

# ANURADHA ROY'S *ALL THE LIVES WE NEVER LIVED*; UNVEILING MARITAL ENTRAPMENT IN COLONIZED INDIA

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**Abstract** - The present study examined the grand issue of marital entrapment in colonial period India through the lens of Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Live*. The study employed Simone de Beauvoir's existentialism to analyze societal norms, gender dynamics, and power structure prevalent during colonial era, contextualizing the experiences of the protagonist within this framework. Harriet Taylor's concept of celebrating rationality in marriage also utilized to analyze Roy's narrative strategies and character development. The paper explores how Gayatri's story sheds light on the complexities of marriage and personal agency in a historical setting marked by colonialism and patriarchal dominance. By engaging with themes of identity, autonomy, and societal expectations, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between personal lives and historical forces in colonial India.

**Keywords**; marital entrapment, existentialism, colonialism and patriarchal dominance

**Abstrak** - Penelitian ini mengkaji isu besar jebakan perkawinan di masa kolonial India dalam *All the Lives We Never Live* karya Anuradha Roy. Kajian ini menggunakan eksistensialisme Simone de Beauvoir dalam menganalisis norma-norma masyarakat, dinamika gender, struktur kekuasaan yang lazim selama era kolonial serta kontekstualisasi segala problematika yang dihadapi tokoh protagonis dalam karya ini. Konsep Harriet Taylor merayakan rasionalitas dalam pernikahan juga digunakan untuk menganalisis strategi narasi dan pengembangan karakter oleh Anuradha Roy. Makalah ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana kisah Gayatri menyoroti kompleksitas pernikahan dan hak pilihan pribadi dalam latar sejarah yang ditandai dengan kolonialisme dan dominasi patriarki. Dengan mengangkat tema identitas, otonomi, dan ekspektasi masyarakat, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang persinggungan antara kehidupan pribadi dan kekuatan sejarah di masa kolonial India.

**Kata kunci**; jebakan perkawinan, eksistensialisme, kolonialisasi dan dominasi patriarki

## INTRODUCTION

The struggles of women during colonized India is a major theme that has been addressed in different works of literature to bring out the issues, oppression and resilience among women during this oppressed period in history. Women were discriminated against and marginalized from their colonizers and within their community. Colonial policies put in place by the British undermined women's roles and status within Indian society. Their freedom, education and individuality were restricted, and they were cultural and political symbols whose bodies and freedom were controlled for political gains.

In works like *"The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh"* by Mahasweta Devi, through the lens of Rukmani and Lachima's existence this novel portraying the life story of women from a low-class society of various groups of rural India with the owners having complete power and control over all things, be it matters of social or legal property in possession. And the case that stands out is this novel explores the repression of women's rights and the basic human undertaken by a group of high-class, and even political parties including government officers (Devi, 2003). *"The God of Small Things"* by Arundhati Roy exposed the complexities of gender and caste dynamics in India where

the life of the twin sisters, Estha and Rahel, who navigate the oppressive social structures that dictate their lives and relationships. Through their story, Roy exhibits the intersections of gender, class, and caste and the ways in which they shape women's experiences in Indian society. Their stories depict women who resist societal norms, asserting their rights and autonomy in the face of oppression (Roy, 1997).

The complex connection among gender, power, and resistance within a colonial context has been highlighted by the challenges faced by women in colonized India. By engaging with these works, the world can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of resistance in colonial contexts and their lasting impact on societies today. According to Partha Chatterjee (1989), "*At no period of life, in no condition of society, should a woman do anything at her mere pleasure. Their fathers, their husbands, their sons, are verily called her protectors; but it is such protections! Day and night must women be held by their protectors in a state of absolute dependence. A woman, it is affirmed, is never fit for independence, or to be trusted with liberty*". The quote strengthens the position of women in the circle of social life. No longer being treated as second-class citizens, women are positioned as those who have no rights over their own lives. Everything is arranged for the benefit of others and perpetuates women's position as oppressed objects.

The idea that women are never prepared to be independent is painfully disturbing and aids in restricting women's empowerment and freedom. This point of view disallows women from making their own choices and, as a result, infringes on their human rights by preventing them from leading an autonomous existence. It creates a pattern of dependence and subordination that limits women's opportunity for self-development, introspection, and self-realization.

It is possible to strengthen the voices and perspectives of disadvantaged groups by reading and studying literary works that focus on women and colonization. This gives women writers a platform to reclaim their stories and declare their agency. These narratives provide readers with the chance to identify the people who struggle to overcome patriarchal and colonial systems and to appreciate the bravery exhibited by women in the midst of struggle. "*All the Lives We Never Lived*" by Anuradha Roy sets another great motion articulates the complexities of marginalization and resistance. Roy challenges dominant narratives and offers a nuanced portrayal of the complexities of female agency and subjectivity. Furthermore, this novel additionally advocates the writer to explore the ways in which the legacies of colonialism continue to reverberate through generations, shaping individual identities and relationships. This study focuses on the grand issue of marital entrapment in colonial period India as reflected in *All The Lives We Never Lived* and specifically aimed at revealing Gayatri's brave journey in escaping a terrifying circumstance of social unfair treatment. It is expected that the results of this study can contribute a significant finding to the field of women empowerment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

"*Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*" by Rosemarie Tong (2009) explores feminist philosophy from several angles, including Harriet Taylor's advocacy of acknowledging rationality in marriage. Taylor's theories question established beliefs about marriage and support a more democratic and sensible approach to partnerships. According to Taylor (1994), "*The basic issue in this controversy was that, by law, on marriage a wife became sous couverture, thus losing her legal existence independent of her husband, and consequently was, among other limitations, unable to exercise in her own name any rights connected with property*". Taylor's statement reveals how women are treated by the legal institution; silenced. Not only facing the socio-cultural unwritten oppression but also unfairly treated injustice; forbid to participate in the democratic proces in a household. This idea is consistent with more general feminist criticisms of gender norms and the distribution of power in close relationships. The idea that respect, communication, and companionship between partners are crucial components of Taylor's concept of celebrating reason in marriage is one of its main features.

In the words of Tong, Taylor viewed marriage as a partnership built on intellectual and emotional equality, in which each partner is free to express their opinions and feelings without worrying about criticism or vengeance. The old patriarchal concept of marriage, which frequently minimizes women's voices and agency in favor of male domination, is challenged by this emphasis on reason and partnership. As Tong (2009) stated, "*In contrast, in "En- franchisement of Women," Taylor argued that women needed to do more than read books and cast ballots; they also needed to be partners with men "in the labors and gains, risks and remunerations of productive industry."* Thus, Taylor predicted that if society gave women a bona fide choice between devoting their lives "to one animal function and its consequence"<sup>33</sup> on the one hand, and writing great books, discovering new worlds, and building mighty empires on the other, many women would be only too happy to leave "home, sweet home" behind them". Tong highlights Taylor's argument that respecting logic in marriage requires recognizing women's contributions to the union and their intellectual potential. Rather than being limited to domestic work, women should be valued for their intellect, insight, and emotional depth.

How women treated in family; unfairly, abused, and silenced by the dominant party causes bigger problem in the society. Women with limited even no access to prove their existence tend to seek their own version of happiness by being exist. Simone de Beauvoir on *The Second Sex* (2010) mentioned that, "*In marrying, the woman receives a piece of the world as property; legal guaranties protect her from man's caprices; but she becomes his vassal. He is economically the head of the community, and he thus embodies it in society's eyes. She takes his name; she joins his religion, integrates into his class, his world; she belongs to his family, she becomes his other half*". Once a women got married, all new titles, new identity, new value labeled to her. Like it or not. Without given any room to grow her own interests, her own ability, her hobbies, her opinion, along

the way she will be the other in relation to men. Women will be defined in opposition to man as the norm and standard of humanity.

De Beauvoir through existentialism urges women to embrace their agency and reject their limitations and expectations of society. In her appeal for a radical rewriting of women's stories, Beauvoir empowers women to rebel against repressive systems and forge their own routes to satisfaction and self-actualization. Rather than dictating how women should behave, existentialist feminism is more of a reflection on life. It contains existentialism simply because Beauvoir links to the notion that experience is the primary building element of self-discovery. Thus, existentialist feminism is a school that critically examines what it means to be a woman.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology is a well-organized and systematic method of obtaining explanations to numerous issues. In order to obtain the most accurate results, a number of clearly defined methods and procedures must be followed throughout the research process (Oun & Bach, 2014). More precisely, the goal of the qualitative research method is to investigate and comprehend the intricacies of human behavior, experiences, and perceptions. It is a methodology utilized in the social sciences and humanities. It is distinguished by the focus it places on context, careful analysis, and the gathering of detailed, narrative data. Therefore, this kind of approach is crucial to learning about the human and social sciences and understanding how people think, particularly in domains where statistics are not employed at all (Anas & Ishaq, 2022). This study employs the qualitative descriptive as the least encumbered studies, compared to other qualitative approaches, by a pre-existing theoretical or philosophical commitment.

Closed reading, in which the focus is on appreciating the intricacy and beauty of the writing on the page. Though it's possible that meaning and sound collections, particularly in the case of poetry and drama, may be pertinent to the novel, further investigation is required before using the two previously mentioned critical theories (Greenham, 2019). Using the theory of social critics as a foundation, understanding how to use the socio-cultural context will provide advice during the initial stages of gathering primary data. The focus on marital entrapment that the main character, Gayatri, experiences will be examined within the framework of Harriet Taylor's rationality of marriage. In addition, if there is sufficient evidence, Simone De Beauvoir's existentialism will serve as a second tool to highlight the idea of women's struggles on *All the Lives We Never Lived*. Through a methodical approach, the study guarantees that the social critique principles pertaining to marginalized women in colonized India will fairly represent Anuradha Roy, the author of this work.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Women as the Second-Class Figure Within the Confines of Marital Entrapment.***

Anuradha Roy illustrates how a woman's marriage can turn into a major catastrophe through the life of Gayatri. The first half of the book depicts how difficult it was for women to grow and

accomplish personal goals in colonized India, as well as how unequal the access to opportunities was. Gayatri, the protagonist of the book, is a lady who rejects social expectations by moving away from her family to follow her artistic goals. Roy uses her experiences to emphasize the patriarchal standards that are common in Indian society, where women are supposed to put their responsibilities as wives and mothers before their own goals.

Gayatri surrounded by extremely narrow-minded people when it comes to women liberation, *"Daughters were meant to have talents; those that would work as bait to catch a husband"* (Roy, 2018), that is how the society valued a daughter. As a burden with a sole purpose in life; be a wife. A young Gayatri is a girl who passionate about art, creating art from scratch has been her source of happiness. But since her father's death all those opportunities to enjoy art vanished. *"It was decided by the family that she must be married off without delay; a young, fatherless daughter was too much of a responsibility for her brothers"* (Roy, 2018). The idea that a fatherless daughter puts too much on her brothers highlights the traditional duties that men are expected to play in providing for and protecting their female relatives. In this case, the brothers are left with the obligation of raising and providing for their daughter, and they could feel pressured to find her a spouse to relieve them of some of that load. This mindset emphasizes the gender norms and unequal power dynamics that frequently exist in families, when women are seen as dependents in need of male supervision and protection. The hasty decision-making to marry off a young daughter without a father also illustrates how little autonomy women have when it comes to making decisions about their own life. Gayatri's family's attempt to dictate her marriage outcome is a manifestation of a paternalistic mindset that puts an end to her autonomy and destroys her future around the desires and worries of her family.

Things are just getting worse for Gayatri as seen from the lines, *"Painting, singing, dancing, these are wonderful things. Everyone needs hobbies and then there are serious matters. Try and read something other than novels—I've got so many books and.. What about the history of India? Have you read the first chapter even? Think of Myshkin"*, (Roy, 2018), those lines show how low the position of a woman. There is no liberty to do things that are considered fun and joyful. Even things to like also criticized, decided by the male figure. Her husband pictures as the most logical person and other people must listen and do as he says. Gayatri is not only considered worthless by the husband but also the circle of his crowd, *"Study Indian dance? What is there to study, my friend? Dance was invented so that men can look at women, not for women to look at women"* (Roy, 2018). The phrase that was stated captures deep-rooted patriarchal views about women, dance, and male attention in the context of social standards. The tone of dismissal used to the concept of researching Indian dance highlights a limited and objectifying perspective that minimizes the importance and skill of dance to a spectacle for the amusement of men. The claim that dance was created so that men might gaze at women upholds the idea that women's bodies are objects of male pleasure and amusement.

Anuradha Roy presents an unsettling and backward viewpoint on gender, society, and dance that downplays the importance of dance as a medium for expression and social interaction on an artistic, cultural, and societal level. This perspective ignores the diversity, depth, and relevance of Indian dance traditions as well as the contributions of female artists and practitioners by promoting gendered stereotypes, objectification, and sexualization within the dance community. In favor of a more inclusive, equitable, and respectful approach that respects the abilities, agency, and creativity of every person involved in the practice and appreciation of dance, it emphasizes the significance of opposing and tearing down patriarchal norms and attitudes that control how dance is interpreted and appreciated.

Another character sets to picture how miserable to be alive, breathe as a woman. Lipi, the second wife of Myshkin's father also facing turbulences soon after she married. *"In a dim unarticulated way i sensed even at that age that there was something pitiable about Lipi's effortsto fit in and make everyone happy. For the first time in my life i had a sense of my own power"*, (Roy, 2018) Lipi who is a total stranger not only to the family but to the whole society trying so hard to fit in. But all her efforts seem to not working, even she's worthless to a little kid Myshkin. The treatment from the husband is simple terrible and freaking controlling. Lipi is being controlled from the very simple basic needs, *"You don't wear clothes of this kind, Lipi. You don't like them. My father said"* (Roy, 2018), Lipi is completely helpless, she has no right whatsoever over her own body. Once again, women treated as an object and these circumstances are maintained until it becomes a routine.

*"I know that in her later years Lipi spoke less and less, watchful, timid, retreating into her own inner world as if she was afraid that words, once out of her mouth, would come back sharpened to stab her"* (Roy, 2018). A sense of withdrawal and self-defense is conveyed by the idea of Lipi being cautious, shy, and withdrawing into her own inner world. It also relates to underlying fears or traumas that may have influenced Lipi's relationship with language and expression. The picture of Lipi speaking less and less suggests a slow deterioration in her verbal communication, possibly due to a lack of self-assurance or agency. The term "watchful" conveys a sense of alertness or caution, as though Lipi is continuously on the lookout for any threats or hazards that words might present. This increased prudence suggests that Lipi is hesitant to speak because of unhealed emotional scars or traumatic experiences.

L.M Barbee (1995) explained that Marital entrapment can be defined as a situation where one or both partners feel trapped or restricted in a marriage due to a lack of autonomy, personal fulfilment, or control over their own lives within the confines of the relationship. This can result from various factors such as societal expectations, gender roles, unequal power dynamics, cultural norms, or emotional manipulation within the marriage. Gayatri and Lipi experience all those marital entrapment their marriage. Gayatri was captivated by cultural norm, power tradition and emotional manipulation in her marriage. Meanwhile Lipi was trapped in frustrated, resentful surrounding where at the end her well-being is completely broken.

Gayatri and Lipi are two pictures perfect of Harriet Taylor's perspective on marriage which emphasized the importance of recognizing and addressing the power dynamics and inequalities that can exist within intimate relationships. Since the established gender roles, gender equality are completely out of the picture Anuradha Roy successfully brings the picture of women as the second-class party in a very unhealthy marital relationship.

### ***Gayatri Against the Male-Dominated World; Discovering the Self-Existence***

Gayatri, the protagonist of Anuradha Roy's book "All the Lives We Never Lived," is a shining example of resistance against the repressive powers of a society ruled by men. We see a woman who challenges social conventions and expectations in the sake of her own liberty and self-discovery via her story. Gayatri's path is one of bravery, tenacity, and finally, the search for one's own existence in a world that tries to contain her. Gayatri's character questions the conventional role of women in her society right from the start. She rejects the restrictions of marriage and children because she is a free-spirited and independent person who prefers to live a life driven by her interests and wants. Her choice to leave home and her son in pursuit of personal growth is a daring act of rebellion against cultural norms that aim to limit her to a set role.

*"I am not coming back. I am telling you this only so that you don't worry about me. Do not try to find me or stop me, please. I am twenty six, life is running away from me. I want more! There are things in us that we can not fight, however hard we try i have failed you and failed our child. Forgive me if you can" (Roy, 2018).*

Part of the letter as a sign of Gayatri leaving home above sounds melodramatic but extra powerful. Gayatri did not let other people's expectations stop her from pursuing her own self-existence. Gayatri becomes a symbol of strength and agency as she rebels against the limitations of a world ruled by men, defying social standards that aim to stifle her voice and limit female potential. She starts to reveal every aspect of her own ambitions and identity. Gayatri learns how the expectations put on her as a woman have formed and limited her via her interactions with men surround her. She experiences periods of suffering, longing, and, in the end, emancipation as she rejects the roles that have been placed upon her and embraces her actual self.

Gayatri's fearlessness demonstrates what existentialism's voice ought to be. The core element of de Beauvoir's existentialist theory is that, despite having inherent freedom, people must also face with the implications of that freedom in an uncertain and sometimes dangerous environment. Rather than being passive objects of their environment, she argues that people are active agents who have the power to shape their own existence by their decisions and actions. Gayatri's decision to move away from home hasn't completely changed things for the better. There are consequences. Being thousands of miles away from her sole child, Mhyskin, in this instance. While it can be difficult for a mother to be apart from her son, Gayatri's oppression is intolerable. She needs to look after herself.

Gayatri reveals all her journey through letters to her son and her friend. All hard work finally paid up. *"This is adventure, not abandonment. I want to eat life, grab everything new and taste it... I feel as my brain is waking up again. I'll work at last. Properly. In a new way. Really work so i am painting with concentration and intensity"*, (Roy, 2018).

This quotation expresses the speaker's deep sense of rebirth and waking. Declaring that this is an adventure rather than an abandonment implies a conscious and intentional departure from the known and comfortable in favor of the unexplored and unknown. The speaker conveys a desire to completely enjoy life's richness and diversity, embrace its experiences, and to seize new possibilities with enthusiasm and passion. To "eat life, grab everything new, and taste it" is an image that expresses a desire for growth, experience, and knowledge. It represents an eagerness to interact with the world in a deeper and more meaningful way, as well as an attitude of curiosity and openness to the opportunities that lie ahead. The speaker seems to have a strong desire for fulfillment and to accept obstacles and uncertainty as a necessary part of the path, as evidenced by her metaphorical hunger for life.

Anuradha Roy ended her story with a heart-felt ending, where Gayatri finally make a living on her own even people appreciate her for her work.

*"Did i tell you one of my painting hangs in the museum now? Would you have thought it possible? I steal in every now and then. I slow down when i reach the room where i know it is and wait linger over the other paintings that come before and my heartbeat keeps growing faster. 'Still Life With Missing Woman' it says. By Gayatri Rozario. It makes me go funny as if I'm puffing up and dissolving in a puddle all at once"*, (Roy, 2018)

There seems to be wonder, disbelief, and maybe even a trace of nostalgia or desire in the passage above. Gayatri Rozario is surprised and proud that one of her paintings is on display in a museum. "Would you have thought it possible?" implies that she would have been apprehensive about her talent being acknowledged and appreciated in such a prominent and public environment. Meanwhile the title "Still Life With Missing Woman" prompts Gayatri to consider identity, presence, and absence in her artwork. One could interpret the concept of a missing woman in a still life painting as a metaphor for themes of longing, loss, and the pursuit of meaning amid nothingness. It asks the reader to reflect on the meaning of both the present and the absent, as well as how absence may define and mold our understanding of reality.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study examined marital entrapment and existentialism in "All The Live We Never Lived" by Anuradha Roy. As the main character works through the difficulties in her personal life, Gayatri encounters existentialist ideas and the idea of marital entrapment. Roy examines the issue of being tied to a marriage that conceals one's actual aspirations and wants through the character of Gayatri. Gayatri fights to escape the confines of cultural conventions and expectations and ends up in a loveless marriage to a man who does not get her. Through the lens of one woman's quest for self-awareness and personal fulfillment, Anuradha Roy offers a compelling examination of existentialist theory and marital confinement. This is a thought-



provoking, introspective book that asks readers to consider the nature of their own lives and how they might remove social expectations from their lives so they can follow their own goals and ambitions.

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