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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.06.13>

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE NETFLIX ORIGINAL SERIES LEILA, IN AN ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE AND TRACING ITS RELIGIOUS OVERTONES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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### Abstract

Dystopian future stories ought to create a vision of the present humanitarian struggles in an intensified manner. The objective of this genre is generally, to enlighten viewers about the consequences humans may face in the future to their present actions. Usually, dystopian stories explore themes like, governmental control, environmental destruction, technological control, survival or loss of individualism. Leila the Netflix series, introduces dystopian fiction to Indian audiences. The series discusses some of the most genuine and pressing issues that are relevant in the contemporary Indian society. This research paper explores the significance of dystopian fiction stories and how themes in Leila are relevant in contemporary India. Also, I will be analysing how the feminine attributes given to both nature and women leads to the exploitation of both by comparing it to the series.

**Keywords:** Dystopia, Governmental Control, Environmental Destruction, Religious Intolerance, Ecofeminism, Contemporary India.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In Stine Kroijer's article titled Civilization as the undesired world, Dystopia is referred as a world that is either inhabitable, destroyed or preparing for destruction. Margaret Atwood, a Canadian author says: "If you're interested in writing speculative fiction, one way to generate a plot is to take an idea from current society and move it a little further down the road. Even if humans are short-term thinkers, fiction can anticipate and extrapolate into multiple versions of the future." There has been a rise of dystopian fiction stories worldwide through books, movies and tv or web series. But in India, this genre remains unexplored. According to a study conducted by Statista in 2018 the Indian film industry is more elevated to the entertainment side, 79% of Indian movie was of comedy genre, followed by action.

The Netflix Original web series Leila, directed by, Deepa Mehta, Shankar Raman and Pawan Kumar is based on Prayaag Akbar's dystopian novel 'Leila'. The show happens in dystopian India, 100 years after Independence. The nation is called "Aryavarta". It's a world where people are obsessed over purity and community divisions. There are dividers or walls to isolate various classes of individuals based on religion and wealth, as the motto is 'Peace by Segregation'. In Aryavarta, even basic necessities like water and air will be enjoyed by only specific castes as environmental degradation has created a situation of 'climate apartheid'.

A man named Joshi is leading the nation and is considered an idol. The nation has completely turned into authoritarian nation and even if Aryavarta is a hypothetical nation set 40 years ahead in time, the series addresses some of the genuine issues that already exists in our country. The central themes in Leila include, subjugation of women in patriarchal society, environmental degradation and religious intolerance.

### 2. LEILA: INDIA'S FIRST DYSTOPIAN WEB SERIES

Praayag Akbar's dystopian novel Leila after its great success was adapted as a Netflix series in the year 2019. Leila was adapted for Netflix by a group of three script writers: Urmi Juvekar as the head script writer and Suhani Kanwar and Patrick Graham alongside. The genre of the series is 'dystopia' and this was the first ever Indian dystopian series. "Dystopia within an Indian context hasn't really been explored before, which was exciting to me" says the director Deepa Mehta. She happens to be one of the most celebrated directors who always brings chills to the audience through her movies. Actors Huma Qureshi (who plays Shalini, the mother) and Siddharth Suryanarayan (who plays Bhanu, an Aryavartan labourer) as the lead.

The show is set in 2047, 100 years after India's independence where the father of the nation is no longer Gandhi and India is known as Aryavarta. It is a man named Joshi who is the father of the nation. His photograph is hanged everywhere in private and public workplaces. He is being worshipped for no reason. By worship, it literally means worship like a god and every citizen is considered a servant to this man. There is a scene where a person has Gandhi's portrait in his workplace but as soon as a government official enters his workplace, he turns the portrait of Gandhi and we can see that behind Gandhi's portrait, there is the photograph of Mr. Joshi. So, people are frightened to show respect to Gandhi as it can bring serious consequences including death. So, it has completely become an authoritarian nation where people have no liberty to live a life as they like. Basic rights including right to freedom is denied in Aryavarta.



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Nobody is allowed to have a side of another political party or worship another god except Joshi and his party. Aryavarta and its ideas were only created in the year 2044 however the visuals shown in the web series has an effect of such nation's existence since forever. Every small detail given in Leila makes the audience wonder how a nation could change this much only in three years. The imagery represented in the show gives us apprehension of a Hindu dominated country as the rituals shown in the series has more Hindu grip to it. Taj Mahal has been bombed as it is a symbol of Muslim or Mughal ruler. Aryavarta also prohibits its citizens from listening to music or watch any performance of a Muslim person. So, the aim is there for making that community completely powerless. The map or landscape of this country is not clear but it is certainly not as large as India is. It's a small world and yet highly segregated.

Led by an extremist leader, the nation keeps running on the guideline of dividers (walls) to separate various classes of individuals based on their religion and wealth. The motto of Aryavarta is peace by segregation and purity is law. The skyhigh walls are built so that each religion can practice their faith inside those walls. The people other than muslims can practice their faith even outside these walls which shows the extent of religious intolerance. The show begins with the execution of a Muslim man but we don't get to see enough about the Muslim community in other episodes. Aryavartan citizens are prohibited from marrying anyone outside their religion. And those violate this law and marry outside the religion have to face serious consequences. The Muslim 'man' who married outside their religion will be killed and the Hindu 'woman' is always sent to a 'Purity Camp' where they have to undergo their cleansing process which is again an inhuman experience as they are tortured both mentally and physically. Again, a purity camp only for women leaves several interpretations to the audience. If the Hindu-Muslim couple have kids already, then that's the worst case. These kids are again, labelled 'Mishrit' which means 'Blended blood'. These kids are again called impure and are taken away for a project called 'Project Bali' which is actually sacrifice of the child. There are scenes where they show new born infants being taken away from their mothers in a small cage and treated like a rat which is going to be killed soon as it can spread diseases. This is again a shocking and heart breaking visual for the audiences. Inside the purity camp, women are forced into humiliating services and the penance for their transgression is while enduring violence. The objective of this purity camp is to cleanse their mind and body to demonstrate their virtue and dedication to Aryavarta and Joshi's ideologies. The camp does not appear to be successful in its goal and only few with relatively few women falling in line. Which means they have extreme torment practices that doesn't exactly work. These women are given red saris to wear every day and the colour of these outfits does not change. Sedatory drugs are given to women to force them to submission, so that they can make these women work continuously according to their will. Women are made to roll their bodies over leftover food of upper caste men, which is again a way of asking forgiveness for their sin. They have a small tub like place with unclean water wherein they wash themselves and it's the same water for everyone to clean themselves. In Aryavarta, an ideal woman is the one who is a domestic goddess and spends her life in service. The purity camp is the place where most of the chilling incident occurs. In one scene, a woman is forced to marry a dog for not conforming to the standards set in the purity camp and she is supposed to be a dutiful wife to the dog. In another scene, a misery-stricken lady jumps from the top floor of the building as her 'mishrit' infant was taken away for the 'Project Bali'. The women in the purity camp have betrayed one another because it is a hostile time and no one really cares about each other. However, everyone has to meet the similar destiny. The person who controls the purity camp is called Guru Maa. Even though the person is called Guru "maa" which means mother, he is actually a male. They give importance and respect to the word but not women or mother in real. After a particular time in purity time, women have to give their purity test which determines if they are a good servant of Aryavarta or not. If they are pure, they can return to home and if not, they have to die in a chamber filled with poisonous gas.

Aryavarta's environment is under severe degradation. Clean water and fresh air to breathe are considered a luxury which only the elites can afford. Rich individuals often go outside wearing an air purifying machine fixed on their face. Atms are set up to withdraw water, which is again very costly. All these happens in one side of Aryavarta. This place is surrounded by purity walls and outside these walls, lives the lower caste, poor people. The underprivileged are always lower castes and rich are upper class Hindus. The people who live outside the purity walls are depicted as impure and they are called 'Doosh'. These people are not permitted to enter the place where upper class people live. They are being forced to live in slums where the air and water is worse than the other place. They live in between the garbage deposited by the upper-class people. Every day, the garbages of privileged people are being brought in huge vehicles and being dumped there. Many parts of the series are shot amidst garbage mountains; which catches fire constantly. People in these slums have no proper roads, instead they have to walk over these garbage deposits to go from one place to another. Even the water coming out of taps are black in colour and toxic. Which implies their living conditions are pathetic and the authoritarians don't care if these people survive or not. So, it's a strange world where only the privileged people can survive.

The story is about a mother's quest for her daughter in a segregationist world. Shalini (Huma Qureshi) is a well-off mother having family time in her private pool, which itself is a wrongdoing. 2047 is a year of atmosphere emergency in Aryavarta. Environment is under severe degradation that it has prompted dark rain and serious fresh water scarcities. In such a time, having an indoor pool to yourself means she is an elite class person with fresh water supply and special air pocket. Yet, state-authorized aggressors drop on the household. Shalini was dragged away as her Muslim spouse Riz (Rahul Khanna) was killed before her eyes. They have a five-year-old



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daughter Leila, who has been taken away for ‘Project Bali’ because she is ‘mishrit’. Shalini is being held in a purity camp where upper-caste Hindu women like her who married outside their marriage are ‘cleansed’ and adapted into turning out to be ideal women of Aryavarta. However, all Shalini wants as two years pass is getting away from the purity camp and finding Leila. The whole situation gives us the feeling of entrapment in a world where everybody has lost their senses and everyone literally has become merely robots. Shalini seems to be enduring pain for most of the part peacefully yet with occasional emotional breakdowns. Yet she is determined to get back to her home and to her daughter.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

- To measure the necessity of more dystopian fiction stories in India.
- To find the relevance of the web series Leila through an ecofeminist perspective.
- To examine if the dystopian themes set in Leila is relevant in contemporary India.
- To understand the religious overtones on women and environmental misuse.

### 4. RESEARCH APPROACH

There are two basic approaches to conduct research. That is Quantitative analysis and Qualitative analysis. In this research, Qualitative analysis is the approach chosen. This research is therefore more concerned with subjective analysis of attitudes, opinions and behaviours. The approach of collection of data.

### 5. RESEARCH TOOLS

Research tools are the means or the instruments that are used to collect the data for the research. These tools are used to measure and observe to analyze for interpretation. The tools are selected accordingly to meet the objectives of the study. As this research has a quantitative approach, the tools used for the study include:

- Questionnaires
- Case studies
- Life history
- The web series: Leila
- Research papers
- Articles
- News Reports
- Series Reviews

### 6. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The part that religion plays in strengthening a male centric society is massive. Religion is a force that keeps on nurturing the roots of patriarchy. It is probably because the religious books were one of the first media that circulated largely among people. So, the part it played in shaping the minds of people is commentable. The whole notion of Madonna-whore complex might have its roots from religious texts. Patriarchy is seen as the ‘social normal’, maybe because it was listed in the religious books that people blindly follow even today, which gives a legitimate reason for all the discrimination. Nature is also seen divine and often connected to women and not men. The nature also had to go through severe exploitation due to its inability to react. Women and nature are both seen fragile, submissive and passive which makes them vulnerable to exploitation. This study seeks to understand the relevance of the connection between women and nature and how religion nurtures the an andro-centric society in India.

### 7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The ecofeminist theory laid foundation to this study for analyzing the Netflix series Leila in an ecofeminist perspective. Ecofeminism is a part of feminism that looks at the connection between both nature and women. It is based on an essential feminist principle, that is equality between genders. It is also a perspective that regards to natural processes. Women and nature are connected by some characteristics like regeneration. So, Earth is called ‘mother’ and given feminine attributes to it because of its regenerative capability. Both women and nature are said to be fragile, passive comforting and submissive. These notions are framed by the patriarchal society, which gives them the supreme power to dominate both women and nature by pointing them as a weaker class. Dominating women, is in the way of suppressing them, framing gender roles and duties, restricting them from doing many things by pointing out their biological differences from men and also by taking advantage of their peaceful nature. On the other hand, environment is being dominated by exploiting and destroying their natural resources and taking advantage of it by thinking that nature will remain unresponsive. But the reason behind dominance of both women and nature is because of the common gender attributes given to them.



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And these gender attributes have a larger impact in the society. The interconnectedness of their characteristics leads to the exploitation of both earth and women according to the ecofeminist theory.

## 8. LEILA AND ITS RELEVANCE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA: CASE STUDIES

"When Netflix approached me for this, I felt that this was a story about women, identity, gender, a totalitarian government. It's a cautionary tale, reflective of our current world, even though it's set in a surreal space. After all these years, to balance the two was a huge learning curve for me." Deepa Mehta, the director of the series says. This show was actually meant to hold up a mirror to the contemporary world. It is not exactly as dreadful as it is shown in Leila. But every issue that we turn blind to might create an exact same situation in future if we don't stop. And that's how this show becomes a cautionary tale. Let's take a deeper look into the central themes of Leila and try to connect it with contemporary Indian scenario to check if any similar situation exists in India. The central themes of Leila includes:

### 8.1 THE SUBJUGATION OF WOMEN

Aryavarta's purity camp forcefully made women take sedatory drugs so that they submit themselves to the authority and doesn't respond to any violence against them. This made the work of Aryavartan officials easy. The women won't feel like questioning them or create problems once they take this pill. It literally made them numb and they walk around like puppets controlled by some one else. They were made to do hectic physical works all the time and given sub standard food, less drinking water, an unhygienic tub, where they never change water and these women have to take bath in the same water. So, this almost feels like a non existant world because of its intensity. But there are similar situations in India which is not this worse but is cautioning.

#### i. Tamil Nadu factories found giving illegal drug to women to make them work through period pain.

A Thomson Reuters foundation exposed Tamil Nadu's multi-billion dollar garment industry for giving unlabelled drugs at work place easing period pains which eventually lead to health problems in half of them. These drugs were not even recommended by doctors and it violates the labour laws. Most of the women didn't know about the harmful side effects it can cause. But, later on started having health problems like depression, anxiety, urinary tract infections, fibroids and miscarriages. Thomson Reuters interviewed these women and the pill was given to the media for doctor's opinion. And when two doctors examined the pills, they revealed that it was "non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs - similar to ibuprofen and Advil - that could help relieve menstrual cramps but were known to have possible harmful side-effects if taken frequently" (India Today-2019). Many people including activists, academics and doctors outraged when this news was brought into light. Further study revealed that many garment industries in India made female workers' lives pathetic. They controlled toilet breaks to periods to meet the business needs as India's garment industries faces greater demands from Western brands.

So, this practice seems to be 'not so dystopian' as it exists in real world. But the situation has not reached that extant which makes us alert about what may happen if it doesn't stop today. Another horrific scene from Leila is, a woman being married off to a dog by 'Guru Maa' for violating the rules at purity camp. This dog later attacks the women and due to severe mental torture, she commits suicide. It was shocking to know a similar practice exists in rural areas of India.

#### ii. Woman, being married off to dogs to cast away bad Omen.

In some of the most undeveloped and rural areas of India, this custom exists in real. There is an unbelievable event that took place in Jharkhand which was published by the mainstream media. One such case where a young woman was married off to a dog came into the attention of media in the year 2014 for the first time. An 18-year-old Indian girl named Mangli Munda was married off to a dog which was an ancestral custom for casting away ill omen. It was believed that she had sick karma from the past and marrying a human being would bring bad luck to her and her community. Mangli did not react to this decision, but she stated that she was not happy with this practice but she convinced that this could change her fortune. This isn't the first time that a girl was manipulated to marry a dog but several other similar cases happened in this village before. And after a certain time the girl can marry a human being without getting separated from the dog.

This practice exists in India and that is sickening to the core. There were allegations about Leila that the show was Hindu-phobic. But when we take a deep look into it, these cases are something that already exists in India. An what's the problem in addressing it or presenting it through a movie so that people come to know about it is still a question. Another important part of the show is the 'Purity camp' where women are brought to cleanse their sins and after that long process, they are put to the purity test. Purity tests are also prevalent in India, by purity it means virginity in Indian context. Some people, even today believe that purity is virginity and if you are not a virgin then you are not pure. But the same is not applicable to men. Men are not even defined as pure or impure. Men are always just 'men'.

#### iii. Two sisters failed to pass the 'virginity test' in two sisters went through a virginity test in Maharashtra faces severe threats by jaat panchayat (caste council) later on.

According to Indian Express, two sisters belonging to Kanjarbhat community, Megha (22) and Sanjana Gumane (20) overcame the social constructs when they filed a case against their husbands and their in-laws. They were married off to the same family and when both of them failed their virginity tests, their in laws threatened to rape them and also the jaat panchayat which they



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are a member of asked them to pay a penalty of 40,000 with social boycott. This panchayat is an extra judicial and illegal system where meetings are held by the elders of the community and matters are heard and they pass the judgement. This is actually illegal under the Maharashtra Protection of People from Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2016. India is one among those countries which the World Health Organization has warned to stop virginity tests as it violates human rights. Also, it can affect negatively on a woman's physical, psychological and social well-being for a very long term. This practice is not just found in this community but it exists in many rural parts of India but women are usually silenced or made powerless to speak against this practice.

These case studies implies that most of the situations in Leila is not just hypothetical but it has evolved from the real happenings in India. All these issues addressed through Leila actually exists but not as dreadful as Leila is. Therefore, this series must be considered as a call of action.

## 8.2 ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRDATION

Leila is a visual representation how worse environmental degradation can get if we don't control it today. It is about climatic change, water scarcity, waste deposition and extreme pollution. Even the clouds shower black droplets of rain which is caused by the pollution. The area outside purity walls doesn't have roads and they are left with no other option that walking through paths that smell rancid. There are rats which are as big as cats, that lives in the same slums and spreads diseases to humans. Rotten food packets inside plastic bags, oozing out thick trickles of fluid dumped by the rich people are all some everyday scenarios in these area. It's difficult to breathe in there and if somebody visits this place, by evening their eyes and nose become inflamed due to the pollution.

### i. Dharavi: Asia's largest slum

A slum without proper water supply, hygienic conditions and proper power supply is already existing in India. Dharavi, a locality in Mumbai has an area over 2.1 square kilometres. It is known one of the most thickly populated area in the world. And because it is thickly populated and doesn't have proper waste depositing areas, people living in this place faces severe health problems. It is also easy to become viral in that area. Toilets are mostly public ones and lacks unhygienic which causes contagious diseases. The pollution is also in its peak point in this area which causes long term diseases in people. Tuberculosis, asthma and lung cancer are commonly found diseases in people living in this area. Despite the fact that State and Central Government has come up with Dharavi Redevelopment Plan. Eventhough, it has been over 16 years since the project has begun, it is time consuming and with the Covid-19 Pandemic going on, this process has again paused. Besides these conditions, Dharavi is also a safe haven for criminals to hide and exercise their activities. It is hard to believe that is another side of vibrant Mumbai. It is upto the audience whether to connect it with the slums shown in Leila. However, one place cannot stay like this forever like Dharavi is now, it should change and become developed. Therefore, Aryavarta's slums can be a vision of future if situations doesnot get controlled.

### ii. Water Crisis

According to The Economic Times report a NITI Aayog report at least 40% of the Indian population will not get to drink fresh water by the year 2030. The Economic times report says "If 2030 still seems far, here's another NITI Aayog report which claims that 21 major cities (including New Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad) are expected to run out of groundwater by this year, affecting at least 100 million people! The safety requirement of washing hands during the current pandemic has only made matters worse." As the atmosphere temperature is rising due to global warming and ground is getting heated, the downpours in India is getting irregular. Seasons are also unpredictable in last few years. Some times there won't be any rain and esometimes there are unpredictable cloud explosions. We are living in a situation where some of our top metropolitan cities will be gazing at the worst water shortage in the following years according to the NITI Aayog Report.

#### Water Atms

According to the Economic Times, In India 63 million people don't have access to safe drinking water and half of the under groundwater is contaminated with pollutants. And that's when there is a need of water ATMs. Water ATMs are now trending in India as people are getting fresh water for affordable prices like 25 paise to ₹5 per litre and it is available all the time. It's not set up in every parts of the country but some states are really taking this concept forward especially Delhi.

Air pollution is still seen as a small issue in India, but a thick cover of brown haze wraps most urban communities in northern India and especially Delhi.

### iii. Air Pollution

In Leila, people are going outside only with an air purifier fixed on their face. Which is again for the privileged people. It's literally a situation where people have to pay for something that is a basic necessity to live and nobody from our past might have heard about anything like this. Again, this is not a dystopic situation. The idea of oxygen bars are new in India however numerous nations have this. It is said to have numerous medical advantages as It helps in the detoxification of the blood. It also helps in handling migraines. And above everything else people can breathe life sustaining oxygen. It was found in New Delhi, when the pollution hit them the worst. Again it is something only privileged people can afford as the starting price is at Rs 299.



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#### iv. Ghazipur Landfills

The landfills shown in Leila is mostly Ghazipur landfills, which is in Delhi. In June 2019, Hindustan Times came up with a news with headlines "Garbage mountain at Delhi's Ghazipur landfill to rise higher than Taj Mahal by 2020". The Ghazipur landfills are a serious threat to the environment and people living around. The non-decomposable garbage are brought in big vans from many different places to get dumped into this. According to the news report published by The Economic Times, the height of Ghazipur landfill is 65 metres which is only 8 metres less than the height of the tallest tower in India, Qutub Minar. Vultures and other birds hover around this landfill. Most of the street dogs, cows and rats wander in this area. At present, efforts have been made to clean up the landfill. The East Municipal Corporation of Delhi has begun isolating and preparing 640 metric huge amounts of waste dumped day by day at the landfill with the help of a trommel-cum-ballistic machine. This machine will help in segregation of the waste. The construction wastes are taken to the 'waste to energy' plants but some other type of wastes are still there. The Ghazipur Landfills also affect health conditions of people. This unhygienic condition can even bring zoonosis diseases in the adjacent area. The smell around this area is unbearable and the soil also will be undergoing continuous degradation. Deepa Mehta once said in an interview "Leila' is not a subliminal, but a blunt reminder of the world that could be in reality. " Leila shows the extreme conditions that is going to happen to the situations at the present. Environmental degradation is not something which is going to happen in the future instead it is very serious in the present. By looking into these case studies, we can understand that these conditions are not dystopic but its an undesirable world that already exists in some part or the nation or the world.

#### V. Climate Apartheid

Climate Apartheid is a condition where climate crisis would create any inequality between rich and poor. Rich or the privileged people will find a of escaping climate crisis as they have money. But on the other hand the poor people will keep suffering says a report from a United Nations Human Rights expert. According to an article published by The Guardian in 2019, Philip Alston, UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, said that "impacts of global heating are likely to undermine not only basic rights to life, water, food, and housing for hundreds of millions of people, but also democracy and the rule of law". Alston also think that the steps taken by the UN itself is "entirely disproportionate to the urgency and magnitude of the threat". This condition won't happen suddenly unless there is a major natural or man-made disaster happens. But, slowly and steadily this can become true. It's a very simple theory that rich people can buy expensive materials for their well being on the other hand the under privileged people will continue to work for their daily bread. While taking the case climatic change witnessed in Delhi in 2020, people could not breathe properly because of the smog. The air was completely filled with toxic pollutants and people had to go out wearing a mask. And during that time, oxygen bars were set up in Delhi for people. It is said to have numerous medical advantages as It helps in the detoxification of the blood. It also helps in handling migraines. And above everything else people can breathe life sustaining oxygen. It was found in New Delhi, when the pollution hit them the worst. Again, it is something only privileged people can afford as the starting price is at Rs 299. But for many people, it is a luxury as they cannot spend money on this when they have their daily bread to buy. People who can afford buy fresh water will never find difficulties for water but those who can't, will find it difficult to survive. So, this creates a situation where only rich people can survive or live peacefully. Alston's report says that "It is the greatest impact of the climate crisis would be on those living in poverty, with many losing access to adequate food and water. Climate change threatens to undo the last 50 years of progress in development, global health, and poverty reduction," Alston said. And the poor people are going to be severely affected for something they have contributed the least. This condition can bring severe divisions among people as it is for basic needs like food, water and air. According to Alston's report, even civil and political rights will be at risk. This might seem like distant or dystopian but this thought is the real danger to the mankind as it can only act as a catalyst to the climatic change at the present to create a future situation like climate apartheid.

### 9.3 RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

The show begins with the idea of religious intolerance, as a Muslim man is killed for marrying a Hindu woman and the woman is being grabbed away for cleansing her in purity camp. Muslim community has to live in a separate place and Hindus live in a separate place which is divided by big walls. And the consequences for marrying from different religion is being shown throughout the web series. When we connect this issue to Indian scenario there exists similar problems.

#### i. Inter-faith Marriage:

India is a country where people are obsessed with their customs and traditions and there is literally only a little space for broadmindedness as the customs comes in the way. Most of the inter faith marriages are not held peacefully in India. Even an advertisement by the famous Jewellery brand 'Tanishq' was considered very controversial that they had to pull down the advertisement for showing Hindu-Muslim wedding. Even if India is a diverse country, people fear of Hindu- Muslim marriages. It is considered a sin when it comes to marrying a Muslim in Hindu houses and vice versa. There are numerous cases of honour



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killings taking place based on this issue in India. Along with that recently, till now two states have come up with the concept of the Anti-Conversion law which has been drafted for now.

Muslims are completely powerless in Aryavarta and they cannot do anything significant in their life. Muslims are all with an average financial capacity and Hindu upper caste people are the rich ones. Muslims are not even permitted to be artists as there is one scene where an Aryavartan official says that he likes hearing a Muslim singer's song, but Aryavartan citizens are not permitted to listen to Muslim singers. Therefore, Muslims are having a really oppressed life in Aryavarta. Taj Mahal is being bombed as the authoritarians think it is a symbol of Muslim rulers or the religion. These are the incidents that portrays religious intolerance in Aryavarta. Bombing Taj Mahal is set in dystopian India of Leila but there have been efforts of erasing Mughal symbols in India at present.

**ii. Wiping out Mughal symbols**

According to an Al Jazeera report (2018) people argued to rename the roads after Aurangzeb in New Delhi because the Mughal emperor was an invader and a cruel ruler, who does not deserve to be commemorated in modern India. The report further stated that "The real reasoning behind their opposition to the road's name, however, went a lot deeper than Aurangzeb's conduct. The RSS and the BJP perceive not only Aurangzeb's rule but the entirety of the medieval Muslim era, as a dark phase in the country's history". Under the Right-wing government, roads like Akbar Road, Thuglaq road, Aurengazeb road are being renamed. One museum near Taj Mahal has also been renamed in Uttar Pradesh containing Mughal artefacts is also renamed after Maratha warrior-king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. The Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adithyanath stated during a press meet that Mughals cannot be our real heroes as they are symbols of slavery.

But what we have to understand is that historical events cannot be changed, whatever India has gone through is what India have become now. It is important for our future generations also to know everything related to the country's history and its significance. How each event or ruler has contributed to become what India is today.

India is considered world's largest democratic and secular country where people from different religion and culture live together peacefully. But taking a few incidents into consideration, let us evaluate this statement. Kalim Siddiqui in his research paper titled A Critical Study of 'Hindu Nationalism' in India explains the rise of the right-wing Hindu organisations in India, that is RSS, BJP, VHP, Bajang Dal and Shiv Sena. The researcher examines how these communities desperately require a minority group to be an enemy to unite Hindus and fight against the minority and how the cow slaughter punishments and building Ram temple at Ayodhya have given rise to dividing communities. He says that Muslims are being kept in a constant state of fear and insecurity. Which means, to an extent the Right-wing's decisions were influenced by religion.

**9. AN ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE OF LEILA**

Ecofeminism is the branch of feminism that connects both environmentalism and feminism. It looks into the connection between nature and women. It states that the interconnectedness of characteristics leads to the exploitation both earth and women. When we consider a patriarchal society, how people control women is similar to how people control nature. And even after we have continued to destroy environment, children are being taught to address the environment as "mother nature". Nature is a parental figure for human beings because it sustains us. Ecofeminists, after years of studying the connection between nature and women feel that women are viewed as closer to nature and that makes them simpler to rule over both.

In the dystopian India that we find in Leila, both women and nature are going through severe exploitation. Women are being drugged to submission, served sub standard food, rolling on eaten plates of men, forced to take bath in a tub full of filthy water and made to lead a life in pathetic conditions. Again with environment, human beings are continuously polluting air in one way or the other, water has also become toxic due to the extreme pollution, with increasing rate of industrialization and urbanization the natural resources are being exploited and contaminated.

Men are viewed different from nature because of their physical aspects. On the other hand nature and women are considered to be closer to nature as they have regenerative capabilities. Both women and nature are considered to be fragile, passive, comforting and submissive in a patriarchal society which gives men the supreme power to dominate both. In Leila, all considered sinners are being sent to a purity camp where they are being exploited both mentally and physically. And if any of the rules are violated at the purity camp, serious punishments are forced. In Aryavarta, an ideal woman is supposed to be pure and be an ideal servant who spends her life in service. So, there is a tendency to colonize what is natural and what they "consider" to be useless. Same happens in the case of environment. The environmental destruction that human beings are caused has resulted in severe pollutions. Now they are trying to control it again through other destructive methods. Skydome is very ambitious project shown in Leila. This project is about creating a



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complete air-conditioned city for the rich people. And the heat released from this will kill the people living outside the city or the purity wall.

Ecofeminist scholars have been talking about the purposes behind and about the negative effects interconnectedness between nature and women. One among that is we don't learn as children and sometimes not understand as age is the negative effect of sexist language. There are terms like "virgin earth" and "infertile soil" that we use commonly. And these are the same words that we used to describe women also. Again, there is an obsession with the word "purity". A woman is considered pure or impure not because she is but it is how society thinks about her. And exactly the same with nature. Toxic air, water, soil are all not because it was always that way but due to human activities. Unfortunately, the characteristics that women and nature share are the reason for its mutual misuse. Apart from that, Leila is also the story of a mother who is desperately searching for her missing daughter. But when she finds her daughter, the daughter no longer has a memory of her and she has become merely like a robot as her brains are completely filled with Aryavartan ideologies. We can connect the same situation between human beings and nature. With the industrialization and urbanization, human beings have also forgotten what nature really means to us.

### 10. RELIGIOUS OVERTONES ON FEMALE SUBJUGATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Media has a big role shaping the thoughts and actions of people. Religious texts can be considered the first widely circulated media as it is considered the ultimate creator's words or experiences. So, even if people don't read these texts, it was preached by people and missionaries. The philosophy imparted and the social constructions framed by religious texts have played an important part in nurturing the roots of patriarchal thought. People blindly followed these thoughts believing that it will create the 'Utopic' society. But that's again a highly subjective thought. Somebody's utopia can be a suffering for another person or any living thing. The present world and the issues most of the people facing can be said as somebody's or group of people's idea of utopia gone wrong. The idea of Utopia in an andro-centric society will be completely different from non-patriarchal society. The notion of Madonna-whore complex is strengthened by the patriarchal interpretation of religious texts. Almost all religious texts are interpreted in an andro-centric way.

Genesis 1:26 is a very controversial statement where it says God said that 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' This statement can again be interpreted in two ways. Either it can be interpreted as human beings shall guard or take care of all other living beings as we have the ability to do it because he has the same image as god and he is more capable and intelligent than other living beings. And the second interpretation can be completely a sexist view. Where the importance can be given to words like 'man-kind' and 'rule over'. These words can bring great consequences as it gives the superior or absolute power to men to rule over women and environment. And unfortunately, the second interpretation is widely used. Many environmentalists, feminists and ecofeminist scholars still argue about these interpretations. But for every deconstruction effort that they make, Biblical structuralists come with an argument.

Likewise, studying about Hindu Mythological interpretation gives us some very deep insights connected to ecofeminism. Sita, the goddess from Ramayana is known as an ideal woman who proved her purity to the world by given her 'Agni pariksha' or the Fire Test. It was conducted to decide whether she is still pure or not. India's obsession about purity and not understanding the reason behind the 'pure' getting impure is undeniable. The importance given to purity is hyped through some religious interpretations also. Sita's purity test made her a symbol of confidence, commitment and virtue. Sita is also known as the daughter of goddess earth. So, the Agni Pariksha can be seen as a humiliation to both women and earth. And because Sita couldn't accept further humiliation and it was also an insult to goddess earth, she was pulled back to her mother's womb. This story should be seen as a lesson and people should understand that both nature and women are important and they must be given their own place in the world and not under some one to rule over.

Water is also considered as 'sacred' and yet being contaminated by the same people who considers it holy. And now the situation has become so worse that everytime a person takes a holy 'dip' in the river or any other water body they swallow a large amount of toxic substances along with the water. River Ganga is considered goddess in Hindu Mythology and yet it is being contaminated by throwing dead bodies, human, animal and factory wastes, medical wastes and many other toxic substances. After understanding this, it is clear these religious interpretations cannot save both nature and women but the least thing we can do is to deconstruct the religious interpretations in such a way where every living being can live in the world peacefully. As religious texts are considered divine, it can give a legitimate understanding to people and it is a media that can actually influence many people, there has to be a deconstruction carried out seriously.



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## 11. RELEVANCE OF DYSTOPIAN FICTION IN INDIA

Dystopian fiction stories are presented in an immediate manner which can generate thoughts and actions in people to control it. It is always a fictional tale created by the extended conditions of the matters today. The landscapes and situations can be fictional but the themes are always non fictional and that's the reason why the idea of dystopia is disseminated through movies, books or any other media. So, the matters are always the pressing issues like governmental control, surveillance, technological control, survival, environmental degradation and loss of individualism.

As dystopia is an unpleasant and horrifying world to live in, people need to be enlightened about the pressing issues of today's world as it can get worse in the future. Most of the countries are genuinely promoting this genre. There are many movies and series that comes under dystopian genre which became very successful in other countries. This is what India lacks, even though there are novels from India that comes under this genre, it would be great if there are more movies and series that will explore dystopia. Because visual representation plays a major role in grasping what the movie or series creators are trying to say. Leila being first Indian dystopian fiction, has gone through several criticisms and certain group of people actually wanted the series to get banned for the alleged "Hinduphobia". Even though the six-episode series Leila is said to be dystopian, the scenes in the show can be related to real life situations. It is represented in such a way that people start thinking what if it comes true someday. Deepa Mehta says "I always see Leila as a cautionary tale that we should look at and think if there is something that I can do today to avoid a future as weak and as morose as shown here." It is a fact that creating a dystopian movie is a challenge in India as there can be huge backlashes while considering the themes like religious intolerance. But the citizens cannot be short time thinkers or live in denial always. Creating a dystopian fiction is upto the creator and it's their interpretation but the audience should cultivate the habit of critical analysis to identify if it's going to happen some day while taking today's situations under consideration.

## CONCLUSION

This study was conducted with a purpose to understand the relevance of dystopian fiction in India. Dystopian fiction stories are presented in an immediate manner which can generate thoughts and actions in people. Leila, being first Indian dystopian fiction, has gone through several criticisms and certain group of people actually wanted the series to get banned for the alleged "Hinduphobia". Even though the six-episode series Leila is said to be dystopian, the scenes in the show can be related to real life situations. It is represented in such a way that people start thinking what if it comes true someday.

It is a fact that creating a dystopian movie is a challenge in India as there can be huge backlashes while considering the themes like religious intolerance. But the citizens cannot be short time thinkers or live in denial always. Creating a dystopian fiction is upto the creator and it's their interpretation but the audience should cultivate the habit of critical analysis to identify if it's going to happen some day while taking today's situations under consideration.

Dystopia need not always be an undersired world, instead it can be a better place which does not mean "Utopia". But dystopia can be a place where there is equality among human beings, diversity and unity, healthy environment, good democratic nation and not a single person or group's utopic ideology.

## RESEARCH GAP

There are many research papers that discuss about dystopian fiction and its relevance. This research paper seeks to understand how women and nature are connected and what leads to their mutual misuse. The power of religion in strengthening gender roles which leads to the exploitation of both women and nature by taking the Netflix series Leila as an example. Also, this research paper explores the relevance of the Netflix series Leila in contemporary India.

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