



ISSN: 2395-7852



# International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management (IJARASEM )

Volume 11, Issue 4, July - August 2024



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

**IMPACT FACTOR: 7.583**

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# Defying Conventions: The Existential Journey of Bipasha in Nabaneeta Dev Sen's Narrative the Naxal Trilogy

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the intricate layers of Bipasha's life, the protagonist in Nabaneeta Dev Sen's *The Parrot Green Saree*, translated to English by Tutun Mukherjee. Drawing from Sen's Naxal trilogy, including *I, Anupam*, and *In a Foreign Land by Chance*, the study delves into Bipasha's defiance of societal norms in sexuality, motherhood, and opinions. Rooted in various disciplines, this analysis incorporates works such as Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, Julia Kristeva's third-generation feminism hypothesis, Harriet Malinowitz's essay *Unmotherhood*, and Mary Kledge's *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*.

**KEYWORDS:** Existentialism, Feminism, Phallocentrism, Bipasha, Identity, Relationships, Motherhood, Societal Norms, Rebellion, Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Unconventional Choices.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This scholarly exploration embarks upon a profound analysis of Nabaneeta Dev Sen's intricate portrayal of the protagonist, Bipasha, in her seminal work *The Parrot Green Saree*, masterfully translated into English by Tutun Mukherjee. Situated within the rich tapestry of Sen's Naxal trilogy, which includes the noteworthy volumes *I, Anupam* and *In a Foreign Land by Chance*, this paper undertakes a comprehensive examination of Bipasha's character, a figure whose essence transcends societal norms in domains as pivotal as sexuality, motherhood, and personal convictions.

At the heart of this endeavor is an interdisciplinary approach that draws from an array of seminal works across diverse disciplines. Sen's narrative unfolds as a literary canvas, and its exploration necessitates engagement with the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, notably his illuminating work *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. This philosophical underpinning becomes a lens through which Bipasha's choices and actions are scrutinized, revealing a complex interplay between existentialist ideals and the intricate web of societal expectations.

Further enriching the discourse is the incorporation of Julia Kristeva's groundbreaking hypothesis of the third generation of feminism, elucidated in her seminal 1981 article, *Women's Time*. Kristeva's multifaceted perspective adds layers of understanding to Bipasha's character, providing a nuanced framework through which to interpret the interwoven dynamics of feminism inherent in Sen's narrative.

In navigating the labyrinth of Bipasha's character, this analysis also draws upon the insights of Harriet Malinowitz, as articulated in her poignant essay *Unmotherhood* (2002). Malinowitz's exploration of the concept of choice, particularly a woman's right to decide on child-rearing, becomes a critical lens through which to understand Bipasha's journey in motherhood. This interplay between societal expectations and individual autonomy, as underscored by Malinowitz, resonates profoundly in the narrative.

Additionally, the study incorporates Mary Kledge's comprehensive work *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*, which provides a theoretical scaffold for unraveling the complexities of Sen's narrative. Kledge's insights offer methodological clarity, aiding in the meticulous examination of Sen's nuanced storytelling and its implications for the broader academic discourse.

In essence, this introduction establishes the groundwork for an academically rigorous exploration into Bipasha's character, weaving together the threads of existentialist philosophy, feminist discourse, and literary theory. The ensuing analysis aims not only to dissect the layers of Bipasha's persona but also to contribute to the broader academic conversation surrounding gender, identity, and the profound impact of individual choices within the intricate realms of Nabaneeta Dev Sen's literary oeuvre.



## **II. BIPASHA'S DEFIANCE: AN EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY, RELATIONSHIPS, AND EXISTENTIAL CHOICES**

This paper delves into Nabaneeta Dev Sen's portrayal of Bipasha, the protagonist, as a character transcending stereotypical social norms in sexuality, motherhood, and opinions. Through an in-depth analysis, it uncovers the intricate layers of Bipasha's life, marked by rebellion, academic success, and a unique approach to relationships. The study explores the impact of Bipasha's early struggles within the Naxalite movement on her subsequent roles as an academician, a mother, and a contemporary literary figure.

Sen's narrative introduces Bipasha as a character defying conventional definitions, notably in the realms of sexuality, motherhood, and societal expectations: "Making love was equally important; it was impossible to imagine a life without love, but work proceeded love" (Sen 2019:5). The paper aims to unravel the complexities of Bipasha's character, emphasizing the pivotal role of her ethics in shaping her life.

Bipasha's work-life emerges as a central theme throughout the narrative, underscoring its importance in shaping her choices: "Relationships were needed, passionate relationships, but no shackles, She could sustain only Existential relationships that remained unfettered" (Sen 2019:23). Sen's narration at the beginning of the novel highlights the ethical foundation driving Bipasha's decisions, steering away from societal expectations of dissipation.

Bipasha's aversion to failure and resistance to self-imposing, dominating men lead her to a unique philosophy in relationships. She gravitates towards unsuccessful, submissive younger men, embodying the concept of a 'toy boy': "Chris was not a toy boy like her earlier lovers. This relationship had lasted a few years. Something like friendship had grown with him" (Sen 2019:42). The paper explores the power dynamics and hierarchy implicit in this unconventional approach to romantic relationships.

Bipasha's philosophy in romantic relationships aligns with Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist ideas, emphasizing the liberating dimensions of individual choices: "Relationships were needed, passionate relationships, but no shackles, She could sustain only Existential those relationships that remained unfettered" (Sen 2019:23). The paper draws parallels between Sartre's thoughts and Bipasha's assertion on the necessity of unfettered relationships.

## **III. BIPASHA'S JOURNEY: DECONSTRUCTING NORMS, CHOOSING ESSENCE IN THE FEMINIST NARRATIVE**

It can be drawn to the conclusion that Bipasha knew the art of deconstructing one aspect of life from the other. An act of similar kind is presented in the text through her character, where her daughter is in despair due to her lover's treachery. The boy/ lover/ Dave, went out with another girl uninformed. It made Rohini burst with rage, and here is how the dialogues and discourse between her mother and her are presented in the text:

"...You don't understand that Dave is thinking differently..."

"Why? Why should he think differently?"

"He has changed his mind. These things happen. And it will happen many times. Darling, you are only fourteen. It's not yet the age to fall in love, honey. It's fun time. Don't mope around, it's nothing serious...." (Sen: pp21)

In the first dialogue, Bipasha tries to tell her daughter the deconstructed fact of freedom of choice. An individual can choose their partner free of any bondage, and thereby one is free of any obligation. To which Rohini replies with a counter question, signifying her disagreement in the matter. This also indicates Rohini's preference for monogamy, hence legitimizing the patriarchal world order for herself. However, Bipasha, in the 3rd dialogue presented above, further elaborates the matter, differentiating her infatuation from intimacy. Incorporating these traits of Bipasha with Sartre's idea of "existence precedes essence", it can be drawn that the traits of an individual's personality do not have to be preordained by any enterprise, of marriage, relationship, or family. One rather chooses one's essence with the freedom of existence/being. To understand the counter-hypothesis of this, the traditional conception of 'essence precedes existence', Sartre used an analogy of a paper knife in his book *Existentialism Is a Humanism*:

"When God creates he knows exactly what he is creating. The concept of man, in the mind of God, is comparable to the concept of the paper knife in the mind of the manufacturer: God produces man following certain techniques and a conception, just as the craftsman, following a definition and a technique, produces a paper knife. Thus each individual man is the realization of a certain concept within this divine intelligence." (Sartre)

Through this quotation, Sartre takes the example of a paper knife and its designer in contrast to men and his relation to the creator, God. He argues that one's essence, like the traits of a knife preconceived in the mind of a designer before





its existence, is preordained by the supreme master before one comes to being/existence. The traits of Rohini towards her relationship are one such example. It is preordained and enterprise by the law of the father. The “law of the father” is a term usually associated with the work of Jacques Lacan in his psychoanalytic account of the way in which children enter into patriarchal culture. On the other hand, Bipasha’s idea of love and intimacy has the dimensions of freedom and experiment.

These characteristics of Bipasha also resemble Julia Kristeva’s hypothesis of the third generation, or the third tier of feminism, introduced in her journal article published in 1981, "Women's Time." Kristeva, who is influenced by thinkers like Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Lucien Goldmann, et al., takes a multiple social, anthropological, and linguistic approach to understand existing feminism and its existing and non-existing, imaginary offspring. Bronwyn Davies, one of Kristeva’s scholars, articulates the traits of these generations in her essay "The Problem of Desire," published by Oxford Journals:

"Kristeva's three generations or 'tiers' avoid the dangers of unitary classifications by allowing, even encouraging, feminists to occupy the signifying space of each of the feminisms despite their profound contradictions: 'So it can be argued that as of now a third attitude is possible, thus a third generation which does not exclude—quite the contrary—the parallel existence of all three in the same historical time, or even that they be interwoven one with the other. These three generations that appeared at historically distinct periods but that must now exist in parallel, interwoven, are:

1. Liberal feminism-access to the male symbolic order;
2. Radical feminism-celebration of femaleness and of difference, separation from the male symbolic order;
3. A move towards an imagined possibility of "woman as whole," not constituted in terms of the male/female dualism. Such a move involves confronting one's own personal identity with its organization of desire around "masculinity" or "femininity." The desired end point of such a confrontation is to demassify maleness and femaleness—to reveal their multiple and fragmented nature and remove from the meaning of maleness and femaleness any sense of opposition, hierarchy, or necessary difference. This is not a move towards sameness but towards multiple ways of being." (Davies 502)

According to Kristeva, the interweaving of multiple generations of feminisms can be present in a single individual’s personality. The distinction can be seen through one of the examples from Sen's text:

"But even though Danish did not flirt, Bipasha noticed how his mesmerized gaze made her conscious of her femininity." (Sen 2017: 34)

These introspective monologues occurred when Bipasha was attending a class in Czechoslovakia, and one of her friends was staring at her in her awareness. Her response of being “conscious of her femininity” shows the existence of the second tier of feminist trait, as hypothesized by Kristeva, in an individual. However, Kristeva’s thoughts of the third tier of feminism are more intact in Bipasha in relation to the second or the first. As the story builds further, the sign of individuality in Bipasha becomes more prominent. Indeed, those thoughts are the products of her younger age mostly. The individual has lived a mother-less life, lost her love interest, Smir, who typically changes when she met him on her return to Kolkata, and the fight for class oppression in the years of 1970s.

The narrative unfolds Bipasha's unconventional motherhood journey, challenging the ideological construct of motherhood. Her reluctance to conform to societal expectations of marriage and motherhood aligns with contemporary feminist discourse, emphasizing a woman's right to choose.

#### **IV. UNVEILING MOTHERHOOD: BIPASHA'S UNCONVENTIONAL JOURNEY**

Motherhood, a multifaceted construct, takes center stage in Sen's narrative, particularly through the lens of Bipasha. Unlike conventional celebrations of conception and child-rearing, Bipasha's mindset diverges; she repels the idea. Born motherless, she felt no absence, surrounded by unconditional love from her father and family. Her marriage to George Anderson was a deliberate choice, ensuring her child wouldn't be fatherless.

In Sen's poignant description, the pangs of childbirth unfold from a mother's perspective. Rohini Bettina Anderson's birth, marked by familial names and fairytale imagery, contrasts with the harsh reality of childbirth's toll on Bipasha's body. The narrative captures the visceral connection—blood, flesh, and the profound impact on Bipasha's being.

However, motherhood, often considered an ideological construct, doesn't align with every woman's desires. In Bipasha's case, she becomes a mother unwittingly, devoid of the choice to abort. Harriet Malinowitz's essay,



"Unmotherhood," explores the concept of choice, emphasizing a woman's right to decide on child rearing. The essay underscores the historical roots of societal pressures, tracing back to President Theodore Roosevelt's "race suicide" concerns and Nazi Germany's race-building propaganda.

Malinowitz argues for the freedom to refuse both the childrearing role and sterilization, highlighting the impact of historical discourses on women's choices. Bipasha's story resonates with this argument, challenging societal expectations forced upon women. Her decision to marry George was driven by a societal construct—ensuring her daughter's birth wasn't fatherless—rather than a personal desire for motherhood. Rohini's birth, not a choice but a consequence of unawareness, reflects the complex interplay of societal expectations and individual agency in the realm of motherhood.

In unraveling Bipasha's journey, the narrative provokes reflection on the intricate dynamics of motherhood, exposing the clash between societal constructs and individual autonomy. The echoes of Malinowitz's arguments reverberate through Bipasha's tale, painting a vivid portrait of a woman navigating the complexities of motherhood in a world rife with ideological and social constructs.

## V. BIPASHA'S STRUGGLE WITH PHALLOCENTRIC REALITIES

Bipasha's journey unfolds with a focus on individual choices, revealing traits that confront the scrutiny of phallocentrism: "The traits of Bipasha's personality shown in the above chapter are the ones she earned for herself. She made 'choices' for herself; less as a woman, more as an individual" (Sen 2019). The interplay of relationships, particularly those tied by amorous or blood bonds, accentuates these traits, as observed in the analysis of the novel. Rohini's departure to England in response to her mother's unconventional love life situates her within the phallogocentric-world order, emphasizing the central role of the male organ in societal organization: "This act makes young Rohini stand in a position of phallogocentric-world order. The ideology that says, the phallus, or male sexual organ, is the central element in the organization of the social world" (Sen 2019).

The narrative invites a post-structuralist perspective, echoing Jacques Derrida's critique of hierarchical binaries within western metaphysics: "To Jaques Derrida, the western metaphysics had a binary system to interpret and understand the world structurally" (Sen 2019). The fluidity of interpretation in relation to male/female dynamics challenges the established discourse, a theme mirrored in Bipasha's life. Samir, her college love interest, exemplifies the "male gaze," evolving from an idealized figure to one embodying toxic phallogocentric traits upon her return to Kolkata: "Bipasha's love interest of her college years, Samir is one of the examples of 'male-gaze' in her life" (Sen 2019).

Samir's attempt at physical intimacy and his accusations against Bipasha underline patriarchal inclinations linking female sexuality with immorality: "That's what you say. All this sativa, purity, for me, no? You think I don't know how many men you've slept with?" (p 93)" (Sen 2019). However, Bipasha, embodying resilience, rejects Samir's advances, asserting her autonomy and self-worth: "'Go away!' She moved Samir's greedy hands away like insects from her body. 'There is no need for you to count yourself among those men'" (Sen 2019:94). Her aversion to men lacking respect or superiority complexes shapes her early encounters, laying the foundation for the resilient Bipasha presented in the text.

Existentialist philosophy, as articulated by Sartre, finds resonance in Bipasha's self-definition through life's encounters: "man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards." A pivotal moment in the trilogy, set in the prequel, portrays Bipasha grappling with a false identity during the Naxalite movement: "In a foreign land by chance to the text *The Parrot Green Saree*. At this instance, Samir, young Bipasha's love interest and one of the comrades in the naxalite movement takes her to his Aunt's house in order to hide amidst the hooliganism between police and rebels" (Sen, *IFLC*, p 106). The theme of identity crisis and the negotiation of individuality within societal structures echoes across Sen's works, emphasizing the existentialist notion of self-definition.

The portrayal of motherhood as a 'male-libidinal economy' emerges in Bipasha's confrontation with Samir's grandmother, highlighting the societal pressure to conform to predefined roles: "In both the works, motherhood is shown as a need of 'male-libidinal economy'. Here the mother-function in the text, is incorporated with the identity of a female individual, and there upon hides every other aspect of her personality" (Sen, *IFLC*, p 106). This theme reverberates in Bipasha's relief upon Rohini's birth, dispelling the unspoken trauma associated with her mother's death.

Bipasha's indifference to motherhood, contrasted with her relief upon Rohini's birth, unveils a suppressed Electra Complex: "Bipasha wasn't fond of children. No, she never harboured any wish to be a mother. But, looking at Rohini, a vague anxiety floated into her innermost heart, she had repaid the debt of her grandmother by bringing another girl into



the world" (Sen 2019:98). In neo-Freudian psychology, the Electra complex, as proposed by Carl Jung in his Theory of Psychoanalysis, is a girl's psychosexual competition with her mother for possession of her father. But here the relation is observed between the female subject and the invisible father/the Patriarchy: "In Bipasha's case, her anxiety is the void she feels as a woman without a child" (Sen 2019). This is a void of incompleteness in the eyes of the patriarchy, or in her realm of the Imaginary, in Lacanian parlance. As soon as she gives birth to Rohini, she feels free of this burden.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In the rich tapestry of Nabaneeta Dev Sen's Naxal Trilogy, the character of Bipasha emerges as a symbol of defiance and empowerment, challenging the traditional molds imposed by societal expectations. The exploration of her journey from a rebellious Naxalite to a successful poet and academician unfolds a narrative that transcends the confines of conventional gender roles.

Bipasha's unique philosophy on romantic relationships, influenced by existentialist ideals, emphasizes the importance of individual choices and the pursuit of an uplifted female identity. Her preference for unconventional partnerships, epitomized by the term 'toy boy,' becomes a manifestation of her rejection of established power dynamics.

Drawing parallels with existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, Bipasha's narrative echoes the notion that existence precedes essence, emphasizing the autonomy inherent in individual choices. The intricate layers of her character, shaped by encounters in her early life, resonate with the complexities of contemporary feminism.

The exploration extends to Bipasha's unconventional journey into motherhood, challenging the ideological constructs surrounding marriage and child-rearing. Her reluctance to conform aligns with the contemporary discourse championing a woman's right to choose, as reflected in the insights of Harriet Malinowitz.

The narrative further scrutinizes Bipasha's encounters with societal scrutiny, exposing the influence of phallogentrism through Jacques Derrida's critique of binary systems. Her resistance to toxic masculinity, exemplified by her college love Samir, underscores a poignant rejection of oppressive norms.

As the analysis unfolds in the subsequent chapters, Bipasha's finer essence and her opposition to contemporary societal expectations depict a nuanced journey of defiance and empowerment. The critique of the phallogentric-world order becomes a central theme, celebrating the intricate complexity of femininity and championing individual autonomy.

In essence, "Bipasha Unveiled: Defying Norms in a Phallogentric World" serves as a testament to the power of individual choices, the resilience to societal pressures, and the celebration of diverse expressions of femininity. The trilogy invites readers to contemplate the intricacies of identity, challenging them to embrace a narrative that defies the limitations of societal expectations.

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