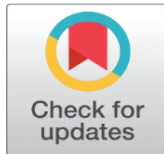
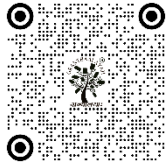


# “I CONTAIN MULTITUDES”: ABJECTION AND AFFECT IN NAMITA GOKHALE’S THE BLIND MATRIARCH (2021)

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the interconnected themes of abjection and affects in Namita Gokhale's novel *The Blind Matriarch*. The themes of abject and affect have procured substantial importance in interpreting the negotiation of marginalized bodies within patriarchal and postcolonial settings. However, Namita Gokhale's novel *The Blind Matriarch* is well researched, but there has been limited attention to the combined study of all three theories. The paper examines the abject in Matangi Ma's embodiment. It analyzes affect as emotional structuring. Further, it explores semiotic and symbolic spatial dynamics. The paper uses textual analysis and Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis for identifying themes within the text. Using this methodology, the primary text, *The Blind Matriarch*, is examined through a theoretical framework that includes theories of the Abject and Affect and an analysis of semiotic and symbolic aspects. The key finding of the paper reveals that the aspect of Matangi Ma's blindness is both marginalizing and empowering, where Matangi Ma is seen as a site of cultural contradiction. She also undermines various common conceptions of power, visibility, and gendered subjectivity. The paper concludes by showing how Matangi Ma reconfigures socio-cultural marginality through theoretical frameworks. These findings contribute to feminist literary studies by stressing the role of affect and abjection in interpreting marginalized experiences.

**Keywords:** Abjection, Affect, Semiotic, Symbolic, Bodily Boundaries

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. CONTRIBUTION AND ORIGINALITY STATEMENT

This study contributes to the existing literature by exploring the themes of feminism, abjection, affect, and aspects of symbolic and semiotic in the novel *The Blind Matriarch*. It offers new insights into how emotional and psychological responses are shaped by varying degrees of semiotic and symbolic dimensions of vision. It also engages with understanding gendered subjectivity, cultural representation, and the course of action through which the condition of Matangi Ma reflects and disrupts established societal norms and affective structures.

## 2. STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

The research paper is bifurcated into four main sections. The initial section explores the theme of abjection, examining how Matangi Ma's blindness and social position challenge normative roles and expectations. In the second section, it discusses affect as the structuring force in the novel and analyzes how emotion mediates personal and social identity, especially of Matangi Ma. The third section interrogates the construction of symbolic and semiotic spaces and how these reflect cultural conflict and transformation in the character of Matangi Ma. The last section, the conclusion, synthesizes these insights to argue that Gokhale, through Matangi Ma, redefines matriarchy and female authority outside the traditional patriarchal lens.

## 3. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In the 1960s and 1970s, during the second wave of the feminist movement, feminist literary studies emerged. Basically, feminist literary studies were targeting the literary traditions of patriarchy and its stereotypes. The foundational texts of this study were Virginia Woolf's and Simone de Beauvoir's works, which discussed aspects of women's freedom and gender as a social construct (De Beauvoir, 1997; Woolf, 1925).

Julia Kristeva introduced the Theory of Abjection in her renowned 1980 work, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. She explores how 'Abject' is an element that must be cast off. The theory of abjection can be widely applied in literary texts, where characters from different texts can represent abjection as the breakdown of boundaries between self and society.

Affect Theory was introduced by Silvan Tomkins in 1962 in his book *Affect Imagery Consciousness*. The theory was developed to recognize human emotions through bodily responses. After Tomkins, Brian Massumi, Eve Sedgwick, and Adam Frank contributed to the field of the humanities by introducing the concept of affect. (Massumi, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003; Frank, 1995)

The novel *The Blind Matriarch* was written by Indian fiction writer Namita Gokhale in 2021. The novel is an apt text for understanding concepts of abjection and affect. The abjection and affect are explored in the novel through the protagonist Matangi Ma, 'The Blind Matriarch'. Besides abject and affect, the novel is also analyzed through the aspect of gender and culture.

The paper investigates elements of female subjectivity and the complicated identity of Matangi Ma in the novel through the theories of abject, affect, and feminism. Therefore, this paper inspects the intersection of abject and affect for constructing alternative female subjectivities in the text *The Blind Matriarch*.

There are few or very limited studies on Abjection and Affect in the context of contemporary Indian women's writing. Recent Indian novels lack affective elements.

## 4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study significantly contributes to the intersection of feminist, abjection, and affect theories in the context of contemporary Indian literature. There has been limited attention drawn towards the combined study of all three theories. Through the character of Matangi Ma from the novel 'The Blind Matriarch', the paper explores the gap, analyzing how the complex approach to female subjectivities is shaped within social and cultural frameworks.

By re-envisioning blindness as both symbolic and semiotic in the character of Matangi Ma, the study contributes to feminist literary criticism. Analyzing all three theories alongside the novel provides insight into how cultural factors and psychological experiences intersect in shaping an individual's identity in contemporary Indian texts.

## 5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper uses an interdisciplinary feminist theoretical framework to analyze the novel *The Blind Matriarch*. The framework is designed while grounding the analysis in multiple disciplines. The paper's framework is rooted in feminist theory, abjection, affect, and semiotic and symbolic factors.

The intersection of these theories permits a detailed scanning of how cultural identity is shaped through gendered experience, emotional trauma, and symbolic representation. The feminist theory framework is an interdisciplinary framework that amalgamates theories of abjection, affect, and the Semiotic and Symbolic aspects. This amalgamation helps one understand how aging intersects with gender, disability, and power. These factors ultimately shape female subjectivity. The aspects of feminism, Abject, Affect, Symbolic, or Semiotic are treated as interdependent tools for analysis, rather than in isolation, as abjection is responsible for the subjectivity, which is composed over the interaction of bodily rejections, emotional intensities through affect, and grounding interpretive structures through semiotic and symbolic factors.

Abjection describes the sidelining of the female body, whereas affect discloses how this sidelining is accomplished emotionally and communicated socially. This is what makes the study interdisciplinary. Therefore, the framework explores how gendered subjectivities appear through exclusion, emotional experiences, and the semiotic and symbolic orders.

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection defines it as the process of casting something out of the symbolic order, provoking feelings of disgust and fear (Kristeva, 1982). Kristeva says that Abjection is the process of moving from symbolic space to semiotic space. According to Kristeva, Abjection is constituted through two factors—psychological and cultural. Basically, any subject is constituted from these two factors only. Abject stands at the delicate boundaries of the self. Here, the distinction between the individual and society begins to fade. Abjection is extremely affective and Symbolic. It protects an individual's consistency by casting off what cannot be incorporated into society's accepted structures. Therefore, the concept of Abjection by Julia Kristeva can be called the 'boundary-making process'.

Abjection can be seen as the expulsion of something from the symbolic order. According to Kristeva, the symbolic order can be seen as an organized sphere of societal norms in which identity becomes fixed and comprehensible. To be part of this order, one must follow its norms and the boundaries of society. Abjection is a process that expels the individual and their identity when they challenge the established social system. Abjection is responsible for identity formation and for an individual's instability. One becomes unstable by disrupting society's order and meaning. The boundary between an individual and society is not fixed but delicate. Therefore, identity might continually be fortified through repeated reactions of elimination. Identity is both constituted and destabilized simultaneously by the fear of being cast out of society.

The abjection is grounded in the bodily boundaries and the cultural norms. Abjection is not only based on a biological entity but is also shaped by a society's cultural meanings. The body contributes to the sensory and affective foundation of abjection, whereas society's culture regulates its scope. Therefore, Abjection produces 'otherness' and regulates 'social boundaries'. Abject destabilizes fixed identity. Abjection, therefore, is linked to marginality, embodiment, and, many times, social exclusion.

Silvan Tomkins, an American psychologist, proposed the Affect theory in the early 1960's in his work *Affect Imagery Consciousness*. It was published in four different volumes. Later, this theory was further researched by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Silvan Tomkins developed a theory that explains how strong emotions shape human behavior. Tomkins (1962) stated that emotions are the main source of human motivation, as "affects (emotions) are the primary motivational systems in humans" (p. 34). Affects are pre-cognitive, non-linguistic, physiological feelings that are akin to reactions to stimuli. Tomkins says these effects can encompass several interpretations, such as sentiments, temperaments, sensations, influences, capacities, connections, auras, interaction, intensities, and conditions. Affects are subjective emotional states such as happiness, shame, and worry that are felt by the body and are not consciously recognized (Tomkins, 1962)

Affect theory, formulated by Silvan Tomkins (1962) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003), examines the influence of emotions and affects on the formation of Individual and group experiences, identities, and social structures. The study examines how emotions are shaped by society and culture, and how they impact behavior and power dynamics. Affects are intricately intertwined with the cultural and social environment, exerting influence on both the individual and communal psyche.

Massumi (2002) states that Affect operates before and beyond language. It shapes subjectivity and social interaction. Affects are the foundation of human experience, as they occur before language appears. Affect provides the basis for an individual's emotional response, which later shapes the use and understanding of language. The repetitive affective experience builds a structure of emotional expectations and response. These structures shape how individuals see

themselves. Therefore, affect exists before language. It extends its control beyond linguistics. It shapes both an individual's subjectivity and the collective social life. Therefore, Affects can be called circulatory in nature, where they move between individuals and societal structures.

The Bulgarian-French philosopher Julia Kristeva introduced the concepts of the semiotic and the symbolic. Semiotic and symbolic are referred to as spaces. According to Kristeva (1980), the semiotic and symbolic spaces refer to the two interdependent aspects of language, with the semiotic taken as the maternal and the symbolic as the paternal. Semiotics, as the maternal aspect of language, shows the speaker's inner drives or impulses, whereas the semiotic challenges give rise to the symbolic. Semiotic is pre-linguistic, rhythmic, maternal, and affective, whereas symbolic is linguistic, structured, rule-governed, and paternal.

The process of moving from the semiotic to the symbolic stage is known as Abjection. Semiotics refers to the pre-mirror stage, which moves to symbolic space, representing culture, language, religion, region, and nationality. Abjection is a state of being cast off that disturbs cultural and conventional identity. When one starts distinguishing between self and society, knowing one's role in society, and the symbolic order one must follow, these processes are part of abjection.

Kristeva also notes that one can sometimes oscillate between the semiotic and the symbolic stages. Rathod (2020) writes that "Kristeva describes the relation between the semiotic and symbolic as a dialectic oscillation" (p. 3). Both are seen as continuous oscillations that form subjectivity. At semiotic space, meaning can only be delivered through bodily aspect rather than the aspect which is logically proven. Whereas symbols represent the grammatical structure of the language. Semiotics disrupts force within the language and symbolic instructing system of meaning and identity. The speech becomes meaningful when both come together. Wrede (2015) writes that space is never neutral; it is always expansively constructed, ideologically marked, and shaped by dominant power structures and forms of knowledge (p. 11). Therefore, it is understood that space is ideologically constructed.

Kristeva contemplates semiotic as the maternal and the transgression of the father's rule, and symbolic as the paternal, the grammatical, and the punctuation transgression of language (Ziarek, 1992). Gokhale uses a language that moves from the semiotic to the symbolic. She uses a narrative style that progresses from signs and symbols that directly represent ideas to more abstract, layered symbolic representations that require the reader's interpretation. As discussed above, all theories are interlinked in the study. The theory of abjection interprets what is excluded; affect interprets how exclusion is felt; and the aspect of semiotic and symbolic interpretation concerns where and how meaning is structured.

Abject is seen as something cast off by society. The cast-off component can threaten the steadiness of identity. Identity can also involve cultural norms. Affect is associated with how being cast off, or exclusion, is felt. These are emotions or feelings that took place after exclusion. The process from semiotic to symbolic defines two aspects of where and how the meaning is rooted or structured. This is how all three aspects of themes of Abjection, affect, and symbolic and semiotic are connected.

The interconnection of theories can be seen from different perspectives. Abjection functions within the symbolic order. Affect arises from different encounters with abjection, whereas semiotics disrupts symbolic structures, allowing reinterpretation of the subject. Different contrasts are primarily established through the process of Abjection. It can be subject or object, self or other, inside or outside. Primary exclusion is where abjection operates, and the symbolic aspects rely on what is cast out through it. The element that is cast out is never totally gone; instead, it oscillates on the boundary, which forms subjectivity. Therefore, the identity is not fixed. Abjection can also be seen as a precondition of the symbolic, where language and social norms structure the symbolic order.

Affect emerges from encounters with abjection. It can be seen as an instant pre-cognitive bodily response that precedes and surpasses the standardized connotation. Abject disturbs identity and the societal system, which is why it is neither fully object nor subject. Affect operates at the stage of passion and sensation. It rolls out from the dislocation of the boundaries that the symbolic order must maintain. Affect prompted via abjection is not totally individual; instead, it circulates socially and culturally.

The aspect of semiotics disrupts symbolic structures, enabling reinterpretation. Semiotic and symbolic aspects are intricately woven together. Initially, the disruption occurs at the language stage. Then the semiotic factor disrupts the symbolic through affective intensities. At last, the disruption enables re-interpretation and transformations.

Altogether, the symbolic aspect set up standards, where abjection expels what does not suffice. This deportation produces affective intensities, and finally, semiotic aspects force the disintegration and renegotiation of its significance. Feminist theory anchors all three theories together. It presents gender as constructed and regulated by the environment.

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The analysis presents the body as a locale of control and power, and emphasizes emotional experience. The theoretical framework examines identity formation, emotional structures, and spatial and symbolic negotiations.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative, interpretive research design based on textual analysis and the thematic analysis method. This is a suitable approach for this research, as it examines complex dimensions of Affect and Abject rooted in narrative compositions, which require interpretive and theory-based study rather than quantitative measures.

The novel 'The Blind Matriarch' is selected as the primary text. It was selected for its thematic richness and relevance to theories of abjection, affect, and symbolic and semiotic phenomena. The primary data for this study include passages, scenes, character representations, and narrative descriptions. These were selected intentionally, given their significance to the themes of Abjection, affect, domestic space, and symbolic and semiotic meaning.

The concept of abjection, by Julia Kristeva, serves as an interpretive lens for identifying bodily boundaries, whereas Silvan Tomkins's Affect theory enriches the analysis of emotional intensities within the text.

The textual analysis was conducted through a literary analysis of the novel *The Blind Matriarch* by Namita Gokhale. A close reading of the novel involves identifying motifs, tracing repetitions, interpreting symbols, and, lastly, linking them through the theory.

Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method, a six-stage process, was used. It starts with familiarisation, which requires repeated reading of the text and note-taking. It is followed by coding, inductive reasoning, and deductive reasoning. The themes that directly emerged from the text were inductive coding, whereas pre-existing theoretical concepts were part of deductive coding. Later, themes were generated, reviewed, and defined. Lastly, writing or Interpretation takes place.

The themes of Abjection, Affect, and semiotic and symbolic space were interpreted within the theoretical framework, enabling an analysis of how the ideas of abjection and affect operate within domestic and symbolic structures in the novel.

## 7. RESEARCH GAP AND OBJECTIVES

### 7.1. RESEARCH GAP

Research on the novel *The Blind Matriarch* primarily focuses on its portrayal of female agency and emotional complexity, but it lacks engagement with theories of Affect and Abject in shaping individuality or subjectivity within Indian patriarchal family structures. Further, the association between semiotic and symbolic spaces in the formation of female identity has not been sufficiently investigated. Exploring the given gaps enables a profound analysis of the convergence between female subjectivity, the emotional aspect, and embodiment.

### 7.2. OBJECTIVES

- To examine abjection in Matangi Ma's embodiment
- To analyze affect as emotional structuring
- To explore semiotic-symbolic spatial dynamics

## 8. DISCUSSION

There is extensive research on Namita Gokhale's novel *The Blind Matriarch* and on theories of 'Abject' and 'Affect'. But among the various researchers, there is very limited engagement on *The Blind Matriarch* in relation to the theories together in the context of Indian patriarchal family structures. Notable theorists of abjection and affect are Julia Kristeva and Silvan Tomkins. *The Blind Matriarch* provides various valuable insights into societal culture and human psychology. In the novel, abjection and affect contribute to the construction of societal ideologies and their influence on human emotional experiences. Besides the theories of abjection and affect, liminal space theory, psychoanalysis, and intertextuality also helped bridge the gap in portraying the roles of abjection and affect in the novel *The Blind Matriarch*.

The study situates theories within the Indian socio-cultural and feminist frameworks through which it investigates the production of servitude and agency.

The abject and affect conditions in the novel are reflected through the character of Matangi Ma, who serves as a potent symbol of abjection, challenging societal norms and eliciting complex affective responses. In the novel, Matangi Ma's decaying, disabled, and dependent body becomes a site of abjection. The theme of Abjection in the novel operates as a culturally produced structure of exclusion within Indian society and patriarchal norms. Kristeva argues that object experiences are common in everyday life and help one understand the amalgamation of an individual's experiences, which represent a character (Theory of Abjection). Through her experiences, Matangi Ma became actively aware of how she negotiated, complied, resisted, and sustained her embodied identity. Her body became a platform where feminine gendered expectations of control are fiercely imposed.

One could use the Matriarch's blindness as a metaphor for her societal invisibility or marginalization (Kristeva, 1980), emphasizing how people overlook or discount her because of her perceived disability. Additionally, Bhuvaneshwari and Densingh (2021) mentioned that Matangi Ma was not able to see, but "her act of feeling everything around her through the other senses and thought process is crucial in the text for such abilities mark the extremely high respect the family members possess for her" (p. 2221). It can be related to a quote from a novel: Matangi Ma's fortitude and resilience are unparalleled. She continues to console her family; she believes that "Life is for the living, they hurt more than those that have gone" (Gokhale, 2021, p.187). Her Character represents a threat to our understanding of reality in an abject manner. It arises from the contrast between Matangi Ma's intuitive wisdom and the limited perception of those around her. She highlights the existence of multiple layers of truth and meaning that are often ignored or suppressed by society. Thus, her blindness can be interpreted as a metaphor for deeper insight into truths overlooked by those who rely solely on the physical senses. Her disability should not be taken as a lack, but as an intellectual alternative that challenges hierarchies related to blindness. All the themes discussed can also lead to another theme: resilience. Thus, the theme of resilience does not fit as passive fortitude but as a form of perceptual resistance, as Matangi Ma's story is about love, loss, and the resilience of the human spirit.

The matriarch navigates and challenges the social norms and expectations that seek to marginalize her. Her experiences could shed light on broader issues of social injustice, discrimination, and the power dynamics inherent in patriarchal structures. Despite not having equal gender rights, Matangi Ma continued to work on her self-worth, self-esteem, self-image, character, reputation, and confidence. She carved her path, pursuing her passion, leading her family with a gentle, calm demeanor, and establishing her reputation within it, which in turn bolstered her confidence. Her actions suggest a compromise rather than a total dismantling of internal barriers that could hinder women's advancement. It can be seen in some quotes from the novel where her interests or passions are discussed, such as Gokhale's 'Matangi was humming a Holi thumri' (Gokhale, 2021, p. 21). 'Her voice was wheezy today, but tuneful. She loves to listen to or recite poems 'I was reciting some poems to Matangi Ma' (Gokhale, 2021, p.100).

The abject and liminal space always go hand in hand, because one can only be in liminal space once one is cast off (abject) from society or the surroundings. The conflict in the liminal space of the character Matangi Ma is perfectly employed. Gennep (1909) mentioned that she occupies a marginal or peripheral position within her society or community. This could be due to her unconventional beliefs, actions, or relationships. She exists on the edge of social norms, challenging or redefining them through her presence. She is a spiritual or metaphysical character; her journey may involve exploring the real me beyond the physical or conventional understanding. Matangi Ma's liminality portrays her exclusion from regulating societal roles. While doing so, she locates herself as a figure of transitional authority. Liminality can also manifest in terms of time or space. Matangi Ma exists in a period of transition, not fully rooted in the past or the present. Hasan and Patil (2023) state that "her own past life comes back to her in flashes, her womanizing and abusive husband, and how, one day, she chose to unsee everything – literally and figuratively" (p. 372). Gokhale writes, 'He had slapped her that Holi. Not for the first time. Not the last.' (2021, p. 31) She navigates physically or is undefined. The character of Matangi Ma also serves as a guardian or guide at thresholds or boundaries. This role involves facilitating transitions or transformations for others, embodying the liminal space as a facilitator of change or growth. Matangi Ma's complexity, adaptability, and transformative potential state her journey of transition to transformation.

Tomkins (1962) says that, being non-linguistic, affect can be used to refer to multiple areas such as feelings, emotions, moods, sensations, forces, potential, relations, atmosphere, surroundings, encounters, intensities, or states of any individual or group, over which one doesn't have any control. Matangi Ma's affective life shows that emotions are not fully individual but are shaped socially by culture and gender. Due to macular degeneration or blindness, Matangi

Ma started feeling distress, a deep emotional pain that grew her detachment from the outer world. Despite her blindness, she experiences significant development in her senses, which helps her stay emotionally engaged, as Gokhale writes, "Matangi knew and recognized each of the characters from their voices." (2021, p.10), "Matangi had adapted her faculties to the blurred vision. She went about her tasks with easy, relaxed movements, never complaining, never letting on how little she could actually see" (Gokhale, 2021, p.26). She moved through her daily routine with composure, concealing the depth of her blindness. Gradually, instinct supplanted sight, and her remaining senses intensified, transforming her body into a complex sensory system that enabled her to interpret the world beyond visual cues. 'I may be blind, but remember, I can see everything. I have eyes in the back of my head. I am like a CCTV camera' (Gokhale, 2021, p.36). This is how she sustains in negative Affect conditions too. She turned her anger into silence when she faced domestic violence. This is how she shows emotional suppression by silencing her anger at domestic arena. Despite all these conditions, she still finds joy within her family by keeping her close to nature and by following her passions, like reciting poems: "I was reciting some poems to Matangi Ma' (Gokhale, 2021, p. 100)."

The affect and Theory of Psychoanalysis play a crucial role together, as affect is the influence of emotion on the psyche of any individual. Matangi Ma's personality and actions reflect deeper psychological constructs. Ahmad and Nayab (2019) said that "literary text expresses the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author, that a literary work is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses" (p. 56). One may psychoanalyze the character of Matangi Ma in this novel, *The Blind Matriarch*, but it is evident that all other characters are also reflections of her own psyche. Matangi Ma serves as a complex character whose psychological depth aligns with psychoanalytic theory's exploration of unconscious motivation, family dynamics, and identity formation (Theory of Psychoanalysis). Matangi Ma's actions and decisions often stem from unconscious motivation and desires. Psychoanalytic theory also states that much of human behavior is driven by unconscious action (Sigmund Freud). Abjection and psychoanalysis converge to confess how subjectivity is built up through exclusion and suppression. Therefore, Abject and the theory of Psychoanalysis are interlinked to each other.

As the novel explores complex themes such as tradition versus modernity, the role of women in society, and the impact of contemporary identities, it becomes more intertextual (Kristeva, 1966; Gokhale, 2021). Gokhale engaged and referenced other texts and cultural artifacts, which helped readers to consider multiple perspectives and interpretations. It also serves as a tool for the Gokhale to blend diverse literacy facts into the character of Matangi Ma. She emerges as a character intricately woven with intertextuality, drawing attention to a range of cultural and literary references.

Raj (2015) states that "Intertextuality, though surfaced as a post-structuralist concept, existed as a universal phenomenon that elucidates the communicative interconnections between a text and the other and text and context" (p. 77). Gokhale employs referential rather than typological intertextuality in designing the character of Matangi Ma. Referential intertextuality refers to direct references or allusions to specific texts, myths, or cultural elements that are external to the novel itself (Intertextuality). Further, Zengin (2016) said that "the primary focus in inter-textuality is the interdependence of texts. All texts are intertexts because they refer to, recycle and draw from the pre-existing texts" (p. 300). Gokhale incorporates references to Indian myths, cultural practices, and historical events throughout the narrative, enriching the story with layers of meaning that resonate with readers familiar with these references.

## 9. RESULT

As discussed in the discussion section, subjectivity in the novel 'The Blind Matriarch' is not fixed. The interplay among the theories of the abject, affect, semiotics, and symbolism shapes one's identity. Throughout the novel, affect is a fundamental element that shapes interpersonal relationships, including an individual's behavior, perceptions, and language. Abjection constructs the periphery of belonging by marginalizing certain identities, which are marked through the factors of gender and disability as well. Matangi Ma, the Blind Matriarch, is therefore an apt character in which intersection occurs, revealing how authority and marginalization coexist within the same character. The findings show that Matangi Ma's identity emerges through negotiations among different factors. The factors include bodily experiences, power structures, and gendered expectations. The findings, as discussed, show an entangled, complex reframing of subjectivity. The factors of resilience and transformation help in reframing the subjectivity of Matangi Ma.

Tomkins theory of affect shapes identity. Ahern (2024) mentioned that 'Tomkins model of the affect system is not behaviorist but, rather, capacious enough to account for the complexities of social context and individual personality' (p. 97). The first two volumes of 'Affect Imagery Consciousness' talk about positive and negative Affect. McIlwain (2007)

mentions that one of the central bases of the theory is that the nine basic affects are the primary motivators of human behavior. In Judith Butler's terms (1990), our identity is not static; social and cultural experiences form its foundation, and there is no inner self. Whatever you are, you are just part of the outer world. You perform the role assigned by society. Social construction also constructs binary division, as no individual can possess a 100 percent male or female identity. We should question the conventional understanding of masculinity and femininity (Butler, 1990). The Affect factor shapes an individual's identity. The connection between affect theory and the *Blind Matriarch* is vast. From a Tomkins perspective, the concept of 'blind matriarch' can be interpreted metaphorically as a figure who wields power and authority (the matriarch) but is unable to perceive certain emotional or affective aspects of society, surroundings, or the environment (being blind).

Rooney says the affect systems we inherit are not only differentiated, specific, and particular but also developed by species, group, and individual development and experiences, and realized through what Tomkins terms scripts (Rooney, 2020).

Affect studies emotions and feelings that shape individual and collective experiences, identities, and social structure. Tomkins makes several contributions to the subjectivity thought. Matangi Ma's gradual loss of eyesight due to macular degeneration, her unhappy marriage, her love for nature, the development of other senses, listening to music, and her rejection of societal ideologies are a few illustrations of how Matangi Ma collectively responded to these affective situations in her life.

Matangi Ma's embodied experiences lead to sensory re-arrangements. Blindness in Matangi Ma can be seen as an affective re-orientation rather than a limitation. Her sensory adaptation to blindness strengthens her non-visual affective responses, including sound, touch, and smell. All these affective responses are beyond language. There are many instances in the novel through which the redistribution of sensory attention foregrounds the affective insight beyond visual dominance (Gokhale, 2021).

As a pre-linguistic experience, affect becomes a site of the body. Matangi Ma's presence and power are communicated via her bodily control, her gestures, and even her presence. Her presence for her family members spoke for her before language, showing the functioning of affect before language. The reflection of years of suppression, dominance, and control is a true example of aging and disciplined body of Matangi Ma. Matangi Ma's silence can also be seen as an affective site, full of tension, control, and judgment. Therefore, silence exists beyond language. Due to her blindness, her other senses were intensified, revealing pre-linguistic experience through them.

Through the character of Matangi Ma, one can come to the conclusion that the factor of affect is engraved, communicated, and recognized through the body of an individual. Language is not required to structure an individual's identity.

In Matangi Ma's case, her gender, being female, and her bodily disability, blindness, become the site of abjection. According to Kristeva, Abjection is a state of being or a subject matter considered low, degraded, or disgusting (1982). Further, Karlyn (2015), in his study, mentioned, "The abject is also the foundation of the establishment of the identity, as subject formation must cast off the abject in order to bring itself into being" (p. 2). Abjection is the process of casting off or rejecting something from society or culture (Kristeva, 1982). The Abjection is very near to social isolation. Social isolation stands as the process of marginalizing, excluding, or treating individuals or groups as inferior within a society. It may involve the rejection or devaluation of certain people based on aspects such as race, gender, disability, or socio-economic status. Social abjection often leads to discrimination, prejudice, and unequal access to resources and opportunities for those who are affected.

The theory of abjection is also explained in terms of social marginalization. It clarifies how societies, especially Indian society, reject or marginalize elements that threaten social order. Matangi Ma's body and disability destabilize societal boundaries. Matangi Ma's body can be seen as a threat to societal order because she disrupts the social order's established system.

Matangi Ma's body, which is aging and disabled, asks for dependency, which is suppressed or rejected by society. Matangi Ma's blindness takes her out of the visible world, removing her from the visual system of her life. This element of cast-off or abjection grounds her blindness. Despite her blindness, she remains in authority as a matriarch. Where disability is associated with weakness, authority becomes her control and vision. The contradictory aspect of weakness and authority creates abjection. Through analyzing the novel, her disability is not justified through her physical conditions; these factors made her marginalized and unsettled powerful within the Indian societal order.

Bhuvaneshwari and Densingh (2021) state that matriarchal authority raises the question of whether the power dynamic of patriarchy shifts when a matriarch replaces a patriarch. When one hears the word 'matriarch', one associates it with someone who embodies maternal qualities, such as providing sentimental support to the family. Matriarchal families do not undermine the power and authority of established systems or institutions. In connection with the ideologies they generate, mother-centered families neither subvert nor restore the existing notions of hierarchy. In the novel, everyone looks to their mother for solutions and strength. Matangi-Ma's gentle nature stemmed from her position of authority. She tried to grow her family under one roof. She holds on to her joint family, which lives on the four floors of the same building. As lockdown hits, Matangi Ma re-examines her life and purpose, reconciles with old secrets, and forms new bonds. Children seek more comfort from the matriarch. Suryaveer, the oldest child, seeks comfort in Matangi Ma's company. (Gokhale, 2021)

Matangi Ma's approach to teaching her family was different. Her love, strength, and the human spirit she acquired resonate with every family member who has lived. It suggests how societal norms and expectations intersect with individual identity, particularly within disability and leadership roles.

Karl Polanyi discusses the 2T's. Matangi Ma also embodies the theme of 2T's, which are transition and transformation (Polanyi, 1944). The second half of the novel shifts towards the transformation in the family and the outer world. Matangi Ma can be described as 'indestructible' and 'shatterproof'. It can be elaborated through the lines in the text, where Gokhale writes, "It was difficult to breathe from her nose or her mouth, and yet she was not choking. She tried to lick her tongue against the roof of her mouth, but she couldn't manage it. It was as though there was an insurrection going on inside her body; it had become a battleground with no interludes of peace" (Gokhale, 2021, p.158). 'She couldn't negotiate anything. Her own unflustered acceptance of her condition had made it seem even more normal' (Gokhale, 2021, p.26). Through her journey and changes, she represents these concepts in the novel. Matangi Ma experiences significant transitions in various aspects of her life. She strictly adhered to traditional norms and values, which represent traditional societal norms. Over time, she undergoes changes in her beliefs and attitudes. Matangi Ma led a joint family under one roof, reflecting the culturally determined symbolism of a replete home. This shows that the family's past, relationships, and social life are closely connected to how the novel presents family life amid the pandemic's uncertainty.

## 10. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *The Blind Matriarch* delves deeply into the intricate interplay of affects, abjection, and societal power dynamics, particularly through the compelling character of Matangi Ma. Her journey embodies transition and transformation, challenging traditional norms and fostering resilience within societal marginalization. The novel's exploration of affect theory and abjection illuminates the complexities of individual and collective experiences, ultimately offering valuable insights into societal culture and human psychology

## DISCLOSURE OF AI TOOLS

Both authors declare that no AI has been used in any form for writing this manuscript.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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