT**

This graph shows that among 100 % respondents 38.8% of respondents are not using OTT because of risk on payment of subscription money,30.6% due to internet illiteracy ,10.2% due to lack of gadgets and 20.4 % due to all the given reasons.



Source: Primary Data

**Figure Q: Factors Affecting Choice of OTT Platforms**



This graph shows that among 100% of respondents 55.6% of respondents are influenced to OTT due to quality content,22.2% due to low internet cost,38.4% of respondents due to user friendliness ,32.3 % respondents due to affordable price,61.6% due to anytime anywhere accessibility ,29.3% due to access to international content and 37.4% due to audio and video quality.

### **Findings**

- 1) Majority of the respondents belongs to the age group of 15-30 categories.
- 2) More than half percentages of the respondents are female.
- 3) More than half percentages of the respondents are students.
- 4) Majority of the respondents are aware about OTT platforms.
- 5) More than half percentages of the respondents are not aware about the behaviour of OTT platforms.
- 6) Most of the respondents are using OTT platforms currently.
- 7) Around 89% of respondents are using OTT platforms.
- 8) Around 44.6% of respondents are subscribed by Amazon prime.
- 9) About 34.3% of respondents select the OTT platforms using by them, because it seen to be entertaining for them.
- 10) About 90% respondents satisfied with OTT platforms.
- 11) Majority of the respondents shows high level of satisfaction in factors such as 24\*7 availability, quality contents, and user friendliness.
- 12) Most of the respondents rate their satisfaction at the rate of 8%
- 13) About 60% of respondents are using multiple OTT services currently.
- 14) About 68% of respondents subscribed to 0-2 channels currently.
- 15) Around 90% use OTT platforms during the COVID.
- 16) About 79% of respondents show an increasing usage of OTT during lockdown.

- 17) About 56% respondents spend 2-4 hours on OTT platform.
- 18) Around 63% of respondents choose theatre over OTT platform.
- 19) Majority of respondents choose the OTT platform over traditional release due to convenience and quality contents.
- 20) More than 50% of respondents prefers free streaming with ads in OTT.
- 21) Majority of respondents came to know about OTT platforms by friends recommendation.
- 22) More than 60% of respondents prefer to go to theatre to watch movie with family and friends.
- 23) Around 39% of respondents not using OTT platforms due to risk on payment of subscription money.
- 24) Majority of the respondents prefer to watch movies on OTT platforms.
- 25) Quality content ,user friendliness ,any time any where accessibility audio and video quality are the major factors that influenced respondents to OTT.

### **Suggestions**

- OTT service providers should give more attentions to consumer reviews as it affect the consumers subscription towards OTT.
- OTT service providers should give more consideration to quality of content,accessibility, affordable price as these are the major factors affecting consumer choices of OTT.
- As most of the consumers came to know about OTT by friends recommendations, it would increase consumer base if OTT providers spend more on attractive advertisement .
- As majority of consumers are not willing to use OTT platforms due to risk on payment of subscription money,OTT service providers can take enough preventive measures to avoid risk on payment of subscription money.

## **Conclusion**

OTT Platforms are web based services offering video and audio streaming contents. OTT platforms such as Amazon prime, Netflix, TV, IPTV etc are increasingly becoming popular to a great extent. OTT platforms flourished more during the pandemic playing an essential role in the information revolution and development. We hope by now must have had a fair enough understanding of OTT platforms. So in this space we have learnt what OTT platforms are, how they work, their benefits and their future. And now we can surely conclude that OTT is the future of delivering online media content. There are numerous OTT platforms available in today. This will help you make a more appropriate decision. Additionally we have given a few tips and features to choose the best OTT platform and monetizing your video content.

The present study reflects that OTT platform services undertaking that development of the society and these activities have positively impacted the community. It is interred from the findings that the majorities of the respondents are well aware about each and every activity in relation to OTT platform and there are satisfied with those services provided by them.

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OTT platforms are milking the most of the lockdown.

Lata Jha, (2020)”: India is the world’s fastest growing OTT market:PWC report”

Rise of COVID as a catalyst in increasing adoption of OTT’S in India: A study of evolving consumer perception patterns and future business scope.

## INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

**Research Articles** (not exceeding 4000 words) should be the results of original, unpublished research work in various academic disciplines.

**Review articles** (not exceeding 4000 words) are expected to survey and discuss current developments in a field.

**Short Communication** (not exceeding 2000 words) are brief accounts on projects undertaken. They should include a brief abstract and an introductory paragraph

### Manuscript Preparation

The manuscript should be ordered as follows: Title page, abstract, key words, text, acknowledgements, references, figure and table legends, figures and tables. All manuscripts should be typeset in MS Word (Font: Times New Roman; Size: 12 points) double-spaced with at least 1" margin from all sides. Manuscript pages should be serially numbered.

**Title Page:** The first page of the article should contain the title of the paper, the names of authors, affiliations and addresses. The address of the corresponding author should be provided in full.

**Abstract:** The second page must contain an abstract of not more than 200 words and 3-5 keywords.

**Text:** The text of an article should be divided into Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, Discussion and Conclusion.

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### Journal article

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### Book

Bull AT (2004) *Microbial diversity and bioprospecting*. ASM press, New York

### Online document

Cartwright J (2007) Big stars have weather too. IOP Publishing PhysicsWeb.<http://physicsweb.org/articles/news/11/6/16/1>. Accessed 26 June 2007

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