

Writing the Self-e: Making a case for Intentionality, Emancipation and Gender in Indian Electronic Literature.

And

Indian Electronic Writing and its Modernist anxiety with Print

Samya Brata Roy

Student

Department of English Literature, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad

Author Note

Samya Brata Roy is currently in the 4th Semester of his M.A in English Literature from The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad.

I have no conflicts of interest to disclose. I am indebted to all my respondents and mentors. In Spite of one big paper, my entry is divided into two short papers because it is a work in progress written initially as two separate papers and will be featured as chapters in my MA dissertation.

Correspondence concerning this articles should be addressed to samyabrataroy@gmail.com

Writing the Self-e: Making a case for Intentionality, Emancipation and Gender in Indian Electronic Literature.

Online Narratives or Electronic Literature, in this context, has been used interchangeably because historically, the point of difference between the later and the former is connected to the creative production that took place before the advent of the Internet (Hayles 2007). But, in the context of my research, I am concerned primarily with the production in the age of the internet and the public sphere that it has brought forth. So, what is this thing called Electronic Literature or E-Lit? For me, the definition is very simple. Electronic or Online Literature is something that uses the electronic or the online mode for producing narratives. The definition however can be interrogated in different cultural contexts as all things are. If one looks at the ELO collections, there is an overbearing presence of computational aesthetics (Heckman & O'Sullivan, 2018), and not to mention a distinct lack of Indian presence (Shanmugapriya & Menon, 2019). Computational aesthetics can mean varied things from inserting an image to using VR to convey something. What I mean here is the abundant use of code and other software-based enhancements which help in making it more immersive in nature. Is that the case everywhere? Can this centrality of computational aesthetics be assumed across all spaces? I do not think so. On coming across the ELO collection, the first thing that struck me was how fundamentally different things were in India. From what I have experienced in India, I do not see that much of a use of computer-generated aesthetics and therefore, it can arguably be said that it resembles print in some shape or form. The Internet is known to be a great democratizer, but the recent reality has shown that it is not really the case (Beniwal 2020). If people do not have paper, how will they write stories in it? Similarly, if people do not have a constant flow of the internet, how will they create there? It is important to note that my relationship with Electronic Literature or Online

Narratives is not a new one and is not limited to theoretical postulations. It goes way back to 2015, when I was in school and decided to open a blog of my own. One of the major driving forces behind this act was me being denied the opportunity to publish in print. A deep sense of angst took over and my younger self wanted an outlet where I could share my works with people without being at the mercy of anyone else. It is also to be noted that writing for many is private activity but for me it was, and still is, not the case. I write to be read; it is a public activity since the first day.

Now that I have given the context of the question at hand, let me arrive at the question itself. Until I had the idea about the discourse surrounding E-Lit, I treated it as a hobby. But, when I came to know, I had other questions in my mind which needed answers. I knew why I wrote and what my motivation for writing was. Now, I wanted to discover why do others write? When people write online, do they write just because they want to? or, is there something more to it? I wanted to go to the roots of it and uncover this question of intentionality. Since I cannot possibly investigate every single demographic aspect in a single paper, I had to limit my search to two areas: a) gender identity b) writing in English. The latter is an important consideration because, to feature the multilingual ethos of the country, it would require much greater range and support. It cannot be undertaken in this paper and thus this concerns itself only with the online writings in English. So, the central question becomes something like this: do people who identify as 'Male', 'Female' etc. differ in their intentionality of writing in the online space or is it similar? Is my drive of being denied in print and thus wanting to 'share'- a 'universal' driving factor? Or is directly connected to the gendered lived experience?

Methodology

To go about my search, I launched a survey on the 15th of March and accepted responses till the 15th next month. The question in focus, in relation to this paper, were two: ‘How would you describe your gender and/or sexuality?’ and ‘Why did you start telling stories/sharing creative work online?’. Purposefully, I left the questions open ended so that the respondents could be free while answering it, knowing that analysing the data might be difficult and it was so indeed. My sampling method was that of snowball sampling where I had to repeatedly amplify the survey along my personal contacts as well as in the public spaces. After collecting the data, the immediate thing to do was to clean the same. I had a total of 80 valid responses and had to further divide my question on gender/sexuality in three more sub-columns to help quantify the data at hand. The categorization, for the clarity of analysis, in the sub-column called Gender was broadly based on people who explicitly identified themselves as ‘Male’ (two respondents who identified as Male declared that one of them were not sure about it, the other had non-binary leanings and one clearly declared being ‘Cis-Male’), ‘Female’ (one respondent had identified as ‘Womxn’ and another declared being ‘Cis-Female’ which has been included here for the sake of clarity-for which this disclaimer becomes crucial), and Other (people who did not explicitly identify with anything, were not sure, or identified as ‘Cis-Gender’). With the categorisation in the place, the data (within a total of 80 valid responses) came to be as follows: 56 were Female, 18 were Male and 6 belonged to the Other spectrum. It is also important to be noted that while many Female respondents declared being heterosexual, bisexual, queer etc., most of the Male respondents were only heterosexual in nature apart from the handful mentioned of course. The data regarding Sexuality, which has been obtained is not enough to carry out further analysis and

demands separate attention. That is why I would like to stick to the question of Gender identity for the time being. This survey does not claim to make sweeping remarks regarding the nature of online writing in the country simply because the sample size is too small to say something like that. To even get close to saying something like that, the sample size must be exponentially more which requires a bigger research project, better collaborations and funding and is well beyond the scope of a solo paper. The data about Gender was one strand which I intend to highlight, but it cannot be read in isolation. The next strand is that of understanding the intentionality behind writing online and to see if it is related to the Gendered lived experience. As mentioned earlier, my question was ‘Why did you start telling stories/sharing creative work online?’. Once again, this was also an open-ended question as I wanted my respondents to answer freely without any constraints. So, one can say that the survey was more like a text-based interview of sorts. From the 80 valid responses, which were all in sentence and/or paragraph formats, I had to then lump and split the data (Saldana 2013) according to the prevalence of themes in the responses. Once I had quantified the responses in terms of the dominant themes present in them, then it became easier for me to carry out the data analysis in this regard. It is to be mentioned that this analysis was done in a different way as compared to the last question on Gender. I did not treat one response as a singular entity but split them in sub parts as the themes were found in them. For example, if one response talked about how they wrote because they needed to share and it made them good, I split the response up into two units: ‘share’ and ‘feel good’. Like this I found many sub-units and tried to see how many of these sub-units were present in the Male, Female and Other responses which might throw some light on the intentionality behind their acts of writing. While studying and keeping track of the sub-units present in these responses, I had also

maintained a track of which response (and the corresponding subunit) belonged to which Gender category.

Analysis

First, let's look at the responses which explicitly identified as 'Male'. Within the total 16 Male responses that I studied; I found a constancy of responses without much variation. The sub-units which related to the aspects of sharing, creating a community feeling, pursuing a hobby, and just feeling good in general occupied a massive 87.5% of the responses. The rest 12.5% was shared equally within the emotions of self-improvement and to tackle boredom, each having a 6.25% representation. The first thing to note here is how less the Male responses are in number in comparison to the Female responses, which covers almost 80% of the data set. If we investigate whatever data we have for the Male responses, it is evident that the main drive behind them writing is to have a sense of community and feel good about doing so.

But the equation changes when we study the female responses. Similarly, here also the respondents are talking about building a community and sharing amongst each other which ultimately brings in some needed validation. This aspect of community building figures 42.62% percent of the data set as compared to the 87.5% in Males. But the other part is where things start to get interesting. The respondents talk about healing, venting and how writing online also has a therapeutic side to it. I find this cathartic functionality to be vital and it features with a good 24.59%. Adding to the question of healing via venting, the most important discovery in this part comes in the aspect of freedom, oppression, inferiority complex and a desire to bring about change. Respondents speak about how the online space provides them with a much-needed space where no one will oppress them and in turn they can inspire change. Not only that, but people

also say how this space helps them overcome fear of public writing and the fear of not being good enough. This common theme of emancipation and solidarity features a good 14.86% of the dataset. It might seem insignificant as compared to other responses, but it is important to note how the act of defiance and speaking up against the gaze of the patriarchal forces can inspire a chain reaction and that is why conversations must be amplified regarding the use of this mode as a weapon for emancipation. It does not end here, the data also shows 18.03% here are using the online spaces to build an archive, or a portfolio for that matter, which might help them personally or in professional spaces. If we talk about writing the body or expressing lived experiences, we can see directly via the data how it is being done in the online space where people who identify as women or female are taking up the metaphorical pen to write their selves. The Other 6 responses have too less data for commentary but 66.67% here talks about venting and feeling better like the last two while the remaining 33.34% is split equally into having fun and getting a certain amount of reach.

Conclusion

Studying the personal narratives thus, we can arrive at a better societal understanding regarding the online public sphere (Laslett 1999). On the more, because we are talking about online culture and writing in the online space, I think it is even more important to write about the same. Writing about writing, i.e., theorizing about the same, helps in starting a discourse or conversations regarding the same and bring it into the fold of the Humanities departments in general. It is important because the Humanities itself, in the educational curricula and otherwise does not always seem to acknowledge the online or pay much heed to the Digital method (Brennan 2017). These conversations help amplify, not only academic output, but also creative

output which can help promote the notion of Digital Literacy (PTI 2020). We have been taught to read and write in the online space, but we have not been given any training to traverse the internet along the same. If this is taken care of, I believe people might have greater confidence of being able to move around the Internet without unnecessary anxieties of weird pop-ups.

Therefore, as the paper tries to understand the Gendered Intentionality of Online Writing, two things emerge very clearly from the data at hand. Self-identified females populate the space more, when it comes to their creative output, in the online space. In my understanding this presence has deep connections to the oppressive power politics that women face in a regular day to day basis even today where writing emerges as an act of defiance and emancipation (Foster, and Hager 2014). That is why the online space emerges as a medium bereft of the judgemental eyes. One can ask then, does that mean that we do not have censorship online? Are they preying eyes absent there? Absolutely not! A photoshoot still attracts unnecessary eyeballs and women are harassed regularly much more so online than in regular spaces. But what happens in case of art or creativity in general? My understanding in this regard is that people still view social media only through the lens of media and not the social. The attention or the look out, for most people, is what can be observed briefly without the act of reading. Whatever involves the act of the reading, especially if it is creative or textual in nature, can get overlooked. However, this will not be the norm once the country learns to traverse the internet better. I believe that there is a fundamental generational gap in accessing art in the online space. People are taking advantage of that and very rightly so. I have seen my elder generation quickly access YouTube and Facebook but struggle with platforms which also involve media. This idea matches with my data, as most of the writers present in the analysis have their platforms in blogging sites or Instagram which remains a little less accessible to the older demographic (Sehl 2021). As time passes when digital

literacy does not remain an afterthought, I believe this thing will change and then it would be interesting to see how the nature of writing changes and where it moves from there on in. But, as of this moment, the materiality of space and its fortunate inaccessibility of the textual remains a determining factor for people, especially people who identify as Females to express themselves better.

References

- Aarseth, E. J. (1997). *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (UK ed. edition). Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Beniwal, V. (2020). *As digital divide widens, India risks losing a generation to pandemic disruption*. ThePrint.
<https://theprint.in/india/education/as-digital-divide-widens-india-risks-losing-a-generation-to-pandemic-disruption/568394/>
- Bouchardon, S. (2011). Digital Literature and the Digital. *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice (JWCP)*, 4(1), 65–78. https://doi.org/10.1386/jwcp.4.1.65_1
- Brennan, T. (2017, October 15). *The Digital-Humanities Bust*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-digital-humanities-bust/>
- Foster, T. M., & Hager, C. (2014). Review of Word by Word: Emancipation and the Act of Writing, HagerChristopher. *Journal of the Civil War Era*, 4(1), 124–126.
- Girgar, D. (2008). *Electronic literature: Where is it?* Electronic Book Review.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315707860-25>
- Hayles, N. K. (1999). *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hayles, N. K. (2004). Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis. *Poetics Today*, 25(1), 67–90. <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-25-1-67>

Hayles, N. K. (2007). *Electronic Literature: What is it?* Electronic Literature Organisation.

<https://eliterature.org/pad/elp.html>

Hayles, N. K. (2008). *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (1st edition).

University of Notre Dame Press.

Laslett, B. (1999). Personal Narratives as Sociology. *Contemporary Sociology*, 28(4), 391–401.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2655287>

Morais, S. (2013). *Archive Practice and Digital Humanities—The Centre for Internet and Society*. The Centre for Internet and Society.

<https://cis-india.org/raw/digital-humanities/archive-practice-and-digital-humanities>

Mukherjee, S. (2017). “No Country for E-Lit?” – India and Electronic Literature. *Hyperrhiz:*

New Media Cultures, 16. <https://doi.org/10.20415/hyp/016.e08>

O’Sullivan, J. (Ed.). (2021). *Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities: Contexts, Forms, &*

Practices. Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501363474>

PTI. (2020). *Vice President Naidu calls for mass movement to promote digital literacy—Times of India*. The Times of India.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/vice-president-naidu-calls-for-mass-movement-to-promote-digital-literacy/articleshow/79448071.cms>

Rettberg, S. (2018). *Electronic Literature* (1st edition). Polity.

Saldana, J. (2013). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Sage.

<https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/the-coding-manual-for-qualitative-researchers/book24361>

[6](#)

Schreibman, S., Siemens, R., & Unsworth, J. (Eds.). (2016). *A New Companion to Digital Humanities* (2nd ed.). Wiley Blackwell.

<https://www.wiley.com/en-in/A+New+Companion+to+Digital+Humanities%2C+2nd+Edition-p-9781118680599>

Sehl, K. (2021, January 27). Instagram Demographics in 2021: Important User Stats for Marketers. *Social Media Marketing & Management Dashboard*.

<https://blog.hootsuite.com/instagram-demographics/>

Shanmugapriya, T., Menon, N., & Campbell, A. (2019). An introduction to the functioning process of embedded paratext of digital literature: Technoeikon of digital poetry. *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, 34(3), 646–660. <https://doi.org/10.1093/llc/fqy064>

Singh, R. (2016). Based on Brevity: Fiction in 140 Characters or Less. *Journal of Literature, Culture and Literary Translation*, No. 1(Year 7), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.15291/sic/1.7.lc.7>

Shanmugapriya, T., & Menon, N. (2018). Locating New Literary Practices in Indian Digital Spaces. *Matlit*, 6, 159–174. https://doi.org/10.14195/2182-8830_6-1_11

Shanmugapriya, T., & Menon, N. (2019). First and Second Waves of Indian Electronic Literature. *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, 42(4), 63–71.

Tabbi, J. (Ed.). (2017). *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Electronic Literature*. Bloomsbury

Academic.

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/the-bloomsbury-handbook-of-electronic-literature-978147>

[4230254/](#)

Indian Electronic Writing and its Modernist anxiety with Print

INTRODUCTION

If the internet is treated like a material just like paper, then how does the act of writing in these two modes differ? Even if they do, how does it differ in the Indian context? Does it bear a relationship with print? If so why? This paper tries to understand these questions by primarily using the works of Jessica Pressman, Shanmugapriya T and Nirmala Menon. The first part tries to understand how the anxiety of print or the book can be a determining factor while writing online. In the second part, I try to contextualise the discussion by rooting it in the Indian context. And in the final, I use some samples from my data to show how the act of writing is and what we can read from it. The conclusion that I arrive at is that, because the Internet, as a mode of writing is still new, the influence of the print can be seen very vividly hence the Modernist angst of the past is tangibly seen. But, as we move forward and naturalise the digital, in the Indian context, we could see more experimentations akin to our understanding of the Postmodern.

THE ANXIETY OF PRINT

CS Lewis, in his *Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942) talks in detail about Milton's pursuit to recreate the oral tradition in a piece of paper. The greatest challenge for Milton, according to Lewis, was to give a sense of the performative of the bygone tradition while reading a piece of paper in an armchair. Here we get to see Lewis explore what I call a modal anxiety. During the ancient times, the mode of transmission used to be oral: people spoke, sang or chanted. But, when we come to the literary culture, and especially that of writing the Epic (something that used to be sung), we see people like Milton trying to recreate the same when that idea does not exist anymore. Now, when we have the digital mode alongwith the print, I believe the same anxiety comes into the picture. This anxiety can be traced in two ways: as a fetish of the commodity

called 'the book' and a constant desire to recreate the print aesthetic while writing in the digital mode. Jessica Pressman deals with these strands of thought in two of her works: *Bookishness* and *Digital Modernism*.

This is what I describe as "bookishness": creative acts that engage the physicality of the book within a digital culture, in modes that may be sentimental, fetishistic, radical. Cell-phone covers crafted to look like old books; decorative pillows printed with beloved book covers; earrings, rings, and necklaces made of miniature codices; store windows that use books as props; altered book sculptures exhibited in prestigious collections; and bookbound novels that revolve around a book as a central character. (Pressman 1)

Pressman directly connects the Marxist notion of Commodity Fetishism to the idea of the Book and shows how the object has been commodified in itself. In a milieu, where the Book does not enjoy the centrality as it used to, this fetish is a desperate attempt to cling on to a bygone era. This aspect becomes crucial when we see that Insta quotations resemble the fonts made by a typewriter or the background resembles that of the page of an old book. This is the realm of resembling physically, apart from making the post have a perfect page like alignment. Also, The crucial point of digital culture is the aspect of interactivity where the content is not static and it is flowing through the media platforms and various spaces of culture. Hayles (2004) terms a unit of this cultural form as the flickering signifier where she says, extending the Lacanian notion of the floating signifier, that neither the signifier nor the signified stays static and it's constantly flickering in and out of existence. Hence, if interactivity or fluidity is the ethos of the digital space then it places itself in the counterposition of the print culture which is static in nature i.e it does not move after it has been printed. In the internet or the digital space, the artefacts might not remain the same: links might die, advertisements might pop up, the interface might change and the entire tech can go obsolete (Fitzpatrick 2011). Hence, if meaning making is relied upon by this many factors, then it cannot remain static at all, it will visually change at every reading.

Once again, like the schism between orality and print, the same can be observed in the case of print and the digital. Therefore, when people create in the digital space, this modal anxiety can be traced just like Lewis did in the case of Milton. In the Modernist condition as well, we find an attachment towards the past and a lamentation to what society has come down to. The work of Eliot, Pound and Owen, albeit in a more specific context, bears reflection of the same. One can ruminate that the modernist is someone in the present with their heads turned towards the past. Therefore...

What's true of modernism more generally is true of digital modernism as well: it is "a strategy of innovation that intentionally employs the media of its time to reform and refashion older literary practices in ways that produce new art." Just as Joyce returned to Homer, and Pound borrowed "make it new" from an anecdote about an eighteenth-century B.C.E. (Wollaeger, Dettmar and Pressman xi)

Thus when we see the print traces in digital writing now, it can be said that it uses the bedrock of tradition to create something new. Yes, a new mode comes with the tantalizing possibility of making something new or totally re-inventing everything that comes along with it. But, as Pressman argues, digital or electronic literature (used interchangeably here) does not just scratch everything out and start afresh but it uses the old and mixes to form a hybrid which might pave the way for a new artefact altogether. Hence, we can see this as a precursor to Digital Postmodernism. One can attribute the digital very simply to the Postmodern condition just because it is digital, but, if we look at the cultural dialectic of anxiety and then slowly progressing to acceptance, then we can take the phase we are in as the phase of Digital Modernism. If now, people are only typing texts on the web without using a lot of media, that means the effect of the print is very visible though it is in a different modal context. In spite of writing in the digital mode, the authors are looking back at print. This is decidedly the Modern anxiety. I believe, with naturalising of the digital, we will finally be able to embrace the mode in

all its glory and then we can say to be in the realm of the Postmodern. Electronic Literature or E-Lit, by definition, is born-digital and its aesthetics depends on computational elements.

Pressman sums the above by stating that

Electronic literature has been celebrated as a postmodern literary form that grows out of technologies, subjectivities, and poetics from the middle of the twentieth century, but this book provides an alternative genealogy. Across diverse genres and programming platforms, I examine a subset of contemporary online electronic literature that remixes literary modernism ... Writers involved in digital modernism assess the state of electronic literature, and of literature in general in our digital age, and they decide to raze and rebuild. (Pressman 2)

The first generation of E-Lit according to K Hayles was primarily hypertextual narratives with multiple, often non-linear, reading paths. However, these texts can definitely have non electronic predecessors as

Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, Julio Cortazar's *Hopscotch*, and the Choose Your Own Adventure young adult book series, all of which use footnotes or other textual devices to connect chunks of text and enable navigation of the narrative as a network rather than a linear path. (Pressman 6)

Apart from these examples, as we are talking about Modernism, one can also look at Eliot's *The Waste Land* also as a hypertext poem which keeps referring to other works or concepts and depends on them severely for the meaning making to take place. Curiously enough, such work has actually taken place where projects have been dedicated to creating online variorum editions. One of the most important uses of hypertextuality can be seen in Richard A Parker's *Exploring "The Waste Land"* as there is a website dedicated to the poem which traces all the references as concepts sprinkled through the poem as hypertexts. Whenever there is a reference, that area is embedded with a URL which either pops up or takes the reader to the dedicated area to provide the much needed context. Not only should one read the digital artefact with equal attention, but

the readers also must take into account the question of materiality or materialities in the context of the digital. That is to say that the online mode is a collection of platforms or materials which one can use for their creative output, i.e to say that an Instagram is not the same as Wordpress. The digital makes the text nebulous and it becomes difficult to recognise where it begins or ends; it has no clear demarcation like what Genette (1997) suggests in his idea of the paratext. This problem can be understood if we look at what Shanmugapriya and Menon calls as the *technoeikon*:

We propose *technoeikon* to analyze the literary and digital artifacts of digital literary texts: images, kinetic texts and images, videos, graphic designs, and acoustic, the threads of which are either a component or reinforce digital literary texts that make the reader/ viewer to be more focused than in print text. The elements of *technoeikon* saturate digital literature like the cosmos filled with natural objects. Hence, digital literary works emulate ‘the nature of the world’ to present the text with wholesomeness. We use *technoeikon* to represent ‘skill of weaving images’—the images instantiate the motion images of the real world in digital literature. Weaving *skeuomorph* images embody the ideology of natural systems which offers a realistic perspective to the reader. This is a unique disposition of digital literary works. The creator’s aesthetic experience of the world and his/her message manifested through both *technoeikon* and text are inextricable to the theme of the work. (Shanmugapriya, Menon and Campbell 651)

Thus it is clear that the text cannot be demarcated in the digital space as to what is the text and what is not. Everything contributes to the process of meaning making. Now that I have contextualised the concept of Digital Modernism and meaning making through the idea of the text and how it can be traced in Electronic Literature, i.e through the anxiety of the print culture, the next step would be to understand how the same applies in the Indian context.

THE INDIAN CONTEXT

It is necessary to understand the Indian context separately because the nature of Indian E-Lit is not the same as in most of the Western countries, which is where the discourse emerges from. In order to understand the nature of E-Lit in India, it is important to consider them separately. Souvik Mukherjee (2017) traces E-Lit in India back to the ancient forms of oral storytelling and states that it is rather rhizomatic in nature and the awareness of the same is not there yet echoing Rettberg (2009) where he also says many “people have no idea that electronic literature exists”. Consequently, Shanmugapriya and Menon (2018) builds on Mukherjee’s idea and finds emergent elements of the multimodal E-Lit in the *Gita Govinda*, *Patta Chitra* and *Chitra Kavi*. Their 2019 paper, attempts at historicizing the E-Lit tradition in India.

Cloak Room presumably marked the birth of Indian digital literature. Subsequently, few SMS novels such as Neelakannukal (2006) and Deaf Heaven (2009) are also published. (Shanmugapriya and Menon 65)

Therefore, the first generation of E-Lit is here ascribed to the SMS novels. The second generation of the same is however attributed to the works generated by social media, i.e Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. While there can be some elements of similarity with Twitter fiction and SMS novels due to the constrictions of characters in one SMS/Tweet, the space thrown open by other social media profiles remains something to be reckoned with. Before going into that, it is also important to consider blogging and story sharing sites like Blogger, Wordpress, Wattpad and the newly popular Medium. Wattpad can be seen as a user generated storytelling site with not much scope to innovate whereas Blogger, though it is a bit outdated now, and Wordpress are spaces where one can truly experiment with and implement media. Medium is a much cleaner and simpler space where one can surely add images but there are limitations. Facebook was the initial space of sharing snippets of creativity from spaces like

TerriblyTinyTales etc. but with the advent of Instagram, one can say that most of the aesthetics which is directly linked to the act of writing can be found there.

THE ACT OF WRITING

In order to find the spaces of creative production, I launched a survey on the 15th of March where I wanted to find how solo creators shared narratives in the online space. The aspect of the creators being solo is very important because I wanted to also see how much could people produce without the aspect of outside support. I collected open ended text based interview responses till the 15th of April, exactly for a month to have a sense of symmetry. I received 89 responses and the next step was to clean the data so it would be easy for me to carry out the analysis. I asked my respondents to leave a link to their site of creative production and from that data I will attempt to closely read a handful of those to show how the print anxiety contributes to the aspect of Digital Modernism. The first case that I will try to deal with is the bite sized quotation-ish content of Instagram and this new platform called YourQuote. Both platforms heavily rely on texts within pictures. While Instagram has the role of the caption as well, YourQuote, as the name suggests, functions like a community which shares quotations based on prompts given by each other.

The Instagram pages function on three levels: the outline, the post and then the caption along with it. Some pages go for a dedicated aesthetic where they upload content one in three posts and purposefully include fillers in the remaining two. When someone opens the profile, the chessboard-like aesthetic plays a crucial role in the perception of meaning. In this case, I would go so far as to say that the way the text looks is more important than the text in itself. The technoeikon, thus, operates in the realm of beautification mostly. There comes the singular (or double/triple panelled) post with its caption and the comments. Because of the limitations of the

picture, many authors use the caption to flesh out the content which they could not in the main post. Therefore, it serves as an extension to the main post at hand. Then comes hashtags or metadata integration wherein author try to latch the posts on by tagging other profiles or themes by @ing them or #ing them. Last but not the least comes the uploaded picture in itself. More often than not, they are presented in two ways: text with something that adds to the beauty of the picture or the text presented such a way that it resembles the phenomenon of bookishness. The first page that I will be looking at in this context is [midnightpoetryandchai](#). Looking at the profile from the outset, it is clear that the focus here is in the amalgamation of art and text. Paintings and pretty objects are used as backdrops to house the text which makes it even prettier to look at. Roses, clouds, paintings and any Instagrammable photo has been used here to create a backdrop to house the text. The text is more like a quotation which lures in the reader to open the singular post, which then takes you to the longer caption which is present like the normal format of the print text. Therefore, the aspect of the digital is limited to aesthetics and does not use coding or other means of computation. One might argue that the comment section is also important but I would not consider it here as those are reflections and do not add to the text proper. I can go so far as to say that the visuality of the text here becomes more important than the text in itself. Can we call this to be hypertext? Technically yes as it leads the reader from one point to the other where the picture acts as a lure or trailer to the text. But, once you reach the main text, more often than not there is no visible difference from the print format. The next case would be that of [tinta.poetry](#). Mostly the structure of this page is similar to the last one. But, there is one fundamental difference. The aesthetic quality that the author has chosen here directly resembles that of an old book or a manuscript. Aside from the fact that the profile picture is that of Eliot himself, the reference to the book or the manuscript via the use of the visual can be seen as an

example of bookishness in the virtual mode. This mode strikes a sense of familiarity and I would say that it adds to the perception of the reader as well. YourQuote is another similar platform which relies on the aspect of quotations and images to bring in a sense of visuality. But, the platform is dedicated to that activity only while Instagram is used for many other things as well. Coming to the more longform side of things, we have the good old blogs. The concept of blogging is almost as old as the internet in itself. In my responses most of the blogs were from Blogger and Wordpress and only a few from Medium. The Blogger sites mostly resemble an older internet interface with not much dynamic activity going on. But, two Wordpress accounts are what interests me here. [An Unstable Extravert](#) has a very curious web page design. The webpage in itself resembles what I could call a school notice board where all the posts seem to be stuck with sellotape. Some of these posts are separated by pencils and the posts in itself mostly do not use any other form of media and are mostly short poems. The about page of the author is designed like a notebook with lines in between to write the text. These extra-textual signifiers of the pencil, sellotape and the notebook gives the vibe of a school goer and hence the nostalgia factor influences the meaning making. The posts in itself, however do not use any media elements. Therefore, these signifiers though not directly bookish in nature hint at the things related to it in a roundabout way. Next up, I would like to look at [Soham Deb](#). The blog page appears simple in itself but the possibilities it throws open is what I want to talk about here. Mostly, what we see here is a collection of photographs and descriptions that accompany these photographs. It is pretty simple but the possibilities are something that can be explored. One can use these images on a space to tell stories about things that may or may not be related to the space in itself. Therefore, it opens up interesting questions of meaning making. This strand is taken up [Sen Sanchari](#) who not only creates an archive/ portfolio of her works in her website but

also manages to weave a sense of narrative through the pictures. The narrative serves as a mood builder which helps in understanding the authorial intention.

CONCLUSION

All the things that I have looked at, in the Indian context, have limited the incorporation of media to the realm of images and images only. Not even does URLs feature as a part of the narrative which might open up the possibilities of a branched and non linear narrative. I believe that is due to our training of reading and writing in print which limits the experimentation to the images. That is why, even in the digital mode we try to replicate the features of the print. This phenomenon can be very well looked at as a Digital Modernist anxiety which fails to treat the digital mode as a mode of its own. But, while the authorial intention can be that, because the medium is different, the meaning making changes and it does not serve the same function as it would have in print. That is to say that a picture in a book does not serve the same function as it does in a web article or in an Instagram post simply because we interact with the same in a different way. Once, we learn to create in the digital space and accept the nuances of this mode, only then can we say to be in the zone of Digital Postmodernism.

Works Cited

“An Unstable Extravert.” *An Unstable Extravert*,

<https://anunstableextravert.wordpress.com/>. Accessed 7 May 2021.

Exploring “The Waste Land” - The Poem by T.S. Eliot. 7 June 2010,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20100607104653/http://world.std.com/~raparker/exploring/thewasteland/explore.html>.

Genette, Gerard, and Richard Macksey. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation: 20*.

Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Girgar, Dene. “Electronic Literature: Where Is It?” *Electronic Book Review*, 2008, pp.

263–76, doi:[10.4324/9781315707860-25](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315707860-25).

Hayles, N. Katherine. *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*. 1st edition,

University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.

---. “Electronic Literature: What Is It?” *Electronic Literature Organisation*, 2007,

<https://eliterature.org/pad/elp.html>.

---. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*.

University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost: Being the Ballard Matthews Lectures Delivered at*

University College, North Wales, 1941. OUP USA, 2007.

Midnightpoetryandchai's (@midnightpoetryandchai) Profile on Instagram • 164 Posts.

<https://www.instagram.com/midnightpoetryandchai/>. Accessed 7 May 2021.

Mukherjee, Souvik. “‘No Country for E-Lit?’ – India and Electronic Literature.” *Hyperrhiz: New Media Cultures*, no. 16, 2017. *hyperrhiz.io*, doi:[10.20415/hyp/016.e08](https://doi.org/10.20415/hyp/016.e08).

Kathleen Fitzpatrick *Planned Obsolescence*. NYU Press. 2011,
<https://nyupress.org/9780814727881/planned-obsolence>. Accessed 7 May 2021.

Pressman, Jessica. *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age*. Columbia University Press, 2020.

---. *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Rettberg, Scott. *Electronic Literature*. 1st edition, Polity, 2018.

“Sanchari Sen.” *Sanchari Sen*, <https://sensanchari.com/>. Accessed 7 May 2021.

Schreibman, Susan, et al., editors. *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*. 2nd ed., Wiley Blackwell, 2016,
<https://www.wiley.com/en-in/A+New+Companion+to+Digital+Humanities%2C+2nd+Edition-p-9781118680599>.

Shanmugapriya, T., et al. “An Introduction to the Functioning Process of Embedded Paratext of Digital Literature: Technoeikon of Digital Poetry.” *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, vol. 34, no. 3, Sept. 2019, pp. 646–60. *Silverchair*, doi:[10.1093/lc/fqy064](https://doi.org/10.1093/lc/fqy064).

“Soham Deb.” *Soham Deb*, <https://sohamdeb.wordpress.com/>. Accessed 7 May 2021.

T, Shanmugapriya, and Nirmala Menon. “First and Second Waves of Indian Electronic Literature.” *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2019, pp. 63–71.

---. "Locating New Literary Practices in Indian Digital Spaces." *Matlit*, vol. 6, Aug. 2018, pp. 159–74. *ResearchGate*, doi:[10.14195/2182-8830_6-1_11](https://doi.org/10.14195/2182-8830_6-1_11).

TINTA Poetry (@tinta.Poetry) • Instagram Photos and Videos.

<https://www.instagram.com/tinta.poetry/>. Accessed 7 May 2021.