

Feminist Utopia or Dystopia: A Comparative Study of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland and Suniti Namjoshi's The Mothers of Maya Diip

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Abstract

There is no society in the world however developed it may be or how many times it has undergone revolutions, in which women are treated as equals. A woman remains as a woman till today. She remains as 'the other sex' due to the man-made gender-gap.

With the rise of Feminist movement, feminist utopian narratives also became popular. Works of 'Utopian feminist writers' have been discussed and studied individually but a comparison has rarely been drawn between two works from different timeline and different cultures and attempts have rarely been made to relate the struggles and problems across periods and cultures.

The paper employed comparative and analytical method to study Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland which grew out of the Nineteenth century and early Twentieth century American women's movement and Suniti Namjoshi's The Mothers of Maya Diip, a Twentieth century work of an Indian modern woman who attacks patriarchy and its established ethos. Attempts has been made to understand if these worlds they created in their books are truly utopia or dystopia. The themes and motifs, narrative structures and techniques in both the novels and the feminist discourses employed by each author, are analysed and compared, providing insights into the authors' perspectives and societal contexts in which they were written.

The study established that the supposed utopian all-female world - Gilman's Herland and Namjoshi's Maya Diip that they created in their respective works were not rid of flaws such as inequality, hypocrisy, hierarchical power structures and limitations imposed on individual autonomy and they indeed are Dystopias, which disprove the escapism of fantasy but represents confrontation with a possible reality.

Keywords: Feminism, Utopia, Dystopia

Introduction

Simone De Beauvoir in 1947 in her book 'The Second Sex' wrote, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." This line echoes the thoughts of many feminist thinkers and writers who set forth in a journey in a patriarchal social setup in search for the complex answer to the simple question, "What is Woman?" Feminism has been a far reaching movement of the 20th century forth. Its influence is felt in every aspects of social, political, and cultural life. Instead of it being an internalized, practised or actualized belief or pattern of our human mindscape, it remains as a forceful idea yet to unleash all its strength. Feminism has

been attacked more than it is welcomed. There continues to be conflict, debate, and discussion over the very usefulness or relevance of the term.

Throughout history, there have seen many different kinds of women's movements, some with goals to change and improve women's position within a particular society, some to conserve the existing gendered status quo, and others to undo changes made. Within these movements there have always been conflicting ideals, goals and perspectives. Efforts made by women for better treatment at the hands of men or demand for equality in all spheres of life have diversified and taken different paths and actions over the years. Oppression of women has a long history and it is only in the 20th century that feminism has been considered organized.

From ancient civilizations to post-revolution France, rulers implemented laws that regulated women's marital, sexual, and reproductive practices, making them subjects of their husbands and fathers as well as of their kings. All through history women have been subordinated and treated as an object of procreation. As education of women and access to social life began in earlier centuries, women have realized how they, as women, had been treated in the male dominated world. Such realizations brought feminist movements beginning in the mid 1550s England. The period from 1550 to 1700 is known as 'early feminism'. During that period, the doors of education and employment were opened to women and much activism ensued in England and other European countries. Subsequently feminism as a social and political movement spread to other countries.

Feminist movement became more forceful and a widespread phenomenon in the 18th century with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). This marked the beginning of Modern Feminism and subsequently what is known today as 'first wave feminism'. The First Wave focused against stereotyping women's nature as poignant, agonizing and intuitive, and suggests that women should aspire as well as demand the privilege and prestige that society endows men with. In another word, women should enjoy social, legal, and intellectual equality with men. It never demanded women leaving the domestic sphere or anything radical as the right to vote. Then, came the suffragist movement around the 1st World War and eventually women in US got the right to vote in 1918 and the UK in 1928.

The 'Second wave feminism' was a period which saw many divergences in the rise of feminism as a theory. 'Second Wave Feminism' is a phenomena of 1960s and 70s, where women started articulating their desires and views on many social and political levels. The theorizing of feminism began with Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) in which she describes women as the 'Other'. It was in France that feminism shaped up as a theory. Feminist literary criticisms properly begins in the aftermath of 'second wave' feminism.

Post-feminism or 'third wave feminism' emerged in the late 1970s gaining momentum in the 1980s. They elevated the issues concerning women from different views such as the issues of the coloured women and lesbians.

Given these arguments on how women have been subjugated all through history of mankind, feminist writers take up utopian fiction as a way to depict a world free from all male atrocities. But, like feminism, utopia is not free from problems and contradictions. Generally, utopia is an ideal community or society possessing a perfect socio-politico-legal system. The word was imported from Greek, by Sir Thomas More for his 1516 book *Utopia*, describing a fictional island in the Atlantic Ocean. The term has been used to describe both intentional communities that attempt to create an ideal society, and fictional societies portrayed in literature. These ideal societies as they are depicted in utopian novels are often set in the

future and they are contrasted to the actual society that the novel's protagonist is a member of. Many writers like Samuel Butler, William Morris, Edward Bellamy, Aldous Huxley and others have also written utopian fictions following Thomas More's publication of *Utopia*. However the term 'utopia' also gives rise to another term 'dystopia', which is in literature, an often futuristic society that has degenerated into a repressive and controlled state, though under the guise of being utopian. It can be regarded as a sort of negative utopia.

With the rise of Feminist Movement, feminist utopian narratives also became popular. Feminist utopias imagine a society without gender oppression, envisioning a future or an alternative reality where men and women are not stuck in inequality. Some of these utopias project sex role reversals; some create women's lands separate from the male dominated present through time and space, and some attempt to erase gender differences by extermination of men and male values. These literary utopias form an important site for women's struggle for autonomy and equality, in addition to being an impetus and product of twentieth century feminism. In these utopias, in fact, a patriarchal vision is replaced by a matriarchal vision in which men have been eliminated, but the image and the roles of women only appear to be new because, in reality, these women in power blindly repeat and ape male roles, indicating the incapacity and impotence of these women to think independently, the need to relate to the male world in order to define themselves as a consequence of historical prolonged subjugation.

The end of the 1970s and especially in the last three decades of the 20th century, there has been a considerable flourishing of utopian and science fiction writings by women. This genre is seen by writers both as a privileged strategy for deconstructing the patriarchal system and as a fertile ground for narrative and stylistic experimentation, searching for a female utopian language. It reveals not only the desire to criticize and deconstruct the status quo, but also, more importantly, the desire to present a world which is radically different from the present: that is, a world no longer structured on the rigid traditional division of sexual roles, a world capable of giving voice to the 'female territory of difference'.

We can make a distinction between utopias only populated by women and separatist utopias where the female utopian community is rigorously divided from the male community, which has dystopian characteristics. There has been much debate about these utopias, because, far from proposing alternative realities due to their extreme radicalism, they use mental formulas and frameworks which man always applies when dealing with woman.

This paper discussed works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman – 'Herland' and Suniti Nam Joshi – 'The Mothers of Maya Diip', with an effort to understand if the worlds they had created were Utopias or Dystopias.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Vision of the World and Themes in Herland

Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a prominent American sociologist, novelist, writer of short stories, poetry and nonfiction, and lecturer of social reform. Many people regard her as a utopian feminist during a time when her accomplishments were exceptional for women, and she served as a role model for future generations of feminist. She has been regarded by many as an early theorist of the feminist movement. She wrote over two hundred short stories and some ten novels. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was born in Hartford, Connecticut, on July 3, 1860 the daughter of Frederic Beecher Perkins who abandoned his wife, Mary Perkins when Charlotte was 6 year old.

Gilman believed in economic independence for women and argued for changes in traditional gender roles. Throughout her life, she remained committed to social reform, advocating for women's suffrage, access

to education and equality in the workplace. She passed away on August 17, 1935, leaving behind a legacy of feminist thought and activism.

The book 'Herland' was published in 1915. In the story three young men, Vandyk Van Jennings, Terry Nicholson and Jeff Margrave, discover a peaceful, lost civilization, populated entirely by women who reproduce parthenogenetically. There are no wars, no disease and motherhood is considered as divine. The men are initially fascinated by the women's society but struggle to understand and adapt to its principles of equality, cooperation and pacifism. Each man reacts differently to the matriarchal society they encounter. Van embraces the culture and forms close bonds with the women, advocating for mutual respect and understanding between the genders. Terry driven by his chauvinistic beliefs sees Herland as an opportunity for conquest and domination. He clashes with the women and refuses to acknowledge their equality. Jeff is more open minded and curious, but he also struggles to reconcile his preconceived notions of gender roles with the reality of Herland.

As the story unfolds, the men learn valuable lessons about gender, society, and the potential for a more equitable world. They witness the strength, intelligence, and compassion of the women of Herland and begin to question their own assumptions about gender roles and relationships. In the end, the men are faced with a choice; to return to their patriarchal society or to stay in Herland and embrace its principles of equality and co-operation.

The Women of Herland

As in her other writings, Charlotte Perkins Gilman has shown in Herland how her society is unjust to women and does not allow them to achieve their full human potential. Because women are limited to this domestic world, they are made out to be less 'fully human' than men in their potential for development. From this we learn that, according to Gilman, if the chance is given, women can embrace the whole of life just as much men. The women in Herland, who are strong, intelligent and self-reliant, are the fictional embodiment of this point. The women of Herland continually defy the expected norms of female behaviour in both the turn of the century and the present day world. They have short hair, their manner of dress is based on comfort and function, they are naturally athletic and physically strong, they are all highly educated and have specialized jobs in the community, their self-esteem is not dependent on validation by men, and they are assertive in setting and maintaining boundaries. As Vandyk, the narrator observes:

They were not young. They were not old. They were not, in the girl sense, beautiful. They were not in the least ferocious. And yet, as I looked from face to face, calm, grave, wise, wholly unafraid, evidently assured and determined, I had the funniest feeling—a very early feeling—a feeling that I traced back and back in memory until I caught up with it at last. It was that sense of being hopelessly in the wrong that I had so often felt in early youth when my short leg's utmost effort failed to overcome the fact that I was late to school (Herland, 2008).

In Herland, Gilman brings out gender as a social construct and what it means to be a 'woman' in a world where a female is not expected to represent an idealized picture that is forced upon her. What develops is a race of mothers, warriors and intellectuals that are free from any sexual stereotypes.

The women in Herland are able-bodied fighters, and they are not weighed down by the petty squabbles that the men expected. They are skilled warriors, foresters and hunters. The women have athletic figure which are not thought attractive compared to the delicate Western ideal. In the story, when the three male characters are imprisoned by the Herlanders, their hair grows long. Charlotte Perkins Gilman here seems to be symbolically linking them to women-kind. Gender reversal is used throughout in the novel in order

to bring out her point: the women have short hair, the men have long hair; the women teach while the men learn; the women are physically stronger than men, etc. All three of the male characters in the novel start out with the assumption of female inferiority but they eventually had to alter these world views as they come and deal with the Herlandian women. The women of Herland pose many questions about the western world's segregation and stratification of gender.

Social and political structure of Herland

In Herland, the inhabitants live happy, prosperous lives, in a society that is well-ordered, technologically-advanced, attractive, peaceful, non-hierarchical, non-competitive and pollution-free; built on the principles of co-operation and sisterhood and devoted to the needs of children. There is no crime or poverty and even accidents are few. Rooted in Gilman's dissatisfaction with the present business system and corporations, Herland presents industrious cooperation that forges a non-hierarchical community offering an alternative that is different from the present society controlled by men. Herland is organized along socialist lines and represents an idealized form of how society should behave. Herland is organized more as a family than as a state, each member is happy to sacrifice for the greater good.

From the communal farming of the forests to the common education of the young, Herland is organized around the principle that work and reward are to be shared by all, to the maximum benefit of the greatest number. Herlandian society is therefore highly rationalized. The entire community deals with internal problems, without favouritism, individual ambition, or family feeling interfering and reach the most rational solution.

Perhaps the most striking example of Herland's rational society is the way the women calmly embrace the population control required to sustain the population on their isolated plateau. Although many women would prefer to have multiple children, they are limited to just one, and some are forbidden to reproduce at all so that bad qualities may be 'bred out' of the population. Disease, crime, war, pollution and poverty are unknown in Herland.

Sanctity of Motherhood in Herland

One of Gilman's most evident concerns projected in her sociological writings including the novel Herland is the notion of motherhood and womanhood. Women, who are mothers, are expected to be responsible not just for childbearing but also childcare. However, in Herland's utopian society, the responsibility of parentage and childcare is privatized and shifted solely to those who are capable as it is considered a supreme task. Women in Herland are not expected to care for their children if they feel they are not prepared to do so. The women of Herland have a nearly religious attitude toward motherhood.

The rationality and the constant drive for self-improvement that mark Herland's culture are meant to be in the service of the overarching ideal of motherhood. The miraculous ability of the women of Herland to conceive children on their own leads them to see motherhood as the central aspect of their beings—their greatest duty and their greatest honour. They think of God as a sacred mother, a personification of the love that pervades the whole universe. One of the sharpest contrasts Gilman draws is between the judgmental, patriarchal male God of Western monotheism and the nurturing, mothering, female spirit of Herland's religion.

Each child has a whole country of mothers, and each woman has millions of objects for her boundless love. In a society that truly values mothers and children, Gilman suggests, children are not possessions, and motherhood is not merely incidental to a woman's sexual being.

Contrasts between Herland and the outer world

In Herland, Gilman contrasts the way things are done in Herland and the way things are done in the outer world where the three male protagonists came from. At first, these contrasts seem neutral, the incidental differences any two cultures would have. As the men become more familiar with Herland, however, a pattern emerges. In the novel, Vandyk observes that Herland is very different from their assumptions:

We had expected a dull submissive monotony, and found a daring social inventiveness far beyond our own, and a mechanical and scientific development fully equal to ours. We had expected pettiness, and found a social consciousness beside which our nations looked like quarrelling children-- we had expected jealousy, and found a broad sisterly affection, and a fair-minded intelligence, to which we could produce no parallel. We had expected hysteria, and found a standard of health and vigour (Herland, 2008).

Another example is the contrast drawn in the matter of the domestication of animals. Herland's cats are model citizens, intelligent, healthy, and beautiful. They have been systematically bred for good behaviour, chasing rodents only and leaving birds alone.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman also depicts astounding differences in Herland, a matriarchy juxtaposed to the patriarchies that dominate the outside nations. The male visitors are Christians, who are adjusted to the worship of a vengeful, masculine god. In contrast, the religion of Herland reveres a "Loving Power," who is a benevolent mother. In contrast to the outside world, Herlanders do not punish children or criminals. They believe that crime is a disease to be treated.

In any realm in which there is a contrast between the customs of Herland and those of the outer world, those of Herland inevitably appear to be more rational and more effective. At every stage of the novel, Gilman contrasts a society built on reason, equality, and cooperation—all standards we claim to value—with one organized along the lines we have in fact chosen: tradition, inequality, and competition.

Human relationships in Herland

In Herland, Gilman also explores the nature of human relationships. As the male protagonists begin to befriend and eventually fall in love with Herland women, the nature of the man-woman relationship is explored in a new way. The male protagonists in the novel are challenged to think outside "the right minds". In a world without heterosexual traditions, the three male adventurers lose their sense of identity and feel "like a lot of neuters". "There was no accepted standard of what was 'manly' and what was 'womanly'".

In Gilman's Herland, the Virgin birth capacity makes heterosexuality non-existent and allows Gilman the opportunity to re-imagine a new structure for human relationships. In the absence of heterosexuality, the institution of patriarchy-- home, marriage and family -- are gone. In Herland, the physical and psychic aspects of intimacy are not explored. The erotic energy in Herland is removed as it affects every aspects of life. The primacy of the personal is subsumed by the collective and even procreativity is manifested and flattened into universal motherhood. Passion, fear and grief are absent emotions in Herland.

Vandyk and Ellador, in the absence of sexual eroticism, ultimately find a place of deep and profound connection. The two got married at the request of Vandyk since Ellador knows no concept of marriage. Their relationship is part of the main focus in the novel. Gilman describes their relationship as those of two best friends. They have utmost respect for each other and their ideas. This symbolizes the relationship between man and woman that Gilman sees as perfect. They are connected with minds and souls, not just physical bodies.

Suniti Namjoshi's Vision of the World and Themes in The Mothers of Maya Diip

Suniti Namjoshi has been called a writer of contemporary post-colonial transnational literature, an expatriate Canadian South Asian author currently living in England, an Indian English writer, a fabulist, fantasy writer, and mythmaker, an auto-ethnographer, an allegorical fabulist, and a diasporic, Indian lesbian-feminist author. She was born in Bombay, India, in 1941, the daughter of Captain Manohar Vinayak Namjoshi, a Senior Test Pilot who was killed when his plane crashed in 1953, and Sarojini, née Naik Nimbalkar.

She was born into a high caste Hindu family. She is a lesbian with no history of heterosexuality and was accepted by her family as a lesbian on conditions that she was discreet about it. She was educated in English in which she writes her texts, and also writes Hindi and speaks Marathi. She published her first book, *Poems*, through the Writers Workshop, Calcutta in 1967. In fact it was her move to the United States, to Missouri, to take a Public Administration course in 1968 which initiated her progressive understanding and insight into feminist and sexual politics. Until then she had worked in a prestigious position for the Indian Administration Service. In 1968, in Missouri she suffered from “culture shock” during which she felt lost without the privilege which her social position brought her in India. She settled in Montreal in 1969 to study for a Ph.D. in English Literature at McGill University and resigned from the Indian Administrative Service.

Through her writings, she explores themes of female empowerment, equality and the struggles faced by women in society. Namjoshi's stories often feature strong female characters. Who navigate complex social landscapes with resilience and wit, offering readers alternative perspectives on gender dynamics and advocating for greater gender equality.

Namjoshi feels that there is the existence of limiting systems of thought and power, in patriarchy and imperialism, which circumscribe women, lesbians and colonial subjects. Despite her national and cultural awareness, illustrated by the name of her semi-autobiographical text *Because of India*, Namjoshi's concerns concentrate on the issues of women across cultures.

The importance of Namjoshi's works is that she suggests a vision of a feminist community where there is an acceptance of the equality of all humans. Her community is cross-cultural and no one cultural perspective is prioritized. It consists of people of different races, sexes and sexual preferences. This is achieved through the understanding that all humans exist through interaction and mutual influence. Through her revisions of the structure of discourse she produces a text which is based upon these very principles, that is, mutual influence from a community of texts without boundaries and hierarchy. The textual characteristics in turn allow the concepts of feminist self and community to be expressed and developed without limitation from patriarchal constraints. The assumption made throughout Namjoshi's writing is that patriarchy is a negative system that needs to be changed.

The Mothers of Maya Diip— an overview

Like Herland, the story of *The Mothers of Maya Diip* begins with the coming of outsiders- Jyanvi, Blue Donkey and Valerie to Maya Diip, a place cut off from the outside world for a long time. They come to Maya Diip, an imaginary land off the west coast of India on the invitation of the Ranisaheb. Ranisaheb is the supreme mother who rules the land with the help of the Guild of Therapists, the Guild of Poets and the Guild of Servants of Goddess. These Guilds have different functions in the power structure of Maya Diip. The Poets' Guild is the mouthpiece of the matriarch or the supreme mother. The Guild serves the function of media in the real world, the Guild of the servants of Goddess acts as the voice of religion. It is the

equivalent of a religious institution or a head. In the Mayan society, the Guild of the Therapists deals with all forms of crimes of passion and also obstruction of Mayan customs. This Guild acts as a police force of the present day.

The state is an island cut off from the rest of the world and the inhabitants are lesbians except the ‘pretty boys’, the male children who are milked for sperm when they are fourteen years old, and then left to die. The real world is a heterosexual world and follows the patriarchal social setup. Sex and sexual orientations of the mothers is discussed freely in this novel. Childbirth and child rearing is state controlled. It means that procreation is controlled by the state and not a single Mayan dared to go against the rules set by the state. For a heterosexual woman like Valerie, Mayan ways are strange and she feels that the Mayans do not know the pleasure of sex. Baby boys are nurtured and once they reach the age of fourteen, their semen is taken. The semen thus collected becomes state property and is distributed to women who can become mothers. The Mayan mothers do not consider the pretty boys as their own children and consider them as necessary evils.

Maya Diip is a queendom. Though the Oracle chooses the next successor to the throne it should be from the bloodline of the Matriarch. And the Oracle is manipulated by the Matriarch according to her convenience. The Matriarch chooses Saraswati as her new successor. But her two others daughters, Shyamila the civil and Pramila the poet, conspire against her. With the help of Sarla Devi, the chief of the Guild of the servants of Goddess, the two daughters abandon the Matriarch, Saraswati, Jyanvi, Valerie and the Blue Donkey and they are banished from the queendom. Hence they head for the forest.

It is in the forest that the exiles learn about the existence of Ashagad. Ashagad is a place ruled by Asha, the banished daughter of the Matriarch. They have their own set of rules and laws. They enjoy their own myths and legends. In short, Ashagad is a society of males which is quite like a dream to the Matriarch as she had never envisioned the possibility of an all-male social structure. One similarity between these societies is the importance of motherhood. In Ashagad, boys are trained to become mothers. They must face tests and qualify to become mothers. They are like Grade C mothers in Maya, who act as caretakers and take up the burden of childbearing. In Ashagad, motherhood is an important aspect of life. Since they are all males, they cannot hope to become biological mothers but they pray to the tree of life under which they find babies abandoned by the Mayans.

A reader would agree that *The Mothers of Maya Diip* is set in the future. It is evident from the fact that male Androids come to Ashagad in response to the SOS beam sent out by Valerie from her solitary confinement. The male androids are traders and they want to recruit young Ashans. They are equipped with the most sophisticated weapons and they follow a strict military regime. Though they are androids they uphold the ideals of a male dominated society. They find it ridiculous to learn that Ashans love to be mothers. They force Ashagad to come into a trade agreement. When all talks fail, they depose Asha “for obstructing the cause of democracy and justice” (MMD,1989). For long Maya Diip has been a forbidden land; this is just the opportunity the outsiders are looking for to intrude. They arrest Asha, the Matriarch and other ladies for not giving in to their demands.

The androids are, in fact, an abandoned experiment of an advanced nation. They treat the helicopter as a mother which feeds them and turned them into T.V. heroes. As life models were not available they emulate T.V. heroes because they have videotapes of such heroes on board the helicopter. They are traders and they plan to sell their captives to the land of paradise where there is a huge demand for mothers. Before they could trade, their helicopters crash-land on the land of Paradise.

As soon as they land in Paradise, they are wooed by the gallants. Later on they come to learn that there is an acute shortage of mothers in Paradise. Taking note of this situation, the Matriarch strikes a deal with the queen of Paradise to regain her authority. It is agreed that the gallants could have some of the mothers of Maya for their services. Plans to invade Maya Diip are elaborately carried out. Then the matriarch comes to Maya Diip with an army of gallants from Paradise.

Without bloodshed, the Matriarch regains MayaDiip with the help of the gallants. After the law and order has been restored in Maya, the Matriarch decides to retire in the woods choosing Jyanvi, a non-mother and an outsider as her successor to the throne.

Four models of human society: social structure

Maya Diip or Maya, in short, is a lesbian community headed by a Matriarch. It is a matriarchal society where men are the “other sex” and are used for the benefit of the women in the society. All the women in Maya Diip are mothers. There are no fathers. Pretty boys from whom they take the sperm to conceive do not become biological fathers. They are used first and discarded.

Ashagad, founded by its ruler Asha is quite the opposite of Maya Diip in its social formation. Though a woman rules Ashagad, her subjects are all male. Abandoned pretty boys, who are useless to Maya Diip, are the subjects of Ashagad.

Paradise serves as the third alternative society in the novel. The society of Paradise is a bit of both Maya Diip and Ashagad. It is believed that the founder of paradise was a Mayan Princess who set forth in search of beauty and founded Paradise. Hence, the two sexes namely the mother and the gallant are given the same feminine gender. It is not sure, like Ashagad, whether Paradise follows the same pattern of succession to the throne like that of Maya Diip. Yet a queen rules over Paradise and she takes care of all the happenings in Paradise.

The outside world from where Valerie, Jyanvi, the Blue Donkey and the androids come, draws the line of comparison between the three matriarchal societies and the Patriarchal society the outsiders belong to. Namjoshi does not oppose the patriarchal society outright. Though the patriarchal society she compares and contrasts the three models of society in the novel. Jyanvi, Blue Donkey and Valerie do not seem to be so unhappy about the patriarchal society they belong to.

Motherhood in The Mothers of Maya Diip

There are three types of mothers in Maya Diip according to their functions. Grade A mothers are official mothers. Grade B are the biological mothers. And Grade C mothers are childrearing or caretaker mothers. All these grades are given to the mothers according to their functions. In turn, these three graded mothers also have a supreme mother. She is the Ranisaheb or the Matriarch who rules Maya Diip. Right from childhood days, all these women are trained and nurtured to become mothers. It is a Mayan belief that a woman is an incomplete individual until she becomes a mother. A woman gains an adult status after she becomes a mother. Being a mother is the sole purpose of living in Maya Diip. In Maya Diip mothers are given grades according to their status and function. The chosen few are the Grade A mothers. Social and economic status is an important factor to move up the hierarchy of mothers. Any mother who has worked long enough and earned enough can pay to have children and move up to a Grade A status. Economic status translates into social status in Maya Diip. Maya Diip is a society which trains young girls to become good mothers.

The Mothers of Maya Diip is a text conveying feminist thought and ideology. Ashagad is an all male society, or a society of pretty boys. Only Asha, the supreme mother, is a woman. Even in such a society whose population is males only motherhood seems to be a binding force among the Ashans as it is a norm in Maya Diip.

Lesbianism

In The Mothers of Maya Diip lesbianism is plenty revealing retrospective search for her own identity in Jyanvi through textual time and space. The Mothers of Maya Diip is a lesbian-centered text drawing the attention of the readers to the position of a lesbian in today's world. In reality, it is not easy for Namjoshi to identify herself in a western world. She is a woman of color, a feminist, a lesbian, a Hindu and an Indian. She does not fit into the misogynist patriarchal Christian West. So, she creates a lesbian world in India in this novel and tries to carve her own place in such an unreal and imaginative world.

Herland and The Mothers of Maya Diip Compared and Analyzed

Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Suniti Namjoshi are among the 'new women' writers. They are highly educated and talented women from two distinctly different cultures, writing about women's need for 'physical autonomy and intellectual fulfilment'. The writers adopt different literary strategies to convey their points. Gilman presents in Herland a feminist utopia in which women's ideals and values are regarded as the supreme force which unites every single individual together. This in turn brings coherence and harmony in the community. She does that by following the tradition of women writing which deconstructs androcentric norms and reveal the ugly force of misogynist assumptions. Her quest for political, social and economic equality for both men and women, has prompted her to discuss motherhood, domesticity, female physicality and gender relations in Herland.

On the other hand, The Mothers of Maya Diip posits a greater challenge by walking a step forward in 'new women' writing. Namjoshi makes Maya Diip an all lesbian society. She also discusses, as done by other feminist utopias, social assistance, motherhood, childcare, community responsibility, etc. in this feminist fabulation.

In both Herland and The Mothers of Maya Diip, a reader finds traces of personal experience from both the authors. So these books are, in one sense, the product of the relation between private life experience and public discourse. Both the authors tell the story of an all-woman society from different perspectives. Herland and The Mothers of Maya Diip are written in different time periods and different set-ups by writers of different nationalities. Yet, in both the novels, Charlotte Gilman and Namjoshi present an alternative female paradigm by bringing women to the centre. They have also attempted to explore crucial feminist issues and to express their opposition to the dominant patriarchal establishment.

They feel that the literary canon works within an ideological framework that privileges men. Writing against this tradition has been their major objective. In Herland and The Mothers of Maya Diip, they present a feminist utopia, using fantasy and surrealism to expose the patriarchal 'real' as arbitrary constructs and show that the subordination of women is not a natural but an ideological process.

In The Mothers of Maya Diip, Namjoshi employs the technique of the third person narrative to tell the story. The narrator is omniscient who has access to the thoughts and feelings of other characters and who can understand how events are going to turn out in the future. In Herland, Charlotte Gilman appropriates the male voice of the third member of the expedition, Vandyk Jennings. It is a first person narrative, and

the narrator is confined to conditions of knowledge in the real world and he narrates the story as he sees it through his eyes.

Both Charlotte Gilman's *Herland* and Namjoshi's *The Mothers of Maya Diip* are a fantasy world, a world of all-woman, separated from the real world both physically and ideologically. Both the books have a futuristic setting, a sort of a science-fiction saga with the induction of concepts such as androids in *Maya Diip* and the presence of electric cars and procreating parthenogenetically in *Herland*.

Namjoshi goes further by employing fabulist fantasy with the introduction of characters like the Blue Donkey. Yet, in *Herland* and *The Mothers of Maya Diip*, there exists a constant interaction between the real and the fantastic which provides the reader with the facility of highlighting two or more different perspectives. In both the works, the visitors to the exclusive worlds were from the real heterosexual world. Hence there is a constant comparison between the real world and the world depicted by both the writers. In *Herland*, the comparison of the better world of *Herland* with the real world is always presented to the three visitors, which makes them realize and be ashamed of the place they came from. And in *Maya Diip*, through the characters such as Valerie, Blue Donkey, Jyanvi and the Androids, there is an element of interaction with the real world which enables the comparison of the world outside and the all-woman world with the successful depiction of flaws in both the societies.

Namjoshi in *The Mothers of Maya Diip*, makes use of animal fantasy with the presence of the Blue Donkey, a character present in the *Blue Donkey Fables* too. In most animal tales or fables, usually the animals are presented as symbols of certain human characteristics but in *The Mothers of Maya Diip*, Namjoshi presents the Blue Donkey not as a symbol of human virtues or vices, but as an individual animal endowed with human capabilities.

Language, a powerful tool, is one of the instruments of domination and expresses a reality experienced by the oppressors. It represents their world and their point of view. Gilman and Namjoshi, in writing their novellas, were aware of the power of language to shape and reflect society and in creating their utopian vision. They acknowledge that a language invented solely by women would possess very different qualities from the languages of patriarchal origin. Charlotte Gilman's use of language in *Herland* is uniquely feminist. She frequently utilizes plays on words and her own word coinages in her descriptions. For instance, when Vandyk and his two male companions first confront the *Herland* population as a whole, they resist entering what seems to be some sort of official building. As a result, "we were borne inside struggling manfully, but held secure most womanfully, inspite of our best endeavours" (*Herland*, 16). The word 'womanfully' here not only indicates the *Herlanders*' strength of body and will; it also exemplifies the potential strength of women.

Though both *Herland* and *Maya Diip* are imaginary all-female world, there is a huge difference in the social structure of both the societies. In *Maya Diip*, The Ranisaheb or the Matriarch is the supreme mother who rules the land with the help of the Guild of Therapists, Guild of Poets and the Guild of the Servants of Goddess. There is a defined hierarchy in the social structure of *Maya Diip*, which gives room for the subjects to struggle for ascending the ladder of power. All the major decisions in the land are either taken by the Ranisaheb or influenced by her. And the society is not seen as free from the injustice that is prevalent in the real world which is driven by greed for individual gains. On the other hand, *Herland* is an ideally structured society where there is no hierarchy of power. The society in *Herland* is divided into two classes – the mothers and non-mothers. The entire decision making is done by a council of experts in their respective areas and hence the influence of a single person is mitigated and everyone in the land is an expert in one field or the other. Since there is no hierarchy of power ladder, there is no scope for any

struggle for power and individualistic interest. Even the choice of motherhood is sometimes sacrificed for the greater good of the society.

Though both Charlotte Gilman's Herland and Namjoshi's Maya Diip are all-female matriarchal societies, there is a big difference in the way they perceive the other gender. In Maya Diip, the people do not give males any importance other than as a source of semen for their reproduction. It is visible from the humiliating term they use for the other-sex – the people call them “pretty boys”. The pretty boys are brought up only for a lone purpose which is the extraction of semen when the pretty boys turn 14, after which they would be eliminated. On the other hand the people of Herland do not regard the male gender with the same degree of contempt as in Maya Diip. As long as the male visitors accept the equal or superior capabilities of the women in Herland and are willing to abide by the laws of the land, they are welcomed. In cases of contempt, they are exiled. It also could be seen that the people of Herland are contemplating the possibility of starting a bisexual race without disrupting the harmony they have created.

Many characters in literature written by women can be considered as reflections of their creators in that they are attempting to express themselves as artists in a world that is hostile to their efforts. Namjoshi's and Charlotte Gilman's views and interests are reflected in their novels through the characters. In Herland, Charlotte Perkins Gilman reflects her own interests and background in her characters and in doing so, she develops a contrast between what she sees as natural, how this differs from the male view and how her women make the natural operational in their own society. Gilman presents Terry as representing the dominating aspects of patriarchal society; Jeff is presented as representing the idealistic attitudes that often help to justify a system of sexual inequality. Gilman tries to point out through the characters of Terry and Jeff that both their attitudes are predicated on a shared belief in the natural inferiority of women. In Jeff's case, the assumption is that women are naturally delicate, sweet, placid creatures who need looking after. Jeff fancies himself as part of the tradition of knightly chivalry and courtly love. Charlotte Gilman brings out the attitudes of men in the western world towards women through the male characters in the novel. Jeff views woman just as an object, an idol created in order to be worshipped and not a living, feeling woman with independent thoughts and autonomous desires. The more Jeff learns about Herland, the more enamoured of its social system he becomes. Jeff's embrace of Herland, however, is based more on emotion than anything else, and he seems to think that a woman-dominated society would be preferable in every way to a male-dominated one, mostly because women are better, kinder, more moral people than are men. But here Gilman brings out that Herland is better not because it is dominated by women but because there is no domination of anyone, by anyone, at all. Terry is presented as a misogynist and a violent sexist. Through his character, Gilman echoes the ideas of the western world at the turn of the century. Though Terry imagines himself a strong individualist, Gilman presents him as dependent on women as he imagines women are on men. Without a woman to admire him, to flirt with him, and be impressed by him, Terry's sense of himself as a man is challenged, and he becomes deeply insecure.

Vandyk, the narrator, is presented as the most reasonable, objective and well-rounded of the three men. He is more critical in his approach to Herland and he makes a genuine effort to understand the principles on which the country is built. Charlotte Gilman presents Ellador as the ideal woman. Beautiful and athletic, an unusual combination in the literature of Gilman's time, Ellador defies the frail, delicate Victorian feminine ideal without seeming in any way masculinized or unwomanly. She is intelligent, courageous, and curious about the larger world. She is also a career woman; her work as a forester is inspired by the praise she received as a child for helping destroy an insect pest that threatened Herland's trees. Gilman combines all these aspects in Ellador to rebuke the stereotype of the modern, liberated woman as a

waspish, unfulfilled man-hater. Gilman meant for Ellador to exemplify woman's human potential—that is, woman's potential for wholeness, beyond the conventional boundaries of traditional femininity. Through the character of Ellador, Gilman brings out that women can be like Ellador: equal to a man spiritually, intellectually and even physically.

Namjoshi presents Valerie as the most confused character for whom there is no happy ending and who does not gain an understanding of identity. Valerie is a western heterosexual immigrant to Maya Diip whose point of reference is exterior to her new cultural context. To confuse matters she is heterosexual in a world without men. Namjoshi presents Valerie in a comparable position of a lesbian in a patriarchal society. In Maya Diip, only women are important and have adult human status, and heterosexuality does not exist. Valerie's point of reference and her perspective are western, derived from her previous cultural context, and she uses this perspective to establish her identity in the new cultural context. Valerie is conventional in that she assumes that she has a unitary identity formed in patriarchal society; yet she also understands that as a woman, she is not able to define herself. In Maya, Valerie searches for an opportunity to define her identity as “a woman amongst women” (MMD, 1989). The word ‘woman’ is the patriarchal definition attributed to women and Valerie defines herself partially within the patriarchal tradition of the west. Valerie is in a position of culture shock. Valerie finds that her points of reference are either non-communicable, or not of interest to the Mayans. The Mayans do not recognize men; they do not have the concept of heterosexuality in their culture or language. Valerie therefore finds her identity unacknowledged and resents the Mayans for their innocence. She complains “they don't seem to understand or even want to understand who I am or what I've been” (MMD, 1989).

Valerie identifies herself as a heterosexual within and also against patriarchal western society. Although she finds it difficult to live on Maya she acknowledges that “it is even less fun being a woman outside!” (MMD, 1989). Coming from the west where women are inessential, and trying to negotiate a new culture from her position of western non-subjectivity, Valerie is doubly “other”. She is either a western woman or a Mayan heterosexual. Even by the end of the novel, Valerie is no closer to finding a space to define her identity. She remains exterior to the cultural context of Maya.

Namjoshi feels that “identity isn't only a matter of self-definition. It also depends on the identity that other people attribute one” (Because of India, 1989). In *The Mothers of Maya Diip*, the Blue Donkey chooses a position of marginality on her entrance into her new cultural Mayan context. She chooses to be a celibate in a society where celibates are sacred and considered asexual. She is therefore beyond the ordering system of the society which is based on reproductive ability and gender, and cannot be allotted the social roles imposed upon Mayan women. Her position is such that she is able to exploit a fluid identity and participate in society by adopting multiple subject positions and perspectives. Unlike Valerie, who resists the imposed role of mother, the Blue Donkey acts as a free agent, acting the role of mother with ease when she is in the company of Mayan children.

Vandyk and Ellador in *Herland* and Jyanvi, the Blue Donkey, the Matriarch, Saraswati and Asha in *The Mothers of Maya Diip* are strong characters who reflect the views of the writers through their characters. Though initially, they are bound by their rigid beliefs and attitudes they undergo a change in their outlook and attitudes in the course of the stories. On the other hand, Terry, Jeff and Alima in *Herland* and Valerie, Pramila and Shyamila in *The Mothers of Maya Diip* are weak characters who fail to assert themselves or to undergo a change in their attitudes from their rigid beliefs.

As seen by this summative analysis, even though there are differences between the two texts in terms of philosophies and values, there are many structural and functional commonalities as well. Both the utopias

represent a search for a better life. Both Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Suniti Namjoshi demonstrate that the subordinate position of women and their confinement to domestic life harms not only individual women, but also limits the progress of the whole community. They urge women to rise above their subordinate status and assert themselves.

Namjoshi goes further in her novel and gives a sharp critique of women's relationships and suggests that exploitation is a feature of women's communities too. She suggests that gay/lesbian family and social structures seem to be as oppressive as heterosexual ones. Both Suniti Namjoshi and Charlotte Perkins Gilman brings out through their fiction that a community could be transformed if positive values found in the private spheres, particularly caring and cooperation, became central to the public life.

Utopia or Dystopia: The Conclusion

Namjoshi and Gilman, as studied, have shown the need for women to assert themselves and to rise above their marginalized status. Both of them concentrate on revealing the limitations of patriarchy. And both the authors use the genre of utopia or dystopia in order to show the problems of the female gender in such a patriarchal social set-up.

The study brings out Namjoshi's and Gilman's reworking of ideas from feminist theory along with the strategies they utilize to treat themes of feminist struggle, women's community and female relation that form the focus of their novels and other works. The themes and the structures of the two primary texts have been studied. Whether these texts can be considered a utopia or dystopia is brought out here.

In *Herland* we have all the features of a utopian fiction. Gilman portrays women who are simultaneously industrious and motherly without the concerns with whether they are the archetypal feminine or not. In *Herland*, the women all live collectively, and the concept of a private home is alien to them. The children are reared communally. Everything is built collaboratively, the buildings, the gardens, the schools are all perfect. As Vandyk observes, "Everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness and the pleasantest sense of home all over it" (*Herland*, 2008). *Herland* has a different concept of motherliness. As the character Vandyk explains, "It is a motherliness which dominated society which influenced every art and industry, which absolutely protected all childhood and gave it the most perfect care and training" (*Herland*, 2008). From this concept of society, all are able to live to their fullest potential. Without the limitations that one put on women in Charlotte Perkin's Gilman's time as well as our own, all of these women were encouraged to pursue work that they were suited to. If a child in *Herland* showed an aptitude for something, or enjoyed something, that skill was nourished and developed. This is truly a utopian concept. The *Herland* society is well-ordered, technologically advanced, attractive, peaceful, non-hierarchical, and non-competitive and pollution free. It is built on the principles of co-operation and sisterhood and devoted to the needs of children. It is a land that values progress, peace and order above all. *Herland* is a utopian society.

Herland depicts a near perfect utopia but there are potential flaws in it too. In *Herland*, mothers enjoy a different status than non-mothers. Apart from the obvious fact that mothers can have children, they also have the rights to be council members and to decide who is suitable for reproduction. Non-mothers on the other hand, do not have the rights and privileges.

There is a problem in most utopian constructions from which even Gilman's *Herland* do not seem to be spared. Most literary utopias fail to come to terms with the notions of individual will which is so central to the self because they are subject or dependent upon a totalizing system. To maintain their perfection, utopias must greatly compromise freedom.

In Herland, there is also a hint of some inner dissatisfaction amongst the women by their suppositions that the rest of the world must be in some ways better than the one in which they live in. Moadine, one of the teachers in Herland tells. “We are so utterly ignorant, you see.. We know nothing about science as we have worked out for ourselves, just the brain work of one small half-country; and you, we gather, have helped one another all over the globe sharing your discoveries, pooling you progress. How wonderful, how supremely beautiful your civilization must be!” (Herland, 2008). And Ellador says “we are only half a people. We have our own woman-ways and they have their man-ways and their both-ways. We have worked out a system of living which is of course limited. They must have a broader richer, better one. I should like to see it” (Herland, 2008).

Van the male protagonist also chose to return to his land in spite of him finding a new partner whose love surpasses anything he ever imagined. His partner willingly accompanied him, driven by her own quest for discovery. This seems as an acknowledgement by Gilman of either the inadequacy of her utopian vision of the world or of separatist living.

In *The Mothers of Maya Diip*, though we are initially impressed by the seemingly well-organized society, we begin to see features of dystopia in the course of the story. It initially starts off giving the reader an impression of a perfect picture of a female utopia—a world secretly yearned for by feminists. The society of Maya Diip is a state in which motherhood is revelled but in which a hierarchical, exclusive even murderous political system flourishes as the matriarchate replicates patriarchal organizational patterns, demonstrating that women too are capable of the misuse of power.

Like Herland, *The Mothers of Maya Diip* presents an all-women land where motherhood is revered and the education of children is given the topmost priority. In the novel, the term ‘woman’ is always positive, standing for the norm; man is the secondary term, what is other to the norm. Much of the utopian features that we find in Herland are found in *The Mothers of Maya Diip* too. However, like in a patriarchal society, even in this matriarchal society, the problem of equality exists. There are no men to exploit women but the hegemonic structures still prevails and a woman has to face discrimination on the basis of whether she is the guardian, mother or care-taker of the child. Everyone is not equal in this society. Money is distributed according to a woman’s rank which depends on birth and merit. To make money, an ordinary woman has to sell her skills and if she has any children, there are the bonuses that accrue from the children. In Maya Diip, the children are glorified too much and the lives and longings of women do not matter. It is the duty of every Mayan to sacrifice herself for the welfare of the children. However, hypocrisy prevails here also. Jyanvi wonders why the more powerful mothers hire other women to care for their children, and if being a mother is such a marvellous thing, then why do the mothers pass off the chores to other. In this society the more powerful the mother is, the more privileged the child is and to be allowed to care for Mayan daughter is a great privilege. In the story, the society is depicted as far from perfect. Hypocrisy, jealousy, and various other crimes of passion exist there. All the decisions making in the society is biased as it is either taken by the Ranisaheb or influenced by her. The society is not free from greed and fight for power. Thus we can see, *The Mothers of Maya Diip* is not a perfect utopia though it initially gives the impression of utopia. It is a dystopia.

In another words, Namjoshi through her book is trying to bring out a strong message that women can seize the centre-stage to be independent, dominating and able rulers. Yet she did not overstep to show a perfect women-ruled world, but practically depicted a chaotic world just as the real world. She also showed the flaws of other possible societies such as Ashaghad an all-male society under a matriarch, Paradise a society of gallants and mothers and the Outside Android world of male domination. Through the course of the

story, Namjoshi puts up a picture of a strong disagreement to the Male chauvinistic views when Asha refused to strike a trade deal with the Male Androids. Yet her views of a possible solution to the unending quest could be visible in the story when the Ranisaheb offered a deal to the Gallants of the Paradise who were in a way respectful of mothers. Namjoshi feels that an abrupt separation or revolts or continuous acceptance of the suppression are both not the solution to the issue the women are facing.

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