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## Mapping the Relationship between the Sea and the Humans: The Symbolic Sea in Mallika Krishnamurthy's *Six Yards of Silk*

**ABSTRACT** This article analyses the various facets of the relationship between the sea and human characters in Mallika Krishnamurthy's diasporic novel, *Six Yards of Silk* (2011). Focusing on the anxieties about assimilating into the New Zealand mainstream community, this novel portrays the life of two Indian immigrants, Ramesh and Sharmila, who are settled in New Zealand and are unable to adjust to the cultural lifestyle of the adopted nation. A strong sense of alienation from the hostland culture turns Ramesh into a neurotic patient, and in a state of neurosis, he develops an affective bonding with the sea. This connection between the sea and the diasporic characters has been critically examined using Lisa Samuels's concept of "wet contact" and Keren Chiaroni's theoretical paradigm of "fluid philosophy." While exploring Ramesh's deep connection with the sea, this article also offers a psychoanalytical reading of Ramesh's neurotic condition.

**KEYWORDS** neurosis, wet contact, fluid philosophy, sea

### Introduction

Representation of the sea in literary narratives offers interesting dimensions to the interpretation of the sea. Authors belonging to different generations, cultures, and nations have often dealt with the sea to find a meaningful relationship between humans and the sea. While applying various symbolic connotations to the sea, creative writers have attempted to map the sea using imagination, fantasy, and aspirations of humans. Homer's *Odyssey*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), and John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904) are a few instances of literary writing which seek to interpret the

sea and connect it with human ontology. In the domain of diasporic literature, descriptions of sea voyages figure prominently in narratives that represent the experiences of the indentured labourers. So-called Indian “coolies,” through the system of indenture, were transported by sea to the colonial plantation fields in the Caribbean islands, Fiji, Guyana and the other regions of the Asia-Pacific. Literary accounts based on the lives of these coolies describe their travel experiences, boarding the ship to cross the sea and reaching their respective destinations. Ramabai Espinet’s *The Swinging Bridge* (2003), Peggy Mohan’s *Jahajin* (2007), and Gaiutra Bahadur’s *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (2013) are prominent examples of such texts that are reflective of the trauma, anxiety, and suffering of the coolies. In fact, diasporic writers often represent the sea as a space that separates the homeland from the foreign land, and in doing so, they tend to link the sea with the diasporic sensibility of the migrants. Mallika Krishnamurthy’s *Six Yards of Silk* (2011) is a specific instance of a diasporic novel that captures the pain and suffering associated with migration, through a captivating narrative centring on the migrant subjects’ engagement with the sea. Set in New Zealand, this diasporic novel seeks to represent the migratory experience through a narrative that foregrounds the multilayered dimensions of the sea. This article studies the representation of human anxieties and sufferings in *Six Yards of Silk* in view of the relationship between humans and the sea. An analysis of this relationship using various theoretical perspectives enables us to comprehend the intensity of a diasporic sense of loss and anxiety.

## Sea and Human Experience

The novel begins with a reference to an accident occurring in the sea. Ramesh, an Indian living in New Zealand for many years, is a neurotic who decides to row a boat in a dusky evening to tackle the side-effects of the medicines that have been generating an uneasy feeling in his mind and body. After rowing his boat for some time, he falls from it when violent waves hit his boat and he drowns. He is “reported missing,” and the police, unable to find his body, believe that the act of drowning is an “unfortunate accident” (Krishnamurthy 2011, 1). Reference to this incident at the beginning of the novel is followed by a narratorial remark that emphasizes the link between the ocean and human feelings. The narrator states that “ocean,” “rain,” “wind,” and “rocks” associate with secret human desires and “seek discovery” (Krishnamurthy 2011, 1). This remark, in a sense, is the keynote of the entire novel, as it situates Ramesh’s death in the context

of an affective bonding between the ocean and the human. Ramesh's death is not represented as an accident by the text; it is indeed the outcome of Ramesh's attraction to the sea, exhibiting his desire to become united with the boundless sea. The novel, to a certain extent, explores Ramesh's psyche—its intricate functioning in the context of his diasporic life in New Zealand—to find the possible reasons for his unusual intimacy with the sea. Ramesh's sister, Sharmila, is the central character in the novel, and she is deeply affected by the news of her brother's death. Ramesh has been an integral part of Sharmila's life since her childhood days and his death creates a vacuum in her life, alienating her from the familiar space. Her family consists of her husband, Keith, whose parents migrated from Scotland to permanently settle in New Zealand, and her three children, who were born and raised in New Zealand.

Sharmila and Ramesh's parents emigrated from India to New Zealand in order to attain financial stability and to provide a better life for their children. Despite achieving financial stability, Sharmila and Ramesh fail to assimilate into the mainstream culture of New Zealand. Memories of their life in India haunt them, and they often discuss various incidents associated with their childhood experience in India. Ramesh is an inseparable part of Sharmila's childhood memories. Hence, Ramesh's absence depresses Sharmila, which leads to her seclusion. In fact, Sharmila, after Ramesh's death, fails to perceive his absence, strongly feeling the need to connect with him. She often nourishes the feeling that probably Ramesh has disappeared for a few days to keep her in a state of anxiety. His death seems unreal to her and often in her dreams she finds Ramesh lying at the bottom of the sea. While imagining his drowning body, Sharmila captures the image of a person communicating with the ocean, an entity who talks to Ramesh like a friend: "He could hear the ocean muttering. It spoke to him in a woman's voice and told him again and again to make up his mind, drawing him to her" (67).

Ramesh's drowning and his imaginary friendship with the ocean are reflective of a certain kind of insanity, arising out of his inability to integrate with the socio-cultural environment of New Zealand. The narrator does not consider his drowning as an accident, interpreting the entire idea of death by drowning as an act of either "madness" or "instinct" (67). The ocean, symbolic of flux and liberty, attracts Ramesh, who has been trying to escape from a metaphorically imprisoned life in an alien nation, and therefore the narrator states: "Where could he go except back to the ocean?" (67). During his period of growing up in New Zealand, Ramesh develops a strange kind of fear of an invisible power watching his daily activities. Considering this invisible power as the "Authorities" (110), Ramesh

often assumes that the “Authorities” are not granting him freedom to lead a life according to his wishes. His parents, according to Ramesh, are the “Authorities” and the doctors examining his health become the “Watcher” (113). This psychological illness, which the doctors interpret as a case of schizophrenic anxiety and also an instance of “bipolar” disorder (109), situates Ramesh in a vulnerable position. He imagines people torturing and abusing him, and also hears strange noises. The world around him appears to be “a gray flat landscape” signifying the idea of “prison” (110). His parents believe that probably this illness is the result of Ramesh’s migration from India at a tender age, leading to psychological depression occurring due to loss of contact with their homeland culture and his inability to assimilate into the alien culture (106).

In the context of this psychological disorder, Ramesh’s intimacy with the ocean is significant. While imagining that he is in a state of exile in New Zealand, Ramesh considers the land as symbolic of a hostile culture, believing that the ocean offers him a release from the tyranny of the land. The land/sea binary, in Ramesh’s mind, acquires multilayered symbolic dimensions: imprisonment/freedom, repression/expression, and alien/home. Escape from the land means acquiring freedom and also reaching home, amplifying the fact that the sea is like a home offering the necessary comfort and peace. Sharmila understands this aspect when she realizes that Ramesh’s love for the sea is unalterable. She nurtures the view that probably the sea offers something like “mother’s warmth” (135) to Ramesh. Indeed, the bonding between Ramesh and the sea is very well expressed by the narrator: “He could hear the ocean muttering. It spoke to him in a woman’s voice and told him again and again to make up his mind, drawing him to her” (67). Reference to this affective bonding between the sea and Ramesh is a noteworthy aspect in the novel, providing ample scope for analysing the sea as a familiar space. The sea appears to offer Ramesh “a magnificent big life full of hope, success,” and “truth,” generating a strong feeling that humans can live in the ocean (135). This feeling is irrational, however; in the context of this narrative the author seeks to dismantle the general notion that views the sea as unfamiliar, unknown, and unidentified. If the sea is generally considered as wild and furious, Ramesh’s insanity enables him to overlook the fury of the sea and connect with it in friendly terms. Opposing the view of the Watcher that the sea does not support human life, Ramesh imagines life in the ocean, believing that if life has originated “from the sea and the sun” then there is a possibility of “living in the ocean” (135).

Though Ramesh’s attachment to the sea is an important aspect in the narrative, another significant thread that runs throughout the novel is the

use of the sari as a metaphor of connection between Sharmila and Ramesh. The title of the novel, *Six Yards of Silk*, refers to the sari that Sharmila intends to offer as a gift to her dead brother during the memorial ceremony. The sari is symbolic of their Indian identity, and in the context of diasporic experience, this enables Sharmila to realize the need for connecting with homeland culture. After Ramesh's death, when Sharmila's aunt comes from India to stay with her niece's family, the childhood memories appear strongly in Sharmila's mind. She narrates many incidents of her young days spent with Ramesh. The sari, as a sartorial metaphor, therefore, assumes a cultural dimension in the context of Sharmila's relationship with India. At Ramesh's memorial ceremony, Sharmila offers a sari to the ocean, imagining that this act will lead to an eternal bonding between them. This memorial ceremony, which takes place near the same coastal spot where Ramesh drowned, allows Sharmila to express her feelings about her brother. She stands on a rock near the ocean and unfolds a sari, which is carried away by the sea waves. While the sea waves and the strong wind carry the sari away from her, she imagines Ramesh accepting this gift and ensuring that the bonding between them will remain intact. Sharmila imagines Ramesh to be alive inside the sea, looking at her, whereas the sea and the sari seek to bind Sharmila to Ramesh: "The sea tempted Sharmila to follow Ramesh's sari. It called to her to come with it, to find him. The sari sang that it would wrap itself around her, care for her and lead her to her brother" (158).

The sari is an important component of the scheme of chapter division in the novel. Chapter titles such as "Weave," "Border," "Tuck," "Pleat," "Pin," "Fold," and "Cross" are reflective of the method of wearing a sari. In New Zealand, Sharmila has rarely worn a sari, but after Ramesh's death when she decides to take a sari out of her wardrobe, the feeling of touching it gives her satisfaction. The threads of a sari that is "six yards long" passing through the fingers of her hands appear to be "one seamless river" (88). River imagery surfacing in Sharmila's mind evokes a strong connection between the threads of a sari and a river, suggesting the idea of infinity since the threads like the water of a river connote a sense of limitlessness. This idea of infinity is re-emphasized when she recalls the mythical figure of Draupadi,<sup>1</sup> whose sari "spinning like a tornado" amplifies the concept of

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1 In the Indian epic *The Mahabharata*, Draupadi is the wife of the Pandavas. While playing a game of dice against Sakuni (representative of the Kauravas), Yudhishthir (the eldest brother of the Pandavas) is tempted to bet all his valuable possessions. In this process, he bets Draupadi and loses her. Then Draupadi is claimed by the Kauravas and an attempt is made by Dushasana (one of the Kaurava princes) to disrobe her. While disrobing Draupadi, Dushasana fails

an “infinite sari” (141). Sharmila’s decision to wear a sari on the occasion of Ramesh’s memorial ceremony reflects her desire to become united with the infinitude of river. The sari that Sharmila wears and the same one that she imaginatively gifts Ramesh act as a connector between them. In fact, the sari symbolizing the notion of infinitude releases Sharmila from the restrictive and claustrophobic environment of mainstream New Zealand. It affectively associates her with India and also with Ramesh, and in doing so, it also connects her with the river and the ocean. This connection between the human experience and the sea can be interpreted through the lens of various philosophical perspectives.

## **Theoretical Insights into the Relationship between Humans and the Sea**

In the novel, the ocean is imagined having a friendly relationship with humans. It provides the warmth of a mother and also talks to Ramesh like a friend. This aspect, as mentioned earlier, indicates an affective bonding between humans and the sea. Foregrounding this bonding, Kira Gee in her essay “The Ocean Perspective” mentions that the ocean can be considered as “an aesthetic and affective space” (Gee 2019, 24). She further argues that “oceans are also social spaces, communication spaces, and cultural spaces,” enabling humans to interact with it and shape their identities in relation to it (24). Though Gee’s essay discusses the various methods of “conceptualising the ocean” (24), there is one section in this essay in which Gee deals with the “human dimension of the ocean” (38). In this section, the ocean is conceived of as a “place” that bears deep symbolic significances in the human mind, indicating “attachments” to this “place” (Gee 2019, 38) and also creating a “strong sense of belonging” (Gee 2019, 39). Gee’s emphasis, in this discussion, is on the affective dimension of the ocean. Humans, Gee believes, can think about the idea of emotionally transacting with the sea, considering the sea as a place that they could inhabit. Developing this notion, Gee argues that if “landscapes” are “cultural” spaces which have been “shaped by man” (41), the idea of “cultural seascape” is also emerging with the increasing human desire for transforming the sea into a familiar space (42). As ships are sailing on the sea, “bridges” are being built, “platforms” and railway tracks are

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to unwrap Draupadi’s sari because the length of the sari mysteriously keeps increasing. The mysterious sari by virtue of its infinite length protects Draupadi from being molested by the Kauravas.

being constructed, and “off-shore wind farms” are being made, the sea is becoming more accessible to humans, enabling humans to transact with the sea and conceive of it as a cultural space (Gee 2019, 42).

Gee’s perspective on oceans provides a suitable theoretical lens for interrogating the relationship between the sea and humans in *Six Yards of Silk*. Indeed, Ramesh’s strong bonding with the sea enables him to consider the sea as an “affective” and a “cultural” space, which is a noteworthy aspect of the novel. He emotionally associates with the sea, believing that it is like his mother or his friend. His creative conversation with the sea, and also nurturing the notion that the sea is like his home, illustrate Gee’s notion of the sea as a “place.” The idea of “cultural seascape” is evidently reflected in Ramesh’s understanding of the sea as home, which also means that sea is symbolic of India. The narrator, while interpreting Ramesh’s association with the sea, considers the sea as symbolic of home. This sea, as the narrator analyses, is Ramesh’s “home” and he wants to “go to sea” because the “water would fill his ears with reality, home, home, home” (113). While the landscape of New Zealand appears like a prison, the sea seems to be offering “mother’s warmth”; this binary amplifies the cultural distinction between home and exile. Sharmila transacts with the sea through her saris. The act of gifting a sari to Ramesh and allowing the sari to float in the sea can be interpreted from the perspective of Gee’s idea of the sea. As a signifier of Indian culture, the sari associates with the sea, and the sea assumes the idea of home. Though the sea surrounding the country of New Zealand offers a liberatory space to an Indian immigrant, the land and the mainstream culture of this country is like a prison. This dichotomy between the land and the sea of New Zealand is evidently reflected in the outlook of Indian diasporic subjects like Ramesh and Sharmila. In the context of Indian diasporic imaginary, the sea as a space lies beyond the cultural impositions of the land and therefore it signifies freedom.

The second significant perspective on the idea of ocean is offered by Keren Chiaroni. In her article “Fluid Philosophy: Rethinking the Human Condition in Terms of the Sea,” Chiaroni introduces a new mode of thinking based on the connection between humans and the water. While urging people to detach from “earthbound foundations,” Chiaroni proposes to initiate a discussion on a “liquid way of thinking” which may form the base for a new kind of theoretical paradigm known as “fluid philosophy” (Chiaroni 2016, 108). This philosophy is used by Chiaroni to analyse the deep implications of the use of water or “fluid states” in some creative “performances” that seek to offer ecological perspectives on the relationship between humans and the sea (109). These “performances,” Chiaroni

argues, emphasize the need for considering the “human condition in terms of the sea,” endorsing the idea that “our being-in-the-world becomes a being-in-the-water” (109). Thus, Chiaroni’s notion of “fluid philosophy” attempts to study the lived experience of humans from the point of view of fluid substances, which offer humans flexibility and freedom (109). In her essay, Chiaroni also refers to an author cum critic, Lisa Samuels, whose concept of “wet contact” (108) has been used by Chiaroni to build the theoretical paradigm of “fluid philosophy.” Samuels’s essay “Membranism, Wet Gaps, Archipelago Poetics” uses the concept of membrane to develop the idea of “membranism,” which evokes the thought of “wet touch,” linking bodies and objects “within our wet neural network” (Samuels 2010, 156). Cell membranes function in human bodies to allow the transfer of various fluids and substances from one part of the body to another, and this idea of a “contact and transfer” mechanism, which enables the flow of wet substances, is used as a “metaphor” by Samuels to substantiate the fact that humans connect with the external world through a sense of wetness (156). With respect to this connection occurring through a fluid medium, Samuels states that “the eye” looking at any object is “wet,” “the air” circulating around contains water “droplets,” “the brain” involved in interpreting objects is “wet,” “the ear’s drum” also contains fluid matter which aids in hearing, and in this manner, the entire idea of human contact with the external objects is founded on “membranism” (156).

This concept of wetness plays a vital role in representation of human characters in creative literature, particularly in the context of New Zealand, where the whole country is surrounded by the Pacific Ocean. Samuels believes that the “presentness of the ocean” around New Zealand generates a desire to know the sea, motivating humans living in the island country to indulge in mapping the “ocean as fact and idea” (160). An engagement with the sea, in the case of New Zealanders, is the result of less access to the land, which propels the islanders to shape their lives based on “oceans of uncertainty, change, extinction, and the unseen that arrange and derange the stand-out possessed lands” (Samuels 2010, 160). Representation of this lifestyle in creative works, focusing on a sense of negotiation between the islanders and the ocean, is termed “archipelago poetics” by Samuels (160). “Archipelago poetics” is a literal manifestation of the idea of “membranism” or “wet contact,” and this can be explored in the creative works of many authors belonging to New Zealand (Samuels 2010, 160). In fact, Samuels refers to some poems written by Indigenous New Zealand authors to explain the use of this poetics. Chiaroni, too, refers to Samuels’s concept of “archipelago poetics” to interpret the presence of “fluid philosophy” in some creative performances by New Zealand artists.



## *Six Yards of Silk* as Archipelago Poetics

In view of the discussion on Chiaroni and Samuels, *Six Yards of Silk* can be analysed using the theoretical ideas of “fluid philosophy,” “membranism,” and “archipelago poetics.” Since the beginning of the novel, when Ramesh’s accidental death is reported, Sharmila laments for her brother’s death and cries while recalling some incidents of the past. This past is represented by images that are amorphous and watery. Examples of Chiaroni’s “liquid way of thinking” can be traced in Sharmila’s actions, especially when she is deeply lost in remembering Ramesh. While bathing, Sharmila recalls the past events “as the water of the shower mingled with her tears” and in the bathroom when “Ramesh’s screams receded,” the bathroom glasses covered with steam seem to be moving “upward in tendrils as water caught in the sun trailed down the glass like liquid crystal” (Krishnamurthy 2011, 51). This description reflects the presence of “fluid philosophy” and also emphasizes the idea of “wet contact.” Water, ocean, and fluid images are used by Sharmila to imagine her association with and dissociation from Ramesh. She thinks about the ocean instead of the land, and there are references to her walks on the beach. In her dreams when Sharmila meets Ramesh, the ocean is the place of their meetings. During one such imaginary meeting with Ramesh, Sharmila searches the “southern ocean,” finding Ramesh’s body “preserved by some miracle of a salty ocean” and she fancies Ramesh’s eyes looking at her, “silent and watery” (118). This imaginative encounter explicates the concept of “liquid way of thinking,” also elucidating the idea of “wet contact.” In the context of this contact with wetness, Sharmila evokes the notion of “membranism” through multiple correspondences with Ramesh which occur in the sea. While engaging with the sea, Ramesh and Sharmila treat the sea as representing their anxieties and lived experiences. At the end of the novel, when Sharmila, thinking about Ramesh’s body inside the sea, nurtures ideas like “the ocean would help him,” “the ocean would distract him,” and “the ocean would keep him alive” (Krishnamurthy 2011, 170), the sea emerges as a repository of ideas to exemplify a notion of human ontology based on “wet contact.”

The third perspective on the sea, in the context of the discussion on the interrelationship between humans and the sea, can be explained using the binary idea of home/exile. This binary, which is prominently reflected in the act of cultural uprooting of Sharmila and Ramesh, contributes to an experience of diasporic existence lacking the urge to assimilate into the new culture. Sharmila’s attachment to the sari and Ramesh’s mysterious fear of the “Authorities” are signs of psychological unrest produced due to their inability to integrate into New Zealand culture. In their mind,

India as a concept of home is so deeply rooted that their engagement with New Zealand does not generate any desire to create a new home. This aspect is evidently reflected in Sharmila's constant recalling of festivals celebrated and religious ceremonies performed in India. In New Zealand, Sharmila and Ramesh fail to develop any sort of relationship with mainstream New Zealanders, realizing that they are at the margin of the "adopted country" (125). The narrator expresses this fact by stating that they "had become cornered within their own lives" and they never desired to meet "people" who were culturally different (124). After staying in New Zealand for several decades, the places and the people appear to be alien to Sharmila and Ramesh, as they are constantly haunted by the past days spent in India. Sharmila is reminded of the celebration of the Pongal festival (a popular harvest festival) in India and the rituals associated with this. Hindu culture and religious ceremonies are deeply ingrained in their mind. There are several occasions when Sharmila refers to the Hindu religious text Bhagavad Gita, and on one occasion, she wishes to imbibe the real "language" and "meaning" of this text (103). After Ramesh's death, Sharmila realizes that in New Zealand, they "were supposed to fit in, achieve, live well" (125) but they failed to adjust to the new cultural environment and this failure is pertinently expressed by Sharmila when she repeatedly says, "We did nothing wrong" (125). While reiterating this statement, Sharmila underscores the importance of being rooted in homeland culture and memories. Ramesh's attachment to India is so intense that during his twenty-first birthday in New Zealand, when his friends arrange for a "growing-up birthday" (130) party in accordance with the host culture, he feels depressed. Celebration of the twenty-first birthday is considered to be special because Kiwis believe that it marks the entry of a person into adulthood (130-1). Ramesh is not keen on performing the rituals linked to the celebration of this special birthday party. Sharmila recalls Ramesh's reluctance to join the birthday party, as he probably did not want "to be twenty-one in this country" (130). This disengagement from a prominent New Zealand ritual reflects a distinct desire to liberate himself from the process of assimilating a new culture. Ramesh's mental illness or his insanity alienates him from the mainstream culture, as he becomes an "other" to the New Zealanders. In a bid to liberate himself from the "Authorities" or the "Watcher," Ramesh's insanity situates his self in a space beyond the dynamics of cultural transactions. His madness, from the perspective of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, is therefore a sign of "deterritorialization" and "rupture" (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 2). In the context of Ramesh's madness, the sea plays a pivotal role by foregrounding this aspect of "deterritorialization." By virtue of its wildness and constantly

changing pattern of waves, the sea is an untamable natural entity, symbolizing chaos and disorder. Ramesh perceives the sea as an entity that mirrors his psychological disorder, evoking a sense of liberation from the fixed, static, and normative state of being on the land. If the land is a space meant for cultural impositions symbolizing the idea of “prison,” the sea signifies freedom and maternal care. Because of his lack of interest in assimilating into the New Zealand culture, he escapes from the restrictive atmosphere of the land in order to embrace the sea.

Discussing the issue of the relationship between humans and the sea, Nandita Batra and Vartan P. Messier in their essay, “The Multitudinous Seas: Matter and Metaphor” refer to Jacques Lacan’s concept of the “mirror stage” and argue that “the sea’s reflection of our own sense of being [...] institutes a libidinal relationship with our own image” (Batra and Messier 2010, 5). They also observe that “the sea does not have its own distinct ontology” as it is “a reflection of our own” self, and “its existential relevance” is associated with “human experience” (5). Batra and Messier’s perspective can be appropriately used to study the link between Ramesh and the sea. The ocean secretly talking to Ramesh in a female voice, Sharmila’s belief that Ramesh’s accident is an act of “instinct,” and her realization that Ramesh has no other place to go except the sea are such incidents that amply illustrate Batra and Messier’s theoretical perspective. Sharmila connects with the sea through a sari which is metaphorically “infinite” like Draupadi’s sari, and this reflects her desire to assimilate to the infinitude of the sea. In their essay, Batra and Messier refer to Hegel, who considers the sea as evoking the idea of “the indefinite, the unlimited, and the infinite,” (as quoted in Batra and Messier 2010, 6) and in capturing this essence of the infinite, humans, according to Hegel, are “stimulated and emboldened to stretch beyond the limited” (as quoted in Batra and Messier 2010, 6). Sharmila views the sea from the perspective of this idea of limitlessness because she too intends to escape from the claustrophobic imprisoning New Zealand society. While throwing the sari into the ocean waves, Sharmila considers the ocean to be a boundless space that can offer freedom and release her from the monotonous and depressive ontology of the land. Her belief that the ocean will offer happiness to Ramesh is a way of pacifying herself to cope with her grief.

In assuming that the sea is like a “home” space, Ramesh forms an affective bonding with the sea, explicating the functioning of affect that, according to Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, “marks a body’s *belonging* to a world of encounters” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 2). While receiving the warmth of mother’s love and friendly affection from the sea, Ramesh considers the sea as a part of his ontological feeling. His affectionate encounters with the sea during his act of rowing reflect his body’s

linkage with the ocean. The “world of encounters,” in Ramesh’s context, is the sea, which tends to build a relationship with Ramesh’s body in a manner that seeks a reconfiguration of the idea of a human body. Explaining this phenomenon of affective bonding between a human body and a thing, Seigworth and Gregg observe that, “[w]ith affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself,” forming a web of “relations” with the outside world in a way that the difference between “the world” and “the body” becomes less perceptible (3). In seeking his freedom, Ramesh configures an oceanic world of existence, eradicating the distinction between his body and the world. Reference to his missing body at the beginning of the novel is suggestive of this affective web of relationship between Ramesh and the ocean. His disappearance from the land and union with the ocean are symbolic acts bearing an affective connotation. Thus, Krishnamurthy’s *Six Yards of Silk* maps the relationship between humans and the sea through various theoretical perspectives, and it attempts to engage with “a thalasso-ethical world” (Batra and Messier 2010, 17). This ethical perspective, as Batra and Messier argue, seeks to decentre land-based viewpoints and “anthropocentricism,” providing scope for discussions on oceanic imaginary and poetics (17).

Apart from the issues related to the relationship between humans and the sea, this novel also depicts the intercultural relationship between the people of New Zealand and the Indian migrants settled in the same country. Dieter Riemenschneider, in his insightful study of the history of the settlement of Indians in New Zealand, explicates the evolution of the Indian diasporic community in New Zealand, focusing primarily on the rich “cultural diversity” (Riemenschneider 2016, 156) of this community. In his essay, Riemenschneider refers to several critics who have made sincere efforts to investigate the methods adopted by the Indian community in New Zealand to assimilate into mainstream New Zealand culture. This process, indeed, has not been easy because Indians came to the island in the nineteenth century, and in due course of time, they have now “become a visible minority” (Riemenschneider 2016, 156). While describing the brief history of the formation of the Indian diasporic community in New Zealand, Riemenschneider mentions Jacqueline Leckie’s book, *Indian Settlers: The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community* (2007), which presents an overview of the entire “history of Indian migration and settlement” in New Zealand, using “resources” from the archives that contain the “narratives” of Indian settlers (156). In addition to this book, Riemenschneider also refers to Jacqueline Leckie and Paola Voci’s edited book *Localizing Asia in Aotearoa* (2011). This critical anthology, according to Leckie and Voci, shifts the focus of discussion from “macro-national” realities of Indian

diasporic condition to the “micro or local histories and cultural spaces” (as quoted in Riemenschneider 2016, 156), evoking critical responses that seek to address issues related to ethnic identities in the context of Indian diasporic community. Such a shift is necessary in the context of the study of Indian settlers in New Zealand because the entire diasporic community is a “heterogenous group” (Reimenschneider 2016, 156). In the context of his discussion on the culturally diversified aspect of Indian diasporic community, Riemenschneider draws attention to Sekhar Bandyopadhyay’s phenomenal text *India in New Zealand: Local Identities, Global Relations* (2010). Bandyopadhyay claims that Indians in New Zealand have formed a community that is culturally varied because Indian migrants have “come from practically all the regions of India” (as quoted in Riemenschneider 2016, 157) and this phenomenon, according to Riemenschneider, has indeed given a “multi-ethnic character” to the community (156). In an interesting newspaper article called “From lascars to skilled migrants: Indian diaspora in New Zealand and Australia,” Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Jane Buckingham trace the history of the emigration of Indians to New Zealand, commenting on the formation of a diasporic group that is evocative of “inner pluralism” (*The Conversation* 2018). Contemporary Indian migrants, according to Bandyopadhyay and Buckingham, require “multiculturalist policies” in order to adapt to the changing socio-cultural scenarios in “both Australia and New Zealand” (*The Conversation* 2018). These critical studies centred on the formation of an Indian diasporic community in New Zealand provide an appropriate lens to investigate the varied aspects of Sharmila’s and Ramesh’s lived experiences. Riemenschneider’s essay offers a critical study of *Six Yards of Silk* while considering the insightful observations of Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Jacqueline Leckie, and Paola Voci. He argues that the novel has a strong “psychological fabric” (Riemenschneider 2016, 162), which highlights the characteristic traits of “migrants’ predicament” (163). Sharmila and Ramesh, according to Riemenschneider, are typical Indian diasporic characters engaged in the act of negotiating the “conflicting pulls” of two different cultural traditions (162).

## Conclusion

As a postcolonial diasporic subject, Ramesh is an interesting character because his insanity (loss of mind), which is the outcome of his loss of home, leads to his loss of life. The sea is connected to these losses, and it emerges as a space that provides relief to an anxious diasporic subject. Being alienated from the New Zealand mainstream culture, Ramesh

suffers mainly because of his inability to deal with the fears and anxieties associated with settlement in an alien nation. His neurosis originates from the dual feelings of being separated from his homeland and also from the host country. Indeed, Ramesh's insanity can be analysed from the perspective of "separation-anxiety" (Brown 2004, 53) experienced by a postcolonial subject. In his book, *Freud and the Post-Freudians*, J. A. C. Brown refers to Otto Rank to explain two kinds of fear: "life fear" and "death fear" (53, original emphasis). These fears, as Brown observes, are related to the anxieties arising in an individual mind with regard to his social relationships (53). The "life fear" is caused by the occurring of an "anxiety" in an "individual" when he realizes that "assertion" of his identity, cultural values, or "creative capacities" may lead to his "separation from existing relationships" (Brown 2004, 53). The "death fear," on the other hand, generates a sense of insecurity because of "losing one's individuality," which implies loss of identity, loss of cultural values, leading to annihilation of selfhood (Brown 2004, 53). A neurotic, according to Brown, is affected by both of these fears (53), which confuse the mind, as it always seeks to resolve the crisis emerging out of the conflict between these two fears. Ramesh's neurosis is reflective of the unresolved tension between the "life fear" and the "death fear." In New Zealand, Ramesh's "life fear" prohibits him from asserting his Indian identity and cultural idioms, as this may lead to his alienation from the mainstream New Zealand society. Simultaneously, the "death fear" in Ramesh's mind makes him insecure as he realizes that lack of assertion of individual identity may lead to eradication of his self. Ramesh's fears are expressive of his diasporic dilemma and anxiety. As a diasporic subject, stuck between these two fears, Ramesh looks at the sea as an alternative space that offers him relief from the ongoing tension. The sea space is beyond human habitation and Ramesh conceives of this space as his dwelling. At this dwelling space, his fears diminish, and he expects to live in harmony with the sea ecology. This fact is vividly expressed in the last lines of the novel: "the ocean would help him. The ocean would distract him. The ocean would keep him alive" (Krishnamurthy 2011, 170).

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