

**MANIFESTATION OF LIMINALITY: A STUDY OF
GEORGE SAUNDERS' SELECTED WORKS**

Thesis submitted for the award of the Degree of

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in

ENGLISH

by

RAISUN MATHEW

11816310

Supervised by

Dr. Digvijay Pandya

Professor



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2022**

DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that the thesis titled *Manifestation of Liminality: A Study of George Saunders' Selected Works* submitted to Lovely Professional University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a record of original and independent bona fide research conducted by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Digvijay Pandya, Professor, Lovely Professional University, Punjab (India). The thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree/diploma/associateship/fellowship or any other title to any candidate by any university. I hereby confirm that the thesis is free from any plagiarised material. The final version of printed and soft copies of the thesis is proofread. The submission of the final version of the printed copy of the thesis is as per the guidelines to upload in Shodhganga. I have completed the prescribed coursework of research and have incorporated all the valuable suggestions provided by the Doctoral Committees of the University during my end term presentations and pre-submission seminar held on 3rd December 2021.



Raisun Mathew

Date: 05 – 08 – 2022

Signature of the Candidate

Place: Phagwara, Punjab



Certificate by Advisor

This is to certify that the thesis titled *Manifestation of Liminality: A Study of George Saunders' Selected Works*, submitted to the Department of English, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a record of original and independent research work conducted by Raisun Mathew (Reg. No.: 11816310) under my supervision and guidance. The thesis has not formed the basis for the award of any degree/diploma/associateship/fellowship or any other similar title to any candidate by any university.

The candidate has pursued the prescribed coursework of research and has incorporated all the suggestions given by the Department Doctoral Board and Research Advisory Committee of the university during his end term presentations and pre- submission seminar.

Dr. Digvijay Pandya

Professor

Department of English, School of Humanities

Lovely Professional University, Phagwara- Punjab, India

Date: 05 – 08 - 2022

Advisor

Abstract

This research thesis endeavours to analyse the liminal trajectory of the characters in George Saunders' selected works. Having an immense relationship with the real-world scenarios through symbolic representations, the possibilities of interpretation are employed to explore the altering attributes of the characters in the transitional process that shifts from normality to unusualness. Transition, as an essential component of living beings, has the potential to alter existing situations, either positively or negatively. Whether major or minor, the process of transition is significant to understand the changes that it reflects on the subject which undergoes it. Though transitions are common to human beings in their daily lives, often they fail to cope with the negative aspects that lead to an unfortunate and unsatisfactory end. Certain transitions in an individual's life, whether anticipated or unanticipated, can be critical in determining the next course in its track. The problematic situation of not being able to cope with the altering conditions can be resolved if the process of transition can be distinguished and suitable strategies are adopted to overcome the adverse effects of the same. This research thesis is an attempt to trace the transitional trajectory of the characters in George Saunders' selected works by focusing on the intermediary state in the process of transition. To effectively explore the transitional track of the characters, dissection of the same is required, which is conducted by the application of Victor Turner's liminality and Dr Nancy Schlossberg's transition theory. To be specifically based on the major objective of the present research, the 'processual framework' proposed by Turner is utilised to distinguish the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases that become the core facet of the method to analyse the transition in the characters. Upon identifying the tripartite structure, the intermediary phase of the transition is examined for the presence of any of the significant features such as uncertainty, anxiety, ambiguity, unusualness, deviation from normality, fear, loss of the previous state of mind, alienation, isolation, identity crisis, and dilemma. The majority of the combinations of these situational features imply the direct or indirect expression of liminality experienced by the characters.

The primary source of the research in which liminality and transition are explored is the contemporary American writer George Saunders' novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*, two novellas, two short fictions, and twenty short stories in four anthologies. The rationale for the selection of the writer is based on the interpretive flexibility offered by his literary works in the historical context of America, and also in connection with the still prevailing and relevant societal issues. Due to the diversity of the themes discussed in the fiction, the research is able to identify the different modes of liminality hidden within the spatial and situational existence of the characters.

The methodological pattern followed in the thesis is maintained throughout chapters three, four, five, and six to analyse the selected works. The qualitative approach of the research conducted using textual analysis, discussion, and interpretation based on the theoretical grounds helps to explore how the characters tend to be separated from their previously normative existence to the unusual situation of the liminal phase, and thereafter to the post-liminal phase (if any) with mild or drastic instabilities in their state of mind.

The objective of the research is to analyse the selected works of George Saunders in the light of Victor Turner's liminality, where the processual framework, i.e., the tripartite structure consisting of the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases of the major characters, is classified to distinguish the anti-structural characteristics exhibited during the intermediary phase. The transitional trajectory of the characters in the tripartite structure is explored so that the variation in the state of mind and the resultant behavioural actions can be differentiated from those of the previously normative phase and the reintegration phases. This is conducted with the help of additional support using Schlossberg's transition model (emphasising the 4S), which helps to understand the situational settings, psychological status, external supports, and coping strategies utilised by the characters during their transition from the pre-liminal to the post-liminal phases. The theoretical concepts associated with liminality, such as liminal space, liminal entity, *communitas*, temporary and permanent liminality, and anti-structure, are also discussed and traced from the textual references. This pattern is followed throughout the thesis in analysing the works separately, so that it assists the interpretive analysis of the liminal experiences of the characters. The transitional effect of liminality affects characters in their spatial and

situational contexts, and their coping strategies inform about the various in-between states that have a significant influence in determining the characters' post-liminal phase. This reflects how the similar threshold conditions experienced by human beings become challenging factors in defining their existence in the liminal as well as post-liminal phases. The correlation established between Victor Turner's liminality and Schlossberg's transition theory, as part of the theoretical framework of the thesis, helps to integrate the insights shared by the theorists in developing a suitable application model for the analysis of the selected works. Also, the short stories in the four anthologies discussed in the fifth and sixth chapters are classified according to their thematic affiliation, such as capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism. It centres on discussing the coerciveness experienced by the victims of the domination exercised by the power structures in society. The mode of enforced subjugation, exploitation, and oppression thus creates coercive liminality in the characters. These analyses also point to the fact that Saunders' selected works depict characters that reflect situations representing real-world scenarios. Examples of pandemics, wars, revolutions, gender conflicts, caste discrimination, refugee struggles, diaspora issues, political and social dominance, and so on are given to demonstrate how liminality can be applied beyond the confines of a literary work.

The analysis conducted in the thesis reveals certain interpretive findings that add knowledge to the existing research based on George Saunders' works. The primary result obtained with the help of differentiating the distinct phases of the available information in the selected works is the presence of liminality in the characters, which acts as an anti-structure compared to that of the pre- and post-liminal phases. The anti-structural essence of the liminal phase showcases the in-between state of mind experienced by the characters that often exist at the threshold status of neither one nor the other. An in-depth analysis of the transitional trajectory of the characters with the help of textual references and secondary sources showcases the expression of the features of liminality. According to the variation of the situation in which the characters experience liminality, the effect of the same along with its type and duration differs. The occurrence of naturally happening and coercive forms of liminality are interpreted through the analysis conducted on certain stories authored

by Saunders, which also points to whether the same occurs as forms of permanent and temporary liminality.

In the case of the novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*, the title denotes liminality in both Abraham Lincoln and Willie Lincoln, wherein the character of Abraham Lincoln is found to exhibit multiple liminalities at the same time. The spatial setting of the bardo in the novel is interpreted as having the attributes of liminal space, where the liminality of the bardo-dwellers resembles the existence of people during the American Civil War. The analysis identifies that liminality in Willie Lincoln influences Abraham Lincoln and vice versa, liminal transition in the bardo-dwellers, the American Civil War as a liminal event, and the lives of the slaves are characterised and linked to each other.

The analysis of the four anthologies of Saunders builds a base for the in-depth discussions and categorisation of the short stories based on the major themes such as capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism. The findings of the chapters discussing fiction and short stories reveal that the characters experience liminality due to altering situations and enforced dominance, where the mode of liminality and coping strategies influence the transition of the characters. The in-between states of mind created in the characters, that are forced to experience the features of liminality, are discussed in order to interpret the influence of coercive liminality experienced by the characters as a result of the dominance exerted by various power structures in society. In short, the chapters explain that capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism exerted by the dominant power structures cause liminal experiences in the victims. Thus, chapter five, with an introductory hint from chapter four, dwells on the details of the construction of similar situations that provide the space for the coinage of the term ‘coercive liminality’. These explorations of liminality lead to the final chapter that exclusively focuses on the coping strategies relied on by the characters to demonstrate how they overcome the entrapment of liminality, where the mode of liminality and coping strategies influence the transition in the characters.

The analysis of the selected works of George Saunders that are based on the objectives of the study gives rise to certain outcomes. The research correlates the different selected works of George Saunders through the exploration of liminality in the characters. The process of distinguishing the tripartite structure and exploring

liminality in the characters helps to identify that the selected works of Saunders can be interconnected through the same thread of liminality. In order to establish a theoretical framework for the research, the development of liminality and its relationship with Schlossberg's transition theory is portrayed. Thus, the processual framework proposed by Turner is effectively applied with the help of an additional supporting theoretical model. The identification of the tripartite structure provides the notion that the transitional effect of liminality occurs in the characters. Following these analyses and findings of the study based on Saunders' debut novel, short fiction, and stories, the influence of dominant external forces and subsequent ideologies in producing liminality in the characters are traced. Moreover, a convergence of the interpretations conducted in the chapters showcases the correlation between literary fiction and the real world regarding the relevance of liminality. This is explained through the various examples in the concluding chapter that showcase the relevance and contemporariness of the research based on liminality and transition, and are explained using the applicability of liminality to define the pandemic situation, wars and revolutions, the dominance caused by capitalism, consumerism and authoritarianism in society, trauma situations due to health-related concerns, gender-based issues, and miscellaneous daily life situations. The research intends to assist the readers in providing a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of George Saunders' selected works through the lens of liminality and transition. The analysis of the spatial and situational existence of the characters in the works helps the readers understand the significance of liminality in the world. The list of twenty-five literary fiction discussed in the thesis is connected to real-world scenarios so as to generalise the applicability of the same. Beyond the limits of a literary perspective, the applicability of the processual framework of liminality utilised for the research provides scope for flexible and versatile breakdown-analysis of matters that fall under the category.

The relevance of the research is timeless as it informs the often-occurring transitions in life and the in-between states within the process. This framework and liminality-based analysis method can be used to evaluate historical, current, and future records of circumstances and events. The selected works of George Saunders expand the research's ability to interpret and relate to current societal problems

associated with capitalism, consumerism, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism. Despite the fact that the current study was limited to Saunders' selected works, the flexibility, versatility, and potential of liminality are not limited to the confines of literature and literary works. Rather, the possibilities of extensive research are open when linked to other disciplines through the application of quantitative, qualitative, or mixed approaches. While Saunders' selected works present limited scope to explore the application of liminality, researchers can focus on literary works and relevant topics from other disciplines.

The types and duration of liminality alter in a person with the changes that occur in spatial and situational existence. In fact, the import of the analyses and discussions in the thesis equips the reader to understand the transitional trajectory of a person with reference to the intermediary state so as to find better solutions to overcome the entrapment of liminality. Therefore, the thesis concludes by stating the fact that transitions and liminal experiences, whether naturally occurring or coercive in its attributes, are inevitable and essential for the gradual development of humankind because of the vital dynamics that occur in life.

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Glossary of Terms

1. **Transition:** the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another.
2. **Liminality:** is defined as an intermediate phase in the rites of passage, where the liminal entities experience an in-between threshold state of living that produces neither one nor the other/ but both conditions.
3. **Rites of passage:** are rituals and ceremonies that celebrate the transition from one stage of life to another. It also denotes the passage of the state of a person during his/her transition from one state/position to the other.
4. **Pre-liminal:** is a separation from ordinary/normative/usual or previous social life or state of mind.
5. **Liminal phase:** is an intermediary transitional phase having unstructured and unusual characteristics during which one has left one place or state but has not yet entered or joined the next.
6. **Post-liminal phase:** is a period during which an individual experiences a re-aggregation or reincorporation into a new state of being.
7. **Anti-structure:** denotes the deviation from normality, order, hierarchy, authority and different cognitive aspects of organised human society. Unlike social structure, it presents an unusual diversion from the already set rules or traditional attributes. Thus, it takes the position of opposing the identity and structural existence of someone/something.
8. **Liminal personae/ liminal entities/ liminaries:** are the threshold people experiencing the intermediary phase, who elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. They are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony.
9. **Liminal space:** is an in-between place of transition, a threshold between two points, signalling the end of one time or space, and the beginning of another. These spaces exist in the real world as physical locations but are also present in our

cognition and psychological experience, often related to major life changes and periods of uncertainty.

10. **Liminoid:** has characteristics of a liminal experience, but optional and not involving the resolution of a personal crisis. They are defined as post-industrial, individual, optional, leisure-based social acts.
11. **Liminal phenomena:** is the exercise and experience of liminality.
12. **Communitas:** is an unstructured community of having equal status in which people experience liminality, comradeship and egalitarianism.
13. **Permanent liminality:** occurs when liminality extends beyond a certain period that overcomes its temporariness.
14. **Bardo:** is a state of existence between death and rebirth, varying in length according to a person's conduct in life and manner of, or age at, death. It is also considered as a space or state of a person between death and the afterlife.
15. **Bardo-dwellers:** the characters entrapped in the state/space of bardo.
16. **Capitalism:** is an economic system controlled by private ownership focusing their operation on profit. It concentrates power in the hands of a minority capitalist class that exists through the exploitation of the majority working class and their labour through exercising inequality, corruption and economic instabilities.
17. **Consumerism:** is the practice of increased consumption of goods.
18. **Authoritarianism:** is the enforcement or advocacy of strict obedience to authority at the expense of personal freedom. It is based on the lack of concern for the wishes or opinions of others, often leading to exploitation and subjugation.

INTRODUCTION

“To be, or not to be, that is the question”

(Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.1.58)

Literature’s influence on the real world has been strong enough to build an inevitable bond that produces transformational developments in the lives of human beings. Mutual interaction through the process of becoming influenced by each other leads to the substantial progress of both the discipline of literature and the challenging existence of human beings in the world. The continuance of human existence can be associated with recurring transitions that can positively or negatively affect the normative passage of human beings. Though transitions are common to human beings in their daily lives, often they fail to cope with the negative aspects that lead to unfortunate and unsatisfactory ends. Certain transitions in a person’s life, whether anticipated or unanticipated, can be critical in determining the next course of their life. The problematic condition of not being able to cope with changing situations can be resolved if the process of transition can be distinguished and suitable strategies are adopted to overcome the adverse effects of the same. This qualitative research focuses on the process of transitions in the characters of George Saunders, the passage of the flow of transitions, and the peculiar features of the phases correlated with the transitional shift accompanied by the theoretical insights on liminality shared by Victor Turner. Liminality, in its simple definition, is an in-between state of threshold-living where uncertainty, anxiety, and ambiguity of being ‘betwixt and between’ are the major determining facets. It emerges from the intermediary phase of the tripartite structure proposed by Arnold van Gennep that paved the path to further re-discoveries by Victor Turner. Employing a textual and interpretive analysis of George Saunders’ selected works, the characters that correspond to representing the existential status of human beings in the real world are analysed for their expression of the intermediate phase of the rites of passage, i.e., liminality. Divisions of the expression of pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases in the selected works are conducted through the research that helps to interlink the different works of Saunders with distinct themes on the single thread of liminality. Also, the gradual process of transition of the

characters under the circumstances of liminality from the three phases of the tripartite structure is analysed to identify the nature of the transition brought into effect by the influence of liminality. The associated concepts such as liminal space, liminal entity, *communitas*, anti-structure, liminoid, and permanent or temporary liminality are traced to substantiate the effect/s of liminality. In short, the research establishes a link between the fictional aspects of George Saunders' works and those of the real-world scenario via the perspectives of liminality, which become an unavoidable interlinking factor with timeless relevance to the world's settings.

Transition, as a significant phase applicable universally, is crucial to existence considering the subjective perspective of every life form in the world. From the smallest living cell to the largest being, there has to have transition/s at some point in life, whether it is essential or not. The process of transition does not limit to living beings alone but is dynamic to every matter around that is interdependent on each other. Life, according to Heraclitus of Ephesus, a Greek philosopher who lived around 500 B.C., is a flux, which means that everything is subject to change. To him, what is constant out of all is the transition that occurs dynamically in nature. In the same way, as the process of transition is evident in the physical traits of a being, it also happens in the psychological and emotional content of the person undergoing the process of transition expressed through their behaviours and actions. In the perspective of Victor Turner, "... for individuals and groups, social life is a type of dialectical process that involves a successive experience of high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality" (*The Ritual Process* 97). While considering life as a roller coaster of recurring zeniths and nadirs, which can be distinguished as anticipated or unanticipated events of transition, it is symbolic of the medical graph output of heartbeats from an electrocardiogram wave. Each beat of the heart is taken as an electrical impulse or a wave, providing a voltage versus time graph. If it is considered as per the tripartite structure that is to be discussed, the QRS complex that triggers the main pumping contractions representing the depolarisation of ventricles can be regarded as the liminal phase in between the pre-liminal PR interval and the post-liminal ST segment. If it does not occur, it shows a zero-line indicating death. As it is not appreciated and will be considered dead if the graph line maintains a static horizontal line, there have to be waves maintaining the voltage-time

proportions in order to indicate an active lifeline. Similarly, transitions in life take the role of the waves in the electrocardiogram by maintaining the ups and downs that are interconnected and influenced by various supporting factors.

Transitions give rise to both ordinary and extraordinary changes in people's lives where they occur as a continuous process (Brammer). American philosopher and educator, Frederick Hudson, calls it the 'cycle of renewal'. It is defined as "a natural process of disorientation and reorientation" that has the power to change the perception of self and the world, and demands changes in assumptions and behaviours (Hudson 96). A transition process is a total consciousness of moving from 'pervasiveness' to the awareness of 'boundedness' (Lipman-Blumen 26-32). When a person's life experiences are considered from birth to death, he or she deviates from linearity in order to experience a change from the prior state of affairs. It would not be necessarily voluntary every time, as involuntary transitions are the most challenging compared to the others, mainly because they would end up on unexpected pathways. Such transitions in life would help one exit from a past identity and enter into a new one as a transformed persona. In Act 1 of the play *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, Tom Stoppard describes "every exit as being an entrance somewhere else". From one to the other, the vibrant chain of transition maintains the graph of life through the variation of the waves.

Prioritising the process of transition and its effects, the present study would highlight certain selected works of George Saunders for the presence of an 'in-between' state in the characters during the process of their transition, influenced by external forces which leads them to transformed normalities. Dividing the transitional process into three different phases described by Arnold van Gennep as rites of passage, the middle stage is regarded as a potential phase in the study where it gives possibilities in describing the entity using its peculiar features that are distinguishable from the pre- and the post- stages of transition. Bjørn Thomassen writes about the importance of in-between spaces, stating that the existence of humans cannot be advanced without the process of transition. He highlights the in-between states and spaces of life, which he considers the marking positions of personalities and their development (*Liminality and the Modern* 4).

Classifications and patterning have also been done based on transitions by several other renowned intellectuals. R. H Moos and V. Tsu, in their essay “Human competence and coping: An Overview” (1976), writes about two phases of the transition process. They are the acute phase and the reorganisation phase. Feelings are denied in the acute phase, and the person’s potential is managed to lessen the effect of the pressure and tensions, whereas, in the re-organisation phase, the new reality is accepted by facing it to return to normal function. In the book *Managing Transitions* (1991), William Bridges frames a pattern to analyse the transitional process through three phases: endings, neutral zones, and beginnings. The first phase is where disengagements, misidentifications, disenchantments, and disorientation occur. The second phase is the time of confusion before everything returns to normal conditions. The third phase is the phase of renewal. Helen Rose Ebaugh, a sociologist from the United States, introduced the process of role exit by concentrating her studies on endings, or of leaving a role. She writes that “role exit is a process of disengagement from a role that is central to one’s self-identity and the reestablishment of identity in a new role that takes into account one’s ex-role. Role exit is a process that occurs over time” (Ebaugh 23). Out of all these patterns, ‘rites of passage’ by Van Gennep is selected for this research because of the high potential to interpret its intermediate stage, i.e., liminality.

As rites of passage and liminality are on the grounds of anthropology, particularly to the rituals followed by communities in various parts of the world, insights into the ritual processes referred to in the studies of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner will also be discussed to identify the process of transition in the rites of passage, including liminality. According to the viewpoint of Van Gennep, liminality has its importance in transitions where such transitions shape both people and communities. In his seminal text *Les Rites de Passage* (1909), he identifies certain ritual processes like the initiation ceremony, birth, childhood, marriage, funeral, etc. that can be explained through his rites of passage. Turner’s interest was to explore the middle stage of the rites of passage of Van Gennep through his fieldwork among the selected communities performing the rituals. Edith Turner, the wife of Victor Turner, recalls that his initial work on liminality was during the liminal period in their lives. She remembers, “we were in a state of suspense. The place of our waiting was

on the margin of the sea, roughly at the spot where William the Conqueror first penetrated Britain – which was an event known to the English as a changing point in history; while Hastings itself was felt to be a threshold, a gateway” (Turner, “Prologue: From the Ndembu to Broadway” 7). She adds to the point that at the particular time of waiting, they were no longer quite British, not yet quite American – feeling to be *liminars* or known as liminal personae (Daly 70). Furthermore, he expanded the interpretations of ‘liminality’ by adapting it to the context of modern societies and their way of life. The altering structure of the middle phase in the rites of passage creates disequilibrium in the normality of life, leading to suspended emotional variations in the state of mind of a person in the process of transition. Liminality has been defined in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* as “a term much used in anthropology and literary and cultural theory to designate a space or state which is situated between other, usually more clearly defined, spaces, periods, or identities” (Cuddon 398).

Discerning a continuum of relative phases of the characters involved in the transition, the interstice of the rites of passage can be utilised to deduce the ‘transitional liminality’ exhibited by the characters, space, and time following the situational diversification. Though liminality was discovered as an intermediate phase in the rites of passage by Van Gennep, it was further developed by Victor Turner through his various works. As written in *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols* published in 1992, the paradoxical essence of “being both this and that” (Turner 49) transpires as it is a state where “the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definite shape” (133). A limbo state of neither here nor there would be the result of being in a liminal state. Turner’s insights on liminality are scattered in his different works, such as *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), “Betwixt and between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage” (1970), “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology” (1974), and “Variations on a Theme of Liminality” (1977), which are considered the most important among his other works related to the expansion of liminality in anthropology. Aside from the liminality that pervades the works, the research would delve into the significance of the setting in which the characters are placed to carry out their activities. The liminal effect of the setting, which situates

itself as a liminal space, plays an important role in the transition that occurs for the character involved in the specific situation. It is the conditioning through interaction with the environment that decides the behavioural patterns of a person. In “The Uses and Meanings of Liminality” (2009), one gets an idea of the liminality that Turner had while portraying contexts related to it. It says,

“Turner realised that ‘liminality’ served not only to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also to understand the human reactions to liminal experiences: the way in which personality was shaped by liminality, the sudden foregrounding of agency, and the sometimes-dramatic tying together of thought and experience.”

(Thomassen 14)

George Saunders’ style of writing would impress readers if it is read with the same effort that the author had taken to compose them, one by one, with different intentions in mind on how it should effectuate justice to the theme as well as the interest of the reader. While reading an outline of his works for the sake of reading, a reader may not be able to discover the uniqueness of his writing as his words do not open up the hidden treasure of multiple interpretations. He leaves certain blank spaces for the reader to be a part of his writing to fill the left-out spaces of their own. As for how William Shakespeare left gaps for the reader to interpret in certain plays like *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, Saunders also creates an opportunity to engage the interpretations of the reader to produce meanings out of the text. The critics appreciate the distinct and stylistically complex arrangement of Saunders’ literary works for its similar approach to solving a larger algebraic equation. Word after word, it leads to sentences and paragraphs with hints to the next that would finally resolve the question revolving around the reader with the active involvement of the reader itself. His symbolic representations of basic human problems through his characters and the situations in which they are ‘caught suspended’ make him closer to the reader. In such a manner, Saunders takes advantage of the emotional aching produced in the reader.

Out of the various fictional works and essays published by George Saunders in leading magazines, such as *The New Yorker*, *Harper’s*, *McSweeney’s*, *GQ*, *Kenyon Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Witness*, and *Quarterly West* that are based in the United States, selected novellas, short stories, and flash fiction have been compiled together

according to the similarity in their themes to publish anthologies. Four such short story anthologies have been published as of 2022, along with three independent novellas, and a collection of essays. His debut novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*, which was awarded the 2017 Booker Prize, stands out for its perfectly blended experimental style of writing, combining historical events with that of a fictional extravaganza. From the list of Saunders' works, a count of twenty short stories, two short fictions, two novellas, and the debut novel are selected for the study. Sixteen essays from the collection *The Brain-dead Megaphone: Essays* are taken for secondary referential analysis to support the interpretations given based on the transitional liminality observed. From the perspective of the study, it is important as it is used to substantiate certain points put forth by the author. Most of his essays are his ideological inclinations on what he believes to be true to his beliefs and understandings. They can be regarded as an extension of what Saunders writes in his fictional works, with the inclusion of his method of story-telling. As they are powerful, just like his fiction, they cannot be excluded from the list. They point to the liminal events in the real-life scenario of the world. A recent work titled *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain* (2021) has been published that serves as a guide through a selected number of seven Russian short stories. The book is a compilation of the masterclasses that Saunders has taken as a professor for around twenty years. Having an immense interest in teaching creative writing, the book stands out in describing the ways to read and write effectively. Though the book is a wonderful piece of writing, as it does not fall under the criteria of the study, it has not been considered for this research. Therefore, the total number of works selected for this research is twenty-five. In every selected work, the presence of liminality and its subsidiary topics are reflected in one way or the other, according to the change in the characters and their environment. Saunders' short story anthologies are *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* (1996), *Pastoralia* (2000), *In Persuasion Nation* (2006), and *Tenth of December* (2013). He has also written other fiction such as *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* (2000), *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* (2005) and *Fox 8* (2013). *Congratulations, By the Way: Some Thoughts on Kindness* (2014) is an independent book extracted from his convocation speech at Syracuse University. He continues to include either history or cultural circumstances of a casual and relatable American living to native readers in

every piece of writing. It would be perfect to say that Saunders writes for everyone, but more for the common man with their individual and common existential anxieties.

Review of Literature

In the last decade, George Saunders' literary works have become a source of research for researchers and literary scholars. A major part of the research by scholars has taken place after *Lincoln in the Bardo* bagged the Booker Prize award in 2017. The popularity of the author crossed the confined limits of his readers based on short stories to the much more popular genre of novels. A few research works have been published based on George Saunders' works, particularly his various short stories, reflecting on the various themes that can be extracted from the socially relevant topics hidden behind the author's indirect statements. The review in this section focuses on the writing style of the author, the highlight and advocacy of certain values, the exploration of the novel's aspects, and other thematic characteristics of his works. A significant contribution to the analysis and criticism of George Saunders' works can be found in the collection of essays published as part of the American literature readings in the twenty-first century in *George Saunders: Critical Essays*, edited by Philip Coleman and Steve Gronert Ellerhoff. It focuses mainly on the short stories and the writing aspects of the author. Some of the essays make a comparison of certain stories by Saunders with the selected works of other prominent writers. Previous studies by scholars concentrate on publishing master dissertations, doctoral theses, and various research articles on different perspectives and areas related to the works of George Saunders. A few major existing scholarships based on George Saunders' works are provided below:

(i) Experimental Narrative Style

The writing style of George Saunders has always been highlighted by critics. It is notable in the earlier short stories and also in the novel. Twa, Garth (2011) uses the critical and creative lens to analyse the selected works of George Saunders for their use of simple language in formal writing. The author examines the production of a register that categorises mechanics and intention, as well as the vernacular and informal writing of the writer. Saunders' writings express the point-of-view pattern and experimental style, especially in *Lincoln in the Bardo*. Bigler, Amanda (2017)

goes deeper into Saunders' writing style, discovering reader empathy in current American short fiction writers including Lydia Davis, George Saunders, and David Foster Wallace. The anthology *Tenth of December* by George Saunders was chosen for the purpose of analysing the use of various literary tropes that could alter a reader's emotional reaction to a character or scenario.

The narrative style in *Lincoln in the Bardo* stands out from every other mode of storytelling. Morse, Donald (2018) writes about the different uses of the literary devices of conversations in the cemetery designed by Saunders. While describing the writing of Saunders in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, he points to the collage of voices employed in the setting of the bardo, where a combination of devices is used to express the fragments of history, newspaper articles, diary entries, and biographical records of Abraham Lincoln. The streams of consciousness in the dialogues of Lincoln are also explained in the article based on the visit to the cemetery to see the corpse of Willie Lincoln. In addition to that, Hartley, Daniel (2015) explores certain conjunctions of style, the structure of feeling, and emergent forms of life in George Saunders' short story collection, *Tenth of December*. The essay argues for the presence of certain ideological contradictions at work in Saunders' fiction and non-fiction, which are inherently linked to the conceptions of language and style. The expressions of minimal humanity in his collection of short stories are also highlighted in the essay for the visibility of a structure of feeling. The uniqueness of the narrative style can be found in the variation in the narrative perspectives utilised by Saunders. Wilson, Robert (2017) discusses the competing voices and micro-dialogues in George Saunders' short story "Victory Lap". He uses Mikhail Bakhtin's taxonomy of dialogue to show that Saunders' narration always remains on an equal plane with the voices of the characters. When a reader recognises the verisimilitude of a character's discourse about himself or herself, and when the author is only one voice among many in the story, rather than the interpretive touchstone by which all the other voices are interpreted and judged, Wilson writes that a reader may experience a "peculiar active broadening of his consciousness" ("Third-person Ventriloquism": Microdialogues and Polyphony in George Saunders's "Victory Lap" 232).

Alongside the narrative experiments practised by Saunders, some of the elements included in the works have made them interesting and exciting to the readers. One such element is the use of black humour. The use of black humour in Saunders' stories produces humanism, compassion, and empathy in the readers. According to Lavrentyev, Alexander (2016), Saunders employs the brutality of black humour to expose current society's hypocrisy and to promote genuine humanistic principles. He examines "The 400 Pound CEO" for its dark humour, representation of explicit and latent violence, axiological inversion, and counter system. It also examines the story's satire, irony, grotesque, absurd, and parody elements. Similar to the study, James, Nelson (2012) also critically examines black humour as a literary device and genre in the works of Sherman Alexie, Kurt Vonnegut, and George Saunders. He highlights the depressing, horrifying, and tragic situations that lead the stories to such an experience for the reader. Whereas, the research views of Guidry, Cameron (2007) explore the application of humour and comedy in the selected works of American writers such as Raymond Carver, Flannery O'Coner, George Saunders, and Denis Johnson. Specifically, George Saunders' "The 400-Pound CEO" is analysed for the effective use of humour through the employment of the bizarre to fabricate dense and hilarious prose. He writes that Saunders has never felt the high-serious and funny as separate, but as occurring at the same time (18).

(ii) Advocacies and Perspectives

The advocacy of empathy, compassion, and kindness is significantly highlighted throughout the writings of George Saunders. These have been noted by some researchers. Hawkins, John (2013) considers George Saunders' anthology *In Persuasion Nation* as a confrontation with the potential for dehumanisation in post-9/11 America, where the lack of empathy and perception of others is produced through a consumerist culture. He highlights the commercial aspects of dark futures where the consumer culture of the country is highlighted. Layne, Nepper (2016) emphasise the affect and empathy in the postmodern fiction of George Saunders through his article titled "'To Soften the Heart" George Saunders, Postmodern Satire, and Empathy". He refers to the anthology *Tenth of December* by Saunders which consists of ten short stories of varying themes. The presence of imaginative and

dramatic fictional worlds immersed in satiric formulas presented in the anthology is highlighted as the most distinguishing feature of Saunders' writing. Through such descriptions, he elaborates on the postmodern techniques and affiliations used by the writer in the process of creating short fiction. Ryan, Aidan (2015) differs his viewpoints from the previous critics on the notion that Saunders is a satirist of monovocal and political qualities associated with the genre. He conducts reconsideration in relation to Mary Holland's *Beyond Poststructuralism* and Judith Ryan's *The Novel After Theory* along with the insight of Adam Kelly's "New Sincerity". The researcher identifies M. M Bakhtin's heteroglossia in highly ambiguous ethical narratives of empathy while reading Saunders' works with the contributions of David Foster Wallace. Hadaway, Thaddaeus (2019) portrays George Saunders as a second-generation postmodernist who depicts American society with irony and solipsism. He has the viewpoint that the satiric targets pointing to real-world referents in Saunders' literary satire make him different from the previous generations of postmodernists. The researcher also posits that the satire in Saunders' stories gives rise to affect and empathy in the readers, both in and out of the pages. Bassler, Michael (2017) explores the ethics and aesthetics of George Saunders' work considering the engagement provided to the reader based on a compassionate relationship with the characters. Bassler argues that the style of writing aims to achieve compassion and intersubjective understanding more than satire and postmodernist playfulness. Through such a description, he details the workings of narrative empathy in Saunders' works.

Saunders' stories that try to produce empathy in the reader have also taken the path of producing cruel expressions in the narrative and plot, which in their output produce empathetic reactions in the reader. It has been highlighted by Daalder, Jurrit (2017), who criticises the use of cruel-to-be-kind justifications in "Escape from Spiderhead". He contends that Saunders' science-fiction twist on the torture-porn genre ultimately brings the reader to sympathy. As a result, he believes Saunders is attempting to impose a moral lesson on the reader.

(iii) *Lincoln in the Bardo*: Multiple Viewpoints

This concept of eliciting empathy is also linked to the narrative in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, which frames the struggles of the African-American race, who were treated as slaves. Focusing on the thematic expression of grief in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, the essay “Magical Thinking: Experiences of Grief and Mourning in George Saunders’ *Lincoln in the Bardo* and Jesmyn Ward’s *Singh, Unburied, Sing*” by Kjersti Bale and Hilde Bondevik (2019) is insightful to explore such a perspective. The grief depicted in the novel not only projects the situation of Abraham Lincoln and Willie Lincoln, but also the lynching of thousands of African-American people of the nineteenth century who suffered from the acts of slavery and exploitation. The article goes beyond the medical understanding of grief and focuses on how fiction challenges such acknowledged understanding of the emotion. While discussing *Lincoln in the Bardo*, it has also to be viewed through its historical and narrative structure. Hayes-Brady, Clare (2020) examines George Saunders’ *Lincoln in the Bardo* as a historical fiction that reflects and refracts present moral and ethical concerns. He analyses the novel’s unconventional design, symphonic narrative structure, and core thematic issues using Linda Hutcheon’s historiographic metafiction as a central analytical tool (74). In the conclusion, the researcher argues that the generic bounds of historical fiction are broken by *Lincoln in the Bardo* to create a transhistorical meditation on morality, purpose, and legacy out of the symphony of American voices. From a similar perspective and more specific research and assessment of the novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*’s approach to verisimilitude, Moseley, Merritt (2019) define it as a neo-historical novel. The novel’s experimental language tackles fragmentation and an unconventional approach to narrative in this study. It is also important to view the opinion of Sandler, Matt (2017) who gives a description of the novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* connected with the contemporary political culture in America. The transformation of Abraham Lincoln, who was the then President of America, is explained as a polemical force where he realises his state of sorrow is related to others too. The verisimilitude in the novel is also highlighted in the same way Moseley, Merrit (2019) mentions it in her article.

The Booker award for *Lincoln in the Bardo* has brought a few more studies related to the scope of exploring the novel. The word ‘Bardo’ has always been an

interesting term to the readers, which has been discussed by Nagpal and Trambo (2019), focusing on the Buddhist aspects in George Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo* by relating it to the intermediate states described in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The transition states described in the novel are related to the traditional teachings of Buddhism. This intermediary state, which is elaborately discussed in chapter three, has also been a topic of discussion for some scholars. Strehle, Susan (2020) dedicates a chapter in her book to discussing *Lincoln in the Bardo* of George Saunders so as to explore the identities of disavowed others and ghostly communities represented in it. He equally conducts research based on the historical aspects discussed in the novel as well as from the angle of its fictional representation. In the novel, the space of the bardo where the spirits are held is resembled to as a communal bardo. It aids a journey through the novel by intermixing views based on historical records of America on the Civil War, political, and social situations. Green, C. E (2017) has stated her view that *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Saunders probes processes of becoming haunted where it animates the neglected ghosts through their joint acts with their pasts and the living present to mobilise their afterlife. She gives importance to hauntology, historic narratives, and inheritance in post-modern fiction.

From the perspective of the liminal status of the novel, Éigeartaigh, Aoileann (2019) comments on the liminal spaces and contested narratives in Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo* during the IAAS W. A. Emerson lecture. He considers the graveyard setting as a liminal space to create space for the stories of the marginalised and voiceless communities. The speaker considers liminality as a vehicle for social critique to provide an opportunity for alternate perspectives. Though he has mentioned the liminal status of the bardo and its reflections in the novel, there has not been an in-depth character analysis or plot categorisation. Stepping beyond the limits of the novel, Moisy, Amelie (2018) writes about George Saunders' short stories that feature ghosts and revenants by representing their liminal status and metaphorical identity. The article identifies the stories as liminal satires that provide space for multiple interpretations. It states that "he makes full use of the liminality of the form to return the reader to the essential, temperate virtues, restoring their attractiveness even through his literary allusions to other texts" (6).

(iv) Thematic Representations

The analysis of Saunders' selected works from the perspective of liminality discussed in this thesis is closely connected with the thematic representation of the works. It includes capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism as major themes through which the effect of liminality is discovered. There have been articles and research based on the thematic nature of Saunders' works. Rando, David (2012) writes about the inclination of George Saunders' stories towards the marginalised groups in American society who are vulnerable to the dominant structures of power. He prefers writing about the oppressed, the dispossessed, or anyone else whom history's winners have trampled on their route to glory, fame, or enormous wealth (437). Through the analysis of "Sea Oak" from the anthology collection *Pastoralia* (2000), he reads the possible perspectives of Saunders based on class representation, working-class struggles, and identity differences. He claims that "Sea Oak" suspends realism and postmodernism approaches in order to undermine class ontologies. Cesaratto, Todd (2011) uses systems theory and narratology to explain the link between *Arendt's Origins of Totalitarianism*, Franz Fuhmann's "Der Haufen" and George Saunders' "My Flamboyant Grandson". The article relates them to a matter of hermeneutic equivalence between fascism, socialism, and liberalism, respectively. Saunders' story is related to the theme of capitalism and liberalism where the power structures of capitalist consumerism rule over the consumers. Cesaratto opines that the totalitarian model occurs in liberalism when "insult to intelligence becomes gratuitous, and when terror – low or high grade – justifies the gratuitousness" (81).

Lee, Richard (2014) connects the four short stories in Saunders' book *The Four Institutional Monologues* published in 2000 with his later works "The Semplica Girl Diaries" and "Home" in the anthology *Tenth of December* published in 2013. The major objective of the research article was to bring a set of sequenced stories of Saunders to illuminate the tendencies towards work and alienation in his corpus. He states that the absurdity and familiarity of the subversive representation through the stories enable the readers to gain an understanding of American corporate culture.

Kelly, Adam (2017) mentions the scathing satire of corporate jargon used in George Saunders' fiction. The uncomfortable connection between high literary expression and modes of spectatorship produces pain in others. Through these

descriptions, he converges to the point of introducing a term – “New Sincerity” that discusses the sincerity of Saunders’ characters in what they say, even if they do not excel in the use of lyrical language. Gillian Moore (2017) examines “Bounty” and “The Semplica Girl Diaries” to evaluate the change toward deliberately signalling possibilities for a socio-political agency by revisiting the themes of epiphany, hope, and transformation linked with the short stories. His short stories are shaped by the personal and political ramifications of topics such as class, gender, and race in American culture. The border issue is highlighted in Saunders’ *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* (2005) by Nayeypour and Varghaiyan (2020), who provide the symbolic meanings of the border. They draw a parallel between the operation of the modern human world and that of non-human creatures, stressing the importance of ethnicities, nations, and governments. The article demonstrates the transformation of a nation into an ultra-nationalistic and authoritarian regime by manipulating the militia, the economy, bureaucrats, and the media.

Kaiser, Kevin (2018) examines the fiction of George Saunders in the light of posthumanist ethics and conceptions of ethics with regard to human and non-human encounters and relations. He analyses every text of George Saunders where the relationship between the animate and inanimate subjects interacts. Analysis of “The 40-Pound CEO”, “Pastoralia”, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip*, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*, “93990”, “Puppy”, *Fox 8*, and *Lincoln in the Bardo* are conducted for their posthumanist perspectives, empathy, and ethics. Pogell, Sarah (2011) examines the selected works of George Saunders and the French theorist Jean Baudrillard to reveal their mutual interest in theme parks with the characteristics of verisimilitude. The analysis of the works examines the hyper realities in American society as a result of simulated realities, as well as its corporate discourse. Saunders’ fiction such as “Bounty”, “Offloading for Mrs. Schwartz”, “Downtrodden Mary’s Failed Campaign of Terror”, “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline” and “Pastoralia” are analysed for its specific theme park settings. Pogell relates Saunders’ theme parks to the quotidian reality of workers in several parts of the world, including the factories-cum-residence parks in contemporary China (473). Huebert, David (2017) examines “Pastoralia” for its dystopic and spectacularised theme park world created by George Saunders which resembles a human zoo. He discusses the “biopolitical dystopia”

related to the 19th century concept of the human zoo and a close reading of animals, meat, and species identities. It points to the notion of autonomous species identity and troubling facets of the modern American relationship with nonhuman animal life. Saunders provides an emotional orientation to the postmodern reader and a sense of community. Garnett, Catherine (2014) explains the precarity in the works of Saunders through the analysis of short stories in the anthologies *CivilWarland in Bad Decline* (1996), *Pastoralia* (2000), and *Tenth of December* (2013). He conducts it by examining the conventions of setting and speech traditionally associated with the pastoral mode. Apart from the primary concerns, he also states that Saunders' works that consider pastoral representations are a part of the general trend of the new age. The use of theme parks, pastoral landscapes, workspaces, the suburbs, and university campuses are regarded as the materials that relate to American culture and tradition in the various literary works. She also writes about the uncertainty prevalent in the labour force that struggles with the attrition of job security.

(v) **Neo-liberalism and Beyond**

Apart from these discussions on Saunders' works, other explorations also contribute to the religious and neo-liberal ideas of American life. While analysing *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* through the prism of post-secular literary theory and Saunders' own views on Christianity, Jansen, Brian, and Adams, Hollie (2018) identify Christianity as a double-edged sword for Saunders. The unchristian social realities of the world in which Saunders' working poor toil, as well as the radical fundamentalist view, reveal Saunders' goal of double critique. Through such an analysis of the text, the researcher leads the discussion to the problems of capitalism backgrounded by the logic of neo-liberalism. Cottrell-Boyce, Aidan (2017) analyses George Saunders' stories such as "Jon", "Isabelle", and "Brad Carrigan: American" for the presence of the Deus Absconditus. The concept of 'Dues Absconditus' comes from the Lutheran tradition which indicates that the presence of God is realised through the human urge towards forming logical, rational, and totalising patterns. Ellerhoff, Steve (2017) discusses "The Semplica-Girl Diaries" from the Jungian perspective of a 'big dream' that conducts a conscious exploration. The analysis of the short story is conducted based on the difference between the processes of thinking and feeling by Carl Jung.

According to him, the short story is a product of dream images. George, Dana (2017) discusses the magical realism in George Saunders' ghost stories. The mystical marvels of traditional culture and the artificial marvels of contemporary culture are both featured in Saunders' stories. The essayist selected "The Wavemaker Falters", "CommComm", and "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline" for analysing the presence of magical realism.

In the discussion based on neo-liberal perspectives, Millen, Alex (2018) gives the sketch of George Saunders' use of words to denote how neoliberalism is "registered, reproduced, and resisted" (139) through the analysis of his anthology *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*. He shows that Saunders gives prominence to the uniquely sensitive chronicler of American life through his writings. Trussler, Michael (2017) investigates the nature of animated corpses and zombies that Saunders uses to represent the rage against the neoliberal mainstream American culture. He adds the analysis of ethics in "Sea Oak" and "Brad Carrigan, American". Nihilism is explored in the former and in particular, in the use of the uncanny from temporal simultaneity in the latter.

According to the literature review based on George Saunders' works, there are existing studies in master's and doctoral theses, research articles, and papers based on the narrative style, experimental ways of writing, use of colloquial language, settings, and themes in some of the selected short stories. So far, the work has indeed been focused on a viewpoint on working-class struggle, black humour, empathy, interior settings, and a dystopian model linked to a few short stories. His works are either studied in conjunction with each other or with the works of other writers. There are no previous studies that explore transitional liminality in the works of George Saunders by studying the three stages of liminality. Hence, it was found that the application of Victor Turner's theory of liminality in George Saunders' selected works is novel and innovative.

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To analyse transitional liminality in the works of George Saunders, a suitable model that depicts the transitional levels and its implications on the person involved in the transition is used from Dr Nancy Schlossberg's explanations of the transitional adaptation in adults. Her model of transition is more applicable to exploring

transitional liminality in Saunders' works as it is versatile in nature which closely connects with that of the insights shared by Turner. As the intermediate phase of the rites of passage is also called a 'transition' phase besides the term liminality or marginality, and as it serves as a phase 'in-between' the pre-liminal and the post-liminal phases, it would be ideal to take the support of Schlossberg's transition as an additional base to strengthen the theoretical approach of the study. As she writes, "reactions to any transition change over time, depending on whether one is moving in, moving through, or out of the transition" (Goodman et al. 32). This perspective on the transition theory gives hints to the interconnection of it with Victor Turner's liminality. Schlossberg's transition model can be used to determine the level of awareness of a specific transition, the characteristics of the individual participating in the transition, features of pre-transition and post-transition environments, and the mode of adaptation while relocating through the transitional phases of moving in, moving through, and moving out. This justification for including Schlossberg's transition theory allows us to concentrate on the four tenants. She discusses the four key tenants that help a person adapt to a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies, in which she discusses situational variations, personal and psychological characteristics of an individual, societal and familial support, as well as the interpretation of the problem and the assistance in stress management. In terms of how transitional liminality can have both positive and negative or destructive effects, it is comparable to the transition model in that it can have a role change of gains or losses, as well as a favourable or unfavourable 'affect'.

The identification of major objectives remains the cornerstone of any research study that has a solid foundation in the research process's standard norms. The research question that led to the progress of this study is whether the characters in Saunders' works experience liminality. If they experience it, the next question is how it affects them compared to their previous state and post-state of the liminal period. The third question is whether these characters experiencing liminality portrayed in the selected works of George Saunders would escape from their liminal phase or not. If they manage to escape, the study explores the measures taken by them to do so. It also tries to suggest possible ways of escape from their liminal phase in case they fail to be successful in their attempt and are caught in permanent liminality.

Analysing the selected works of George Saunders through the lens of liminality, there are five major goals on which the study is conducted. They are interlinked with each other as one leads to the other progressively. The first aim is to analyse George Saunders' selected works in the light of Victor Turner's theory of liminality. Despite the fact that Victor Turner rediscovered liminality through his ritual and cultural studies, it has become a key research topic in a variety of fields due to its versatility. As a result, this research would not limit exploring liminality to Turner's viewpoints, but would also include contemporary advances and viewpoints on the same. The second aim is to elucidate the ideological and conceptual understanding of the gradual development of liminality along with discussing the contributions of major proponents. It would help to understand the biography of the author as well as the contributors of liminality and transition. Also, the incorporation and merging of Schlossberg's transition theory help to elaborate the possibilities of interpretation and application. The third objective is to describe the transitional effect of liminality affecting the actions and behaviour of the characters as depicted in the selected works. There would be dramatic changes in a person who happens to be in a liminal phase experiencing liminal phenomena. It is the reversal of the previous state of mind in which he/she was said to be in normality compared with that of the liminal phase. Therefore, through exploration of the tripartite structure of the characters in their transition from one to another, it is possible to identify the conditions before the liminal phase, during the liminal phase, and after the liminal phase. It can be relative to the changes in their actions and behavioural patterns. The fourth is to delve into the impact of liminality held sway by societal upheaval and emerging ideologies depicted in the selected works. As depicted in certain short stories of Saunders, the effect of capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism is high in influencing the circuitous slippage of identities leading to experiencing 'neither here nor there' liminal phenomena. Through such a thematic categorisation and analysis, the significance, exercise, and experience of coercive liminality are traced with the help of Saunders' selected short stories. Finally, the research objectives converge to trace the connection between the fictional derivatives and the real world on the inevitability of liminality and its present relevance. The inevitable sequence of various liminal conditions in human life and its present relevance are detailed by quoting instances from the

selected works of Saunders. Agnes Horvath argues that “liminal situations can be, and in fact in the modern era, are rather quite different: periods of uncertainty, anguish, even existential fear; a facing of the abyss or the void” (Horvath, *Modernism and Charisma* 2). Integrating the knowledge derived from the analysis of the novel, novellas, short stories, and essays of George Saunders, the findings are interlinked together to generalise the presence of such liminal conditions in human life that would depend on the individual and circumstances. These liminal phenomena are necessary evils that occur continuously, either separately or in an overlapping fashion.

The present study falls under the category of qualitative research. Therefore, content analysis is considered the most suitable methodology to analyse the objectives through textual analysis, discussion, and interpretation. Being comparatively novel research in literature, the incorporation of liminality from the discipline of anthropology, especially under the ritual and ceremonial studies, and Schlossberg’s transition from developmental psychology - both are incorporated together to examine the transitional effect of liminality in the works of George Saunders. The focus of the research is to delineate the tripartite structure expressed by the characters which would help to identify their liminal phase. Upon identifying the intermediary phase, the research highlights the transitional attributes of the characters in that particular phase so as to discover the anti-structural aspects of the situation, liminal space, liminal entity, *communitas* formation, and to identify the nature of the liminal existence of the characters. The tabular representations of the tripartite models of the major characters from the selected works of George Saunders are attached towards the conclusion of chapters three, four, five, and six as a reference to distinguish the liminal phase from that of the pre- and post- phases of the characters with respect to the details provided in the respective plots. It gives a glance at the overall findings and analysis of the chapters utilising the analytical framework of Victor Turner’s liminality and Schlossberg’s transition theory (4S). Due to the diversity of the themes and context of the selected works, the applicability of the theoretical concepts of liminality and transition, as well as the interpretative delineation of it vary from one chapter to the other. Resources accumulated from various online databases and university library sources in the form of books, indexed journals, approved theses and dissertations, reviews, and critical appreciations have increased the insight into the

fields of literature and anthropology concerning the topic of the study selected. Although most of the books related to liminality were not available first-hand, various book depository website sources were useful for gathering the necessary electronic versions of the same. The typesetting and formatting of the entire thesis strictly abide by the documenting style prescribed in the eighth edition of the MLA Handbook.

Constituting to the emerging field of discussions in exploring liminality from various parts of the world through its application to diverse disciplines of study, this research contributes knowledge based on its applicability in literature, principally based on the selected works of George Saunders. The scope of liminality cannot be limited to a single study of Saunders' selected works. It has limitless possibilities for exploring the presence of 'in-betweenness' in the whole of literature. This research would be a pioneer in exploring the very aspect of the applicability of liminality discussed in the following analytical chapters. It helps to interlink the selected works of George Saunders with the help of liminality. More or less, it adds to the chain of knowledge that is continuously being multiplied with new research attempts in the field of literature. This research explores the transitional effects of various micro and macro liminal conditions in the selected works, one after the other or in an overlapping manner that facilitates change, and provides a dynamic characteristic to humans living in the world. Therefore, as literature is a mirror to societal realities, this research provides a better scope to co-relate the presence of liminality at the literary as well as societal levels.

The thesis consists of six chapters besides the introduction and conclusion which serve as a threshold of entry and exit if the research study itself is considered a liminal process. The first chapter titled "The Bookman and his Certitudes: Life and Works at a Glance" introduces the author whose works have been taken for the purpose of research in the thesis. George Saunders' early life and academic career as a professor of creative writing at Syracuse University are discussed. He has a wide practical knowledge related to what he writes because he has worked as an engineer in the geophysical field prior to completing his Masters in Creative Writing from Syracuse University. It elevates him to the forefront of the working-class struggles of the common man, and he finds himself having experienced the 'in-between' state as a result of capitalist ideologies' oppression. Saunders, as a literary figure, grew beyond

his professional limits during the period of over twenty years since his initial stages of writing in 1989. His ideologies and political affiliations have influenced his writings, chiefly in framing the themes of his essays. Saunders' transition from his previous profession to that of an acknowledged writer is interesting as it was a journey for him through certain liminal phases of his life. Each story would have a backstory for the author to share with his readers, which Saunders does sincerely through his television and print media interviews. In short, the chapter is set to learn more about Saunders through his perspectives and through what the critics have to say about him. His long list of awards and accolades will speak to who he is today as a writer of the contemporary period.

Following the chapter that deals with the author's details, the second chapter titled "Betwixt and Between: Of Liminality and Transition" directs attention to the biographies of the major contributors to liminality. Intellectuals and their contributions to developing liminality are foregrounded hierarchically for introducing liminality. Arnold van Gennep is included as the first person related to the study as liminality was introduced through his 'rites of passage' which was later re-discovered by Victor Turner. It was undiscovered and not given enough importance for around five decades due to his incessant academic conflicts with Emile Durkheim and his studies. Further perspectives on liminality were given through the works of Arpad Szacalcai who extended the scope of permanent liminality introduced by Victor Turner. Some of the contemporary researchers who have contributed to enhancing the scope of liminality are Paul Stenner and Bjørn Thomassen. Though not in detail, a brief note on their contributions is also discussed in the chapter. The discussion moves to the biographical details of Dr Nancy Schlossberg, whose model of transition is utilised to provide an in-depth basis for the study, explaining the factors affecting the transitional process of liminality. Her contributions to the field of psychology by developing the model of transition are discussed with a special focus on the discovery of 4S such as the situation, self, support, and strategies. As a whole, the second chapter is an answer to the related questions of who, what, when, where, why, and how, based on the contributors and theoreticians related to liminality and transition theory.

It also endeavours to discuss the development of liminality from Arnold van Gennep's rites of passage to where it has been developed at the point of research. Victor Turner, who gave importance to the studies based on liminality, interconnected it with several sub-terms and concepts which increased its scope of applicability even beyond the limits of rituals and ceremonies. As of today, liminality is considered a versatile term that can be effectively used for interdisciplinary research. Schlossberg's transition has also to be discussed along with liminality as both go in parallel even though they are discovered from different disciplines. Possibilities for the study increase while incorporating both liminality and transition under the newly coined term 'transitional liminality' or 'liminal transition'. In the chapter, the rites of passage, liminality, and transition are categorised for their possible applicability in the following chapters that are framed to critically analyse the novel, novellas, and short stories of George Saunders, respectively, through the lens of liminality.

The third chapter, following the elaborated discussions on liminality and transition in the second chapter, enters the major application part of the research. In this chapter titled "*Lincoln in the Bardo: A Liminal Perspective*", George Saunders' debut novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* is discussed for its liminal aspects. As the setting of Saunders' bardo itself is directly attached to the concept of liminal space, the chapter begins from the point of analysing the roots of the bardo from which Saunders developed his setting for the novel. It leads the study to Saunders' Buddhist affiliation and, thereafter, to the base root of the concept of Bardo. The Buddhist bardo is compared with the bardo developed by Saunders with the influence of the former. The liminal importance of the setting of Bardo is discovered through content analysis of the text which gives space for interpretations. In the second part of the chapter, the major and minor characters are scrutinised for dividing their roles as per the criteria of the rites of passage. The liminal phases of these characters, except for Abraham Lincoln, are found to be similar. The dual liminal existence of Abraham Lincoln is discussed by analysing the circumstances he had to pass through in the entire novel. Due to the historic importance of the characters and the incident, a brief visit to the details of history regarding Willie Lincoln's death and the prohibition of slavery in America is conducted. The novel presents around one hundred and sixty-six characters through a common liminal phase of bardo that turns out to be a potential

space for the ghost characters trapped in their liminal space. Their pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases in the novel are explored one by one for a more suitable study of the character transition, especially during the liminal phase.

The fourth chapter titled “The Quirk and Quiddity of Liminality” examines Saunders’ two novellas, one allegorical fable and a morality tale for the unusualness and uncertainties leading to the experience and expression of liminality. The themes of his short fiction vary from one to the other. Though he involves animals, birds, abstract figures, and also human beings as his characters in the novellas and short fictions to express what he has to convey through them, there are hidden meanings like how George Orwell wrote *Animal Farm* as an allegory. Saunders’ writings hit the target at which he aims to point out his views without much provocation through his language, unlike the aggressive writers of the same age who would directly point out issues. “Bounty”, published in the collection titled *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* is a novella where the chapter begins to conduct its critical study through the lens of liminality and transition. Analysis of the setting, situation, and characters is done to explore the presence of liminality in them. There are transitions where the ‘in-between’ state, both physiological and psychological, appears to be present. The categorisation of the characters’ transition as per Van Gennep’s rites of passage gives clarity to their pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases. Likewise, identification of the same is conducted in novellas such as *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* and *Fox 8*. In *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*, the atrocities due to totalitarianism exercised by Phil are pointed out, referring to the appearance of post-truth liminality in his speeches. *Fox 8* is concerned with the environment that is destroyed by man’s invasion for the pleasure of his living. The ways in which authority, power, totalitarianism, and capitalism lead the oppressed and subjugated class into experiencing liminality are explored in the chapter.

The fifth chapter titled “Coercive Liminality, Vulnerability, and Victimisation” delves into the liminality caused by external coerciveness as a result of the dominant and repressive acts of various power structures in society. The chapter categorises thirteen short stories from the four anthologies of George Saunders, such as *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* (1996), *Pastoralia* (2000), *In Persuasion Nation* (2006), and *Tenth of December* (2013) into three ideological thematic divisions such

as capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism. Six of the thirteen short stories are divided into the category of capitalism, two into consumerism, and five into authoritarianism. Though these are categorised into these three thematic ideologies, the primary focus of the study is based on the tripartite division and analysis of liminality that affects the normative living of the characters. The direct and indirect effects of these ideologies on the characters that lead to the expression of liminality are identified through various textual references. The newly coined term ‘coercive liminality’ is defined in connection with the neither/nor discussions about the characters’ rites of passage.

The final chapter titled “Overcoming the Entrapment of Liminality” conducts the analysis of seven short stories published in the four anthologies. The chapter has short stories of George Saunders where the entrapment in the intermediate phase of liminality is highlighted. The transition through the tripartite structure is analysed for the characters, wherein the peculiarities of the liminal phase are pointed out with a discussion about the different approaches conducted by the characters to overcome and escape their liminal phase. The transitions in the characters from their pre-liminal to the post-liminal phase are analysed in which the transitional phase of liminality is given prominence, as there are immense possibilities in identifying the state of mind in the characters due to reversal, as it is the ‘in-between’ state from one phase to the other during the transition. Though each short story differs from the other, they can all be tied together with the same thread of liminality to bring sequential unity to the study.

Eventually, the conclusion of the study is framed to bring together the findings from the previous chapters where a detailed study of each selected work of Saunders has been conducted. The transitional effect of liminality in the selected works of George Saunders is identified with reference to the intermediate state of liminality. Liminality and its effects caused by power structures leading to a high impact on the psyche of its victims are explored. It leads to a generalised insight within the boundaries of the study that the flow of human life can be categorised into three, such as the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases where the potentiality of the middle phase of the tripartite structure namely liminality, is high compared to the others. There are continuously developing liminal situations that are inevitable to the

gradual development of human life. The formation of such transitional liminality can be individual as well as the inevitability of liminality depending on the environment and frequency at which it occurs. The current study will make an important contribution to the field of understanding and developing conceptual insight in the area of liminality in literature, paving the way for future endeavours. Despite the fact that other contexts and disciplines can provide extensive knowledge on the application of liminality, this study is limited to an interpretative analysis of George Saunders' selected works. Nonetheless, it sheds light on the relationship between fiction and reality from the perspective of liminality experienced by the characters, who tend to represent human beings' in-between states. The insights on liminality are well represented in the real-world environment, particularly in light of recent developments. Thus, the discussions and research based on the transitional effect of liminality become highly relevant and timeless as it always influences human beings' living conditions and states of mind.

The following chapter presents the biographical sketch of the author, ideologies reflected in his writings, and important works of the author selected for the research in detail. It throws light on the personal and academic life of the author, including his liminal transitions in life, which helped him to divert his interest to be a writer. Insight into the author's life will help in understanding the perspective in which he has framed his fiction and essays. As to how each person is influenced by their own experiences, the writings of Saunders are also highly influenced by the life experiences that he gathered throughout his personal, social, and professional life.

The Bookman and his Certitudes: Life and Works at a Glance

Towards the latter half of the nineteen-nineties, major literary figures in the United States of America saw the emergence of a writer with great potential trying hard to establish him among the then celebrated canons of literature. George Saunders' eventual arrival in the world of literature has to be related to his experience of liminal moments at a particular period of transition in his life. It would be ideal to begin with the author's liminal transition from a professional engineer to a dedicated and successful academic and literary persona. Having the research focused on the transitional effect of liminality as portrayed in the author's selected works, there are strong possibilities of such resemblances in the author's life also. During the time of isolation and loneliness, along with the extremities of work in places and situations that disturbed Saunders, he was drawn into the world of literature as a passionate reader of writers like Ayn Rand, Tom Wolfe, Kurt Vonnegut, and Ernest Hemingway. This transitional liminal period of existence has driven him towards the MFA programme at Syracuse University that transformed his inner and outer existence in this world.

George Saunders, being active in the field of literature, is mostly known for his inventive short stories. He was born on December 2, 1958, in Amarillo, Texas, in the United States of America. From an early age, he developed a strong sense of satisfaction in reading and writing which might have helped him successfully escape from his most crucial liminal phase of life. Saunders got his basic education from Oak Forest High School in Oak Forest, Illinois. After graduation, he joined the Colorado School of Mines with the intention of qualifying in geophysical engineering. Saunders comments, "I'd been kind of an Ayn Rand guy before that," (Lovell, *The New York Times Magazine*) on the way of his life focusing only on him. But, after experiencing the harshness of capitalist ideology, his notions about life changed. He had to undergo severe suffering as part of his job in Sumatra. He had to work for an oil exploration company in the Sumatra jungles after graduating from the Colorado School of Mines.

He was assigned the duty of seismic prospection. Being a part of a group engaged in excavation, they had to drill deep holes to blow it up with the help of dynamite at the bottom, so that the cross-section of the subsurface became clear to them to have an idea of where to drill. The assigned task was risky considering the physical aspect of the work. Four weeks on and two weeks off, he worked with the team in extreme conditions. It was during these days of his life that he became more involved in the habit of reading, as it became a relief to him daily. He had a selected collection of books that he carried during his trips. He describes in his essay titled “Mr. Vonnegut in Sumatra” in the collection *The Brain-dead Megaphone* about his transformation from an “untrained reader” (Saunders 73) who discovered “the function of art to be primarily descriptive” (78) where the reader “enters in one state of mind and exists in another” (78). This particular essay is a recollection of his memories in the mines of Sumatra. He begins the essay by saying that at the age of twenty-three he had no connection with the habit of reading. He was an engineering graduate who had to work in the Sumatran jungle every four out of six weeks. He used to take many books back to the seismic crew with him when he was on leave in Singapore (73).

He preferred to read the works of the writers through odd selections, for whom he thought the style of writing was almost similar to his knowledge of the same. It was because of his notion that great writing was hard to read. But, without knowing that Kurt Vonnegut was a classic writer, he selected *Slaughterhouse-Five* on one of his journeys. According to Saunders, “What’s important is something undeniable and nontrivial happens to the reader between entry and exit” (*The Brain-dead Megaphone* 78). These books act as *liminoid* in the perspective of Victor Turner, which acts in-between the author and the reader. Saunders’ writings are also similar to the liminoid nature of the books selected by him. Inside the magical box of Saunders’ fictional works, the emotional roller coaster effect on a reader would be high as it deals with what he would like the reader to experience through his writings.

The technical work and life in Sumatra did not go well for Saunders. In 1982, while he was having his recreational swim after a time-packed work, he got sick as the river was infested with monkey faeces. Saunders had to struggle with the infected simian virus and had to eventually quit his job. This was a period of crisis for him. It can be called his liminal phase of transition where he was undergoing both physical

and emotional reversals from his previous state of living. During that time, he proposed to a woman in Chicago and they moved to Los Angeles. They were economically struggling as he had no work at that time. Because of the constraints on leading a better life in Los Angeles, they moved back to Chicago to live in the basement of his aunt's house. He managed to work as a roofer. He describes his experiences being a roofer in his essay "Chicago Christmas, 1984" which also discusses the end of his relationship with that woman. He had to move on in the same way without any unusual changes for about two years during which he wrote his first story titled "The Lack of Order in the Floating Objects". In 1985, his application to the graduate writing programme was accepted by Syracuse University based on the story. It was a turning point in his life where he found out what perfectly suited his abilities. During the period of the programme at Syracuse University, he met Paula, who was also there for the same programme. They were engaged shortly. In 1988 and 1990, he was blessed with two daughters, Caitlin and Alena, respectively. He worked as a technical writer for the Radian Corporation. He decided to do so as he found it better for him to be with his family as Paula had to go on complete bed rest.

His writings against capitalism grew from the unsatisfactory situations he had experienced during his work in Sumatra. Saunders comments on the dangers of capitalism, which he survived with the help of art. He regards "art as a kind of black-box the reader enters one state of mind and exists in another" (*The Brain-dead Megaphone* 78) similar to how he experienced it in reading *Slaughterhouse-Five* which transformed his life. From Saunders' viewpoint, "the black box is meant to change us. If the change will be greater via the use of invented, absurd material, so be it" (79).

Saunders has had the experience of about thirty years since 1989 in the field of teaching creative writing. He had been an adjunct professor at Siena College in Loudonville, New York. He has also been a visiting writer at various colleges, institutions, and universities in America. In 1997, Saunders began teaching a course in creative writing at Syracuse University as an Assistant Professor. Since 2007, he has been a professor at the same university. His specialisation in teaching is fiction, especially short stories. He conducts various tutorial sessions for students who are interested in learning different methods of creative writing. For Saunders, writing

fiction is a process of discovery in a peaceful mode rather than a sudden exploration. He says this in an interview published in the winter fall issue of the magazine *Sixtysix* in 2018.

“To know what the story is going to do too well is a buzz-kill. Part of my process is to try to think about individual sentences and sections without thinking beyond that, and then improving those small units until they’re kind of sparkly, and then do that again and again. Pretty soon the story will start having a theme and politics and all that, but it’s one that will be surprising to you instead of one that you forced into the text.”

(Rote)

He observes that the training he got during the course of geophysical engineering helps him frame his writing more systematically. It was unclear to many how an entirely different stream of study would help a person in his writing process. In an interview with *Chicago Magazine*, Saunders explains the “applied-science approach” (Pollock) that he adapts to write a story logically and experimentally. Mostly, what is applied by the author is not what it might produce. The possibility of a different reading is high in such a style of writing as that used by Saunders. His characters are carved out of what he gets to see around him. He might also become a prominent character in such stories by being the narrator of the story. In such a condition, he writes from the point of view of a writer as well as from the perspective of society. Method reading can be followed in George Saunders’ *Lincoln in the Bardo* where the reader does not merely identify with, develop sympathies for, or recognise themselves in a fictional character, but performs as someone else. The aesthetic and literary experience of the novel is able to be achieved through such a model of reading (Thompson, “Method Reading”). His works are regarded as more vocational and informal because of this relatable link that he purposefully maintains with the innate culture of America. Even his fictional debut novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* was formed out of his interest in his wife’s cousin’s narration about the crypt on a hill in Washington DC, that is, of Abraham Lincoln’s son, Willie Lincoln. The image of Lincoln who went to the crypt on several occasions leapt into the mind of Saunders, combining the images of the Lincoln Memorial and the Pieta. But it took him around a dedicated gap of twenty years to publish his fictional imagination as a book.

The political ideology of Saunders is well reflected in his short stories and essays. Although he does not explicitly state his ideological position and perspectives in the short stories, he does mention them in his essays. His essays, “The Great Divider” and “The Brain-dead Megaphone” lead the discussion to explore the uncanny situation caused by the Trump phenomenon. While “The Great Divider” gives a critical discussion about the US-Mexican border through the life of an illegal immigrant family, the first essay in the collection, i.e., “The Brain-dead Megaphone” is about the pseudo-truth proclaimed by the media under political pressure. Saunders’ article titled “Who Are All These Trump Supporters?” raises a more direct and pointed criticism of Donald Trump and his supporters. He is against Trump’s racist and misogynist excesses that he uses for his political propaganda. In the article, he empathises with them for their intolerance of opposing views. While being a reporter for *The New Yorker* at the Presidential candidate rallies, George Saunders stated his view on Donald Trump, writing, “Although, to me, Trump seems the very opposite of a guardian angel, I thank him for this: I’ve never before imagined America as fragile, as an experiment that could, within my very lifetime, fail. But I imagine it that way now” (Saunders). He has put forth the issue of illegal immigrants, suggesting empathetic kindness towards them. Saunders criticises the alternative facts that are popular in the political speeches of Trump. The term for such circumstances where objective truth is less influential in framing public opinion than their personal beliefs and emotions is post-truth. With the onset of the 2016 Presidential election in America, the emergence of post-truth politics was encouraged by the speeches of Trump who gave the least importance to what was happening in reality. The word “post-truth” was selected as the word of the year for 2016 by the Oxford Dictionaries on behalf of the forty-fifth Presidential election in America as well as the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom. Saunders adds up that immigrants, Muslims, and women are the ones who suffer the most under the rule of Trump as there is no amount of compassion towards them from the side of the government led by him (Bisley, *Vox*). He delivered a convocation speech at Syracuse University, emphasising the need to express kindness and compassion to each other, keeping in mind the contemporary political and social issues that haunt America. The speech was later published as a book titled *Congratulations by the Way: Some Thoughts on Kindness*.

A writer like Saunders, who deviated from his first profession by recognising his passion for writing, is eligible for awards and plaudits not only because of his correct selection, but also because of his exceptional writing ability. The multiple accolades and scholarships that Saunders has received as a reward for his attempts to convey the realities of the world, particularly those of his country, through his perspectives, demonstrate his aptitude for producing engaging stories. The most popular and acclaimed of the numerous major and minor awards he has received during his writing career since 1986 is, without a doubt, the Man Booker Prize Award in 2017 for his debut novel, *Lincoln in the Bardo*. The panel chaired by Baroness Lola Young consisted of other renowned writers like Lila Azam Zanganeh, Sarah Hall, Tom Phillips CBE RA, and Colin Thubron CBE. Baroness Lola praised Saunders for his unique and extraordinary piece of work. Saunders became the second American in a row to win the award after Paul Beatty in 2016. As reported in the news article “George Saunders wins Man Booker Prize for ‘unique’ and ‘extraordinary’ work” in *The Telegraph*, Saunders expressed his disbelief and delight while receiving his award by saying, “People always say it’s humbling, which is stupid because it’s not – it actually fills you with s- - -. But it’s wonderful and I feel very grateful” (Singh). He received the American Society of Magazine Editors’ National Magazine Award for Fiction for his works “The 400-pound CEO”, “Bounty”, “The Barber’s Unhappiness”, and “The Red Bow” in 1994, 1996, 2000, and 2003. His anthology of short stories, *Tenth of December* was selected for The Story Prize in 2013 and the Folio Prize in 2014. It was also selected as one of the ten best books of 2013 by *The New York Times* Book Review. His “CommComm” received the World Fantasy Award for Best Short Story. He also obtained the Academy Award in 2009 provided by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Saunders is also awarded the PEN/Malamud Award for Excellence in Short Story in 2013. Despite the fact that he did not win, some of his notable works are finalists for prestigious awards. *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* was a PEN/Hemingway Award finalist in 1996, *In Persuasion Nation* was a Story Prize finalist in 2006, *Tenth of December* was a National Book Award for Fiction finalist in 2014, and his short story “Home” was a Bram Stoker Award finalist in 2011.

Apart from the awards, he has also received the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship for the 2006-2007 period, the Lannan Foundation Literary

Fellowship for the 2002-2003 period, and the MacArthur Fellowship from 2006 to 2011. *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* was awarded the De Zilveren Griffel Children's Literature Award in the Netherlands in 2003. He has also read his selected books at many bookstores, festivals, and universities as per their invitation. In 2001, *Entertainment Weekly* named Saunders one of the top hundred most inventive people in entertainment, and *The New Yorker* named him one of the best writers under forty.

George Saunders is quite famous for his short stories, and with the publication of *Lincoln in the Bardo*, he also received the title of 'experimental novelist'. His works have been adapted into theatre plays, short films and audio clips. His short story "Jon" was adapted for the stage by Chicago's Collaboraction Theater Company and performed in 2008 and 2009. "CommComm" was selected by The Goodman Theatre to perform in 2010 and was also performed as part of the Studio Festival by Shakespeare & Company in Massachusetts in 2006 as per the direction of Michael Hammond. "My Flamboyant Grandson" was performed at Symphony Space in NYC, and a version of "Ask the Optimist!" was developed for a puppet theatre. "Pastoralia" was adapted for a theatre performance directed by Yehuda Duenyas in 2005 at PS 122 in Manhattan. *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* was performed in Australia during the 2004-2005 period as an adaptation by the Terrapin Puppet Theatre. Many of his short stories, such as "Pastoralia", "My Flamboyant Grandson", "Bohemians", "The Falls", "The Barber's Unhappiness" and "I CAN SPEAK!", have been performed by various acclaimed actors like Kerry Shale, Oliver Platt, Buck Henry, Tony Danza, and René Auberjonois. The selected stories from *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* were presented by the Yale Cabaret Theatre in 2003 under the title "Everyone You've Ever Loved, You've Treated Like Gold" which is the last line of his short story, "Offloading for Mrs. Schwartz".

His anthologies of short stories and essays were reviewed on several platforms and were selected 'the best' in the respective years. He has been complimented by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* for his unique way of portraying life and characters to their fullest potential (Akins). The *Boston Globe* praises his fragmented rhythms and wildly absurd realities that he has incorporated to represent the twenty-first-century experience (Ciabattari). Saunders' stories are endowed with freedom of language,

societal criticism, and moral aspiration, as well as amusing black humour (Corrigan, “George Saunders Lives Up To The Hype”).

In discussing his writings, the foremost importance has to be given to his debut novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*. It is both because of the 2017 Man Booker Prize that it won and because of the experimental nature of his writing that he adapted into the novel. Being an academic person who teaches creative writing, the success of his experimental approach in writing the novel is an advantage for him to place himself differently from the writers who are already established in the field of writing by using their different approaches to create a unique space for them. Zadie Smith commented on his novel in the shortest description as “A Masterpiece”. Not just for her reading, but for most of the readers, it seems to be the same. There are almost one hundred and sixty-six major and minor characters involved in the single novel. It was published on February 14, 2017, by Bloomsbury Random House. Colson Whitehead, a renowned American novelist reviewed the novel as “a luminous feat of generosity and humanism” (“Colson Whitehead on George Saunders’s Novel about Lincoln and Lost Souls”). Though the references given by Saunders for the development of the novel would mislead the reader to consider that the novel is a historical attempt at writing, it is not in the real sense. Many of the references given in the book are created by Saunders himself along with certain genuine library sources. This particular approach of verisimilitude is an important feature in the novel used by Saunders which distinguishes his writing from other novelists (Moseley 3). He has brilliantly incorporated his fictional ideas into an event in history. The novel resembles a neo-historical project combining the technique of verisimilitude effectively (9).

Lincoln in the Bardo is based on the setting of bardo existence due to the death of Abraham Lincoln’s son, Willie Lincoln. Willie is shown as stuck in a bardo with other souls. Each soul has their own stories to tell in which their materialistic wishes and fancies of the world make them stay in the bardo, thinking that they can go back to the world to fulfil those wishes. They are unaware of their death and do not accept it. The liminal space of the bardo is limited. They are alienated from other worlds and have the boundaries of the bardo as their limit. Reverend Thomas is the only soul who has seen the next world of judgment, but he came back in fear of his ultimate fate.

Willie is convinced by Hans Vollman, Roger Bevins III, and the Reverend Thomas to go out of the bardo to the afterlife. When he is ready, his father comes to take his dead body in his hands and talk with it out of his grief and loss. Seeing it, he enters Lincoln and understands that Lincoln will come again to see him. This makes him stay there even though others try to convince him of the consequences of staying in the bardo. Seeing Lincoln, many souls gather around Willie to tell their stories, which reflect the same tone of loss, grief, revenge, affection, etc.

Willie is held by the tendrils of hell that make him stuck there. Hans Vollman, Roger Bevins III, and Reverend Thomas go with Lincoln to convince him to come back and make the boy understand the necessity of leaving the bardo. They enter Lincoln. Most of the souls enter Lincoln to explore his state of mind. They became united for some time together. Many people leave because there is no hope of staying inside. Willie is held by more tendrils. As the lightning power of transition breaks the tendrils, the Reverend who comes out of Lincoln accepts to leave the bardo to save Willie from the tendrils. Vollman and Bevins take Willie to the chapel where Lincoln was sitting. Through the flashback memories of Lincoln, Willie enters Lincoln to understand the truth that he is dead. Willie comes out of Lincoln and announces to all of his fellow members that they are all dead. Upon hearing the reality, the souls depart one by one from their bardo condition. Only one soul who wants revenge stays there. Willie also escapes from his trapped condition. Lincoln begins to feel that he is freed from an unknown haunting state of mind and has some peace of mind. He makes a decision that he will end all the Civil War tensions by signing the act to free the slaves. Thomas Havens, a slave soul, enters Lincoln to make him do his best to act rightfully. The novel widens its scope not only into the history of the American Civil War but also into the Tibetan concept of bardo. The state of Bardo is effectively used as a setting by the writer to place his characters in order to develop the plot. Due to its wide reception, the novel was reviewed by leading newspapers and magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *Irish Times*, *London Review of Books*, *The Washington Post*, *The Telegraph*, *The Independent* and various online media.

Although Saunders is known for his short stories, he was extraordinarily gifted at the challenge of writing a lengthy piece like the novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*.

Even though he wrote it successfully, his expertise in short stories remains higher than in writing novels. To discuss his short stories, it would be right to start with his first short story collection, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*. His four short story anthologies consist of stories that were published in the most reputed magazines in the United States. Even though he managed to combine the previously published short stories according to their themes, he has also included odd ones along with the other stories. The anthology was reviewed by *The New York Times*, the *New York Times Book Reviews*, *People Magazine*, *Boston Globe*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Boston Phoenix Literary Supplement*, *Men's Journal*, *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, *Atlanta Journal*, *San Jose Mercury*, *New York Newsday*, *Daily Mail*, the *London Sunday Tribune* and the *London Observer*. As per the review in *The Los Angeles Times*, in *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, Saunders concentrates on “the dismal commonplaces of our times - unemployment, crime, the disparities between rich and poor, ecological degradation, and fashions in self-realisation and man-woman relations - and gives them an absurd half-turn into near-lunacy” (Eder). In the anthology, he includes stories such as “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline”, “Isabelle”, “The Wave-maker Falters”, “The 400-pound CEO”, “Offloading for Mrs Schwartz”, “Downtrodden Mary’s Failed Campaign of Terror” and a novella titled “Bounty”. The article “Good Work and Good Works: Work and the Postsecular in George Saunders’s *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*” explore the relation that Saunders establishes between “work” and religiosity in his writing from a post-secular literary perspective. Though each story in the collection is set in different contexts, they have been interconnected by the common theme that Saunders puts forward.

The second in the short story anthologies is *Pastoralia: Stories* published in the year 2000 by Riverhead Books. The anthology consists of short stories that were previously published in *The New Yorker*. Among the six short stories, three were awarded the O. Henry Award in different years. It was appreciated for the writer’s dry humour, realism, and postmodern attempts. The short stories include “Pastoralia”, “Winky”, “Sea Oak”, “The Barber’s Unhappiness” and “The Falls”. Positive reviews were published by *The New York Times Book Review*, *Time Magazine*, *Esquire*, *Vogue*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Washington Post*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Denver Post* both in the United Kingdom

and Italy. The major theme used by Saunders to interlink the short stories in this anthology is capitalist oppression and the isolation of the working class. He attempts to project the workers' internal struggle onto various contexts of the profession. As said in the introduction, many of his short stories and essays are a reflection of the author's experience in the struggling stages of his life. In the research article "George Saunders and the Post-Modern Working Class", the analysis of the story "Sea Oak" depicts the social anxieties of the characters in solidarity with the working class in America. "Sea Oak" as an effective story "is perhaps the most effective expression of class construction and representative of the mal-representation of class" (Rando 437).

In Persuasion Nation: Stories is an anthology of short stories published in 2006 by Riverhead Books. It consists of twelve short stories such as "I Can Speak!™", "My Flamboyant Grandson", "Jon", "My Amendment", "The Red Bow", "Christmas", "Adams", "93990", "Brad Carrigan, American", "In Persuasion Nation", and "CommComm". Reviews were published in *The Nation*, *The New York Times*, *Time Out New York*, *Los Angeles Weekly*, *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, *BookLine*, *Publisher's Review* and *Kirkus Reviews*. The general theme of the anthology is the persuasion of people in the consumer era. The writer creates a dystopian world in these stories. The essay "Biopolitical Dystopias, Bureaucratic Carnivores, Synthetic Primitives: "Pastoralia" as Human Zoo" portrays the dystrophic and spectacular theme park cave-world depicted in the short story "Pastoralia" and

"calls the narrative of species coherence into question through the juxtaposition of cave-dwelling hunter-gatherer life with modern techno-industrial, fax-machine-using humans. The reader encounters two vastly different ideas of the human animal in the narrative realm of the cave."

(Huebert 115)

The most popular short fiction anthology by George Saunders is *Tenth of December* published in the year 2013 by Random House. It consists of ten short stories such as "Victory Lap", "Sticks", "Puppy", "Escape from Spiderhead", "Exhortation", "Al Roosten", "The Semplica Diaries", "Home", "My Chivalric Fiasco" and "Tenth of December". David Wolf, in his review published in *The Guardian*, writes Saunders' work as the most realistic one when compared with his previous short story anthologies. He tries to project the human psyche that equally

deals with internal and external tensions. The essay “To Soften the Heart: George Saunders, Postmodern Satire, and Empathy” discovers empathy as a crucial factor that Saunders tried to evoke in the reader while reading *Tenth of December*. Readers are left with a new or renewed sense of unironic empathy for the characters who are tormented and oppressed by the wretched failures that have become their lives. Pogell is correct when it is claimed that the

“‘aesthetic of negativity’ that informed much of the black humourists’ and postmodernists’ output . . . is too ‘degenerative’ for Saunders—and hardly sufficient to combat the injustices visited upon the average American worker by ruthless, often foolish, heads of massive corporations.”

(Neeper 285)

The anthology also received great appreciation from the reviews published by *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *NPR*, *The Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *The New Yorker*, *HuffPost* and *the National Post*.

Fox 8 is a novella by Saunders based on the narration of a fox who learns the language of humans by hearing a mother say bedtime stories to her child. It was originally published in 2013. It criticises human activities that lead to environmental destruction and climatic change. It received exciting reviews from the leading media such as *The Guardian*, *Evening Standard*, *The Independent*, *Financial Times* and *The New Yorker*. The fox, who mistook humans for loving creatures before its unfortunate experiences, changes its mind. The novella is based on the deforestation done by humans in the habitat of the fox to make a mall for them. In the last, the fox suggests humans be a little nicer to others too. The story, though a fable, speaks about the deepest truth of destruction done by the powerful creatures of the earth without any care for others. In the book review “Fox 8 by George Saunders review – wisdom in the woods” to the story published in *The Guardian*, the reviewer suggests,

“It’s no stretch to read Fox 8 as an allegorical take on the current state of US politics. It’s a story about cultural differences and tribalism, about greed and the destruction of the American landscape. Above all else, it’s a story packed with the kind of moral didacticism that we expect to get from a certain type of

children’s story – all about respecting others and the importance of basic decency.”

(Preston)

The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip is a modern fable based on a village named Frip. It was published in 2000 by Villard. The economy of the village is mainly based on the milk produced by their goats. A certain form of gapper that seems to be in the shape of a fish comes out of the sea and sits on the goats of the villagers. It became a hectic job for the children in the village to remove these gappers that sit on the goats. The goats of a girl named Capable are targeted by these gappers. It is a moralistic fable in which Saunders wants his readers to understand the value of power arising from unity rather than selfishness. The fable, which has already received awards for children’s fiction, was given positive reviews by *Entertainment Weekly*, *CNN Showbiz Today*, *San Jose Mercury*, *Time Out New York*, and the *Miami Herald*.

The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil is a satirical novella published in 2005 by Riverhead Books. A parable similar to George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, the novella is about the border disputes between abstract-shaped Inner Hornites and Outer Hornites. The Inner Hornite is surrounded by a much larger Outer Hornite along with a Short-term residency for the Inner Hornites to wait when their land decreases in size. Seeing an evil threat to the Outer Hornite leisure, Phil, an Outer Hornite uses the moment to destroy the Inner Hornites as well as to grab the President’s position with force and a cunning attitude. Patriotism is forced as a tool by the Outer Hornites to gain support for his ideas against the Inner Hornites. Saunders writes about the book that “the human tendency to continuously divide the world into dualities, and, soon after, cast one’s lot in with one side of the duality and begin energetically trying to eliminate the other” (“Why I Wrote Phil”). The power of Phil encouraged him to disassemble the Inner Hornites as they did not pay their taxes for occupying the Outer Hornite area. Oppression by the powerful over the subjugated class is depicted here. In the review of *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* titled “Morality’s ghost”, the reviewer writes in *The Guardian* that,

“Phil devises a cruel and senseless system of taxation, harassment and finally genocide. Saunders’s inspirations for the parable include Rwanda, Bosnia, the

Holocaust and Iraq, but the trickiness of the concept and the wackiness of the execution diminishes its resonance. There are regular chuckles to be had and, against preposterous odds, episodes of eccentric poignancy, but overall this piece betrays its origins as a conceptual dare.”

(Faber)

The political satire was reviewed by *The New York Times*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *GQ*, *the Boston Globe*, *Orlando Weekly*, *Bookforum*, *Daily Candy* and many more including *The Guardian* and *The Independent* in the United Kingdom.

Apart from the short story anthologies which were earlier published in reputed magazines and newspapers, he has a good number of essays, humour stories, memories and travel writings. Some of his notable memoirs are “A View from the South Slide, 1970”, “Kurt Vonnegut Day” and “Hypocrites”. Most of his published humour is political in its context that relates to contemporary situations in America. Some of his humour pieces of writing other than what is published in the anthologies are “My Gal”, “Antiheroes”, “Y’all Torture Me Home”, “Woof: A Plea of Sorts”, “The Big Table of New Years’ Resolutions”, “Borat: The Memo”, “Proclamation”, “A Brief Study of the British”, “The Food Fundamentalist”, “Flooding the Zone”, “Exit Strategy” and “My Guilty Pleasures”. As he has stated, he writes travel notes as part of his recreational entertainment to relieve himself of responsibilities. Though in a leisure sense, his writings on travel have an odd touch that is distinguishable from the usual pattern of travel writing. “Tent City, U.S.A” and “Bill Clinton, Private Citizen” are his travel writings which are not included in his collection of essays, *The Brain-dead Megaphone* includes travel writings like “The New Mecca”, “The Incredible Buddha Boy” and “The Great Divider”. Reviews of *The Brain-dead Megaphone* were published by popular newspapers, magazines, and online platforms such as *Entertainment Weekly*, *Vanity Fair*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Boston Globe*, and *Kirkus Review*. He used to write a weekly commentary column called “American psyche” for *The Guardian* during the period from September 2006 to November 2008. The subjects discussed in his column were related to the political, cultural, and societal issues in America.

“George Saunders peoples his stories with American history - the dispossessed, or merely those whom histories walked all over on their paths to glory,

terrific wealth. Among other forms of marginalisation, the subject is above all the American working class” (437) is how David P Rando describes Saunders’ writing in his analysis of “Sea Oak” in his essay “George Saunders and the Postmodern Working Class”. From a geophysicist to a technical writer working for a pharmaceutical company, an environmental engineering company and finally being an academician and a writer, he has witnessed several situations that moulded his thoughts and perspectives on the society and its culture to which he belongs. He had the experience of working as a Beverly Hills doorman, a roofer as he explains in “Chicago Christmas, 1984”, a convenience store clerk, a guitarist in a Texas bar band, and a slaughterhouse worker. In this way, he was not far away from the situations of the real world, both in experiencing it and referring to it in his stories and essays. It might be due to his bitter first-hand experience of capitalism that made him write a severely critical satire of capitalism. The majority of works in the short story anthologies like *Pastoralia* and *In Persuasion Nation* depict how the power structure of capitalism prefers to oppress the working class. Michiko Kakutani, an American literary critic and former chief book critic of *The New York Times* comments on the writing of Saunders as,

“No one writes more powerfully than George Saunders about the lost, the unlucky, the disenfranchised, those Americans who struggle to pay the bills, make the rent, hold onto a job they might detest — folks who find their dreams slipping from their grasp as they frantically tread water, trying to keep from drowning.”

(“Review: Lincoln in the Bardo’ Shows a President Haunted by Grief”)

Although the stories of Saunders have a riddling effect on first-time readers that they have to be familiar with the settings and premises framed by the author and have to be on the track on which he finds his readers to be perfectly fit. It would evoke curiosity one after the other word in the reader if the preferred track was familiar. The reader is introduced to new internal postmodern settings like the civil-war-based theme park, human zoo, bardo, Inner and Outer Horners, and the dystopian futuristic environments that create a puzzle in the mind of the reader at first, which is resolved through a gradual exploration of the characters and the situations through

which they move in, move through, and move out. Catherine Garnett's essay titled "The Future in the Pasture: Pastoral Precarity in George Saunders' 'Interior Gardens'" focuses on the interior settings such as theme parks in anthologies such as *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, *Pastoralia*, and *Tenth of December*.

Saunders' dark humour would make his readers laugh with a bit of discomfort deep inside their hearts. Being an allegorist and a fabulist, he often uses the whip of satire to criticise how badly division and discrimination have affected America. Satirical writing in American fiction began with Francis Hopkins who blended it with allegory. It was continued by Washington Irving and Mark Twain in the nineteenth century and Edith Wharton and Kurt Vonnegut in the twentieth century. Saunders follows their tradition into the twenty-first century as an important presence in American literature. His allegorical fiction titled *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* is often compared with that of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

Saunders has used magical realism in two different ways. In "Sea Oak", he uses it in a direct manner as usual where the author uses normal situations as a base to apply moments or incidents of fantasy. Aunt Bernie, a long-dead character, reappears to instruct and chastise. But, in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, he has reversed the use of magical realism to apply normality to the magical situations of the bardo where the ghosts are trapped. This interplay of reality and imagination makes his works more interesting to read as he has an exciting oddity hidden in every work.

Concerning the influence of writers over Saunders, he acclaims the lists of Nikolai Gogol, Anton Chekov, and Isaac Babel for their method of dealing with big topics. He is also fond of the absurdist comic traditions followed by Mark Twain, Monty Python, Daniil Kharmis, Groucho Marx, Steve Martin and Jack Handey. The list extends to Sherwood Anderson, Raymond Carver, Ernest Hemingway, and Tobias Wolff. The critics often compare Saunders' writings to those of Kurt Vonnegut because of their absurd realities, cynicism, and dark humour. For example, Saunders' short story "Escape from Spiderhead" which has a setting related to a dystopian future resembles Vonnegut's *Welcome to the Monkey House* published in the year 1968. The comparison is based on "the seriocomic timbre and I suppose that the freshness of his prose must bear a similarity to the whimsical strangeness Vonnegut presented when he was new on the scene" (Offerman ch. 18).

In the case of the use of narrative point of view, Saunders expertly uses the effectiveness of the method of writing. He usually uses the first person and third person points of view. It is used to evoke empathy in the reader for the characters' conditions. First-person usage has its own advantages as well as limitations. It helps to understand what the specific character that narrates the story thinks inside him/her and also increases the scope to develop a connection with the narrator and another character, if possible. He explores the character to the maximum which the reader has to know with the application of the first-person narrative. The reader is able to experience the same situation that the character feels through the medium of fiction by using such representations which are best expressed authentically through the first-person narrative. The work's altering points of view are done on purpose to develop a connection between the reader and the characters, allowing the reader to empathise with them.

After the success of his debut novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*, there were questions related to his Buddhist inclinations. The link was through the word 'Bardo' which was adapted from the Buddhist teachings in Nyingma detailed in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which is an English translation of the traditional *Bardo Thodol* by Walter Evans Wentz published in 1927. To such questions, Saunders' replies as reported in the article "George Saunders opens up about his commencement speech and its Buddhist roots" in *Syracuse.com*,

"I've been thinking about this kindness idea for most of my life, I guess, Saunders said. [I] was raised Catholic and always loved that part of the tradition. [I] was very taken with, and moved by, the idea of Jesus being infinitely patient and loving. And my wife and I have been studying Buddhism since our kids were little. And kindness – and the reasons for our unkindness – [are] at the center of those practices."

(Baker)

He admits his breakthrough in writing came when the meditations inspired by Buddhist affiliations helped him to understand the writing process in direct relation to the text at the moment. Though the concept of Bardo represented in his novel does not exactly fit into the subject dealt with in its original roots, he has modified the concept

in such a way that it matches to place the characters according to the theme and content of the novel.

His speech at Syracuse University in May 2013 during an invited convocation ceremony was indeed an occasion where he introduced the core of his themes inspired by his practice of Buddhism. As reported in *The Washington Post*, Saunders says, “What I regret most in my life are failures of kindness” (Klein). The idea of ‘kindness’ was highlighted as something he wanted his listeners to follow in their lives and not be stuck in the moment of regret about the past as he does. The speech was later published as a book with the title *Congratulations by the way: Some Thoughts of Kindness* in 2014. His essay, “Manifesto: A Press Release from PRKA” gives a list of activities that are based on empathy, kindness, and compassion. Saunders satirically mocks the activities of violence, invasion, racism, war, rape, and such similar exhibitions of power over others. Moreover, Saunders writes with “a moral agency of literature. His stories, without simply moralising, often affirm certain moral positions that can be troublingly ambiguous” (Ellerhoff and Coleman, “Preface” vii).

Having the reputation of a successful writer, there is much more for the readers to expect from him in the future. He is a writer who prepares himself by providing sufficient time intervals after each of his publications, whether it is a novel or a short fiction anthology. The first chapter of the research concludes at this point, even though information related to the works of the author will be dealt with in the following chapters that deal with the study of his novel, novellas, and short stories. The next chapter focuses on the theory, the theorists, and other contributors to liminality and transition. The major focus of the chapter is the description of the biography of Victor Turner, who is a prominent proponent of liminality. His anthropological and symbological works based on the rituals are taken into consideration to figure out the details regarding liminality and its subsidiary concepts. Along with Victor Turner’s contributions to the development of liminality, the insights on the transition model by Dr Nancy Schlossberg are also discussed as they are used in defining the condition of the characters undergoing liminality. The discussions in the following chapter are necessary as they lay the foundation for this research regarding its application in George Saunders’ selected works.

Betwixt and Between: Of Liminality and Transition

The focal point of this chapter is to introduce the theorists, intellectuals, and academicians who have instituted, re-discovered and contributed to enriching the knowledge base on the primary subject matter of application in this research. Important works in which they elaborated on their perspectives on liminality and transition are discussed along with their contributors. As per the details discussed in the introduction, this research utilises the perspectives of intellectuals from the disciplines of anthropology and developmental psychology. The pattern followed to introduce the major contributors is arranged according to the chronological development of the subject applied. Therefore, Arnold van Gennep will be first on the list followed by Victor Turner. Dr Nancy K. Schlossberg's insights on transition are discussed separately as part of a supportive theoretical discussion on liminality. Recent research studies related to liminality conducted by scholars and academicians in various disciplines would also help in describing the possibility on a wider platform and applying the same.

2. 1. Arnold van Gennep's rites of passage

Liminality, as said in the introduction, is versatile and complex in nature and has a universal application irrespective of the discipline from which it originates. From the perspective of anthropological studies, the onset of the introduction to liminality was by a person who had continuously been unrecognised and discriminated against due to academic rivalry and emerging politics of the time based on intellectual circles with dominance and power to establish their viewpoints and ideologies beyond the genuine criticism from rare corners of academic interests. Arnold van Gennep is one of the most overlooked social scientists of the twentieth century (Szokolczi and Thomassen 23) mainly due to his fiercest opposition to Emilie Durkheim.

Apart from his translational works and lectures, he began to write articles for the literary magazine *Mercure de France* for the section "Ethnographie-Folklore-

Religions-Prehistoire”. He also wrote for the journal *Psychologie et la vie*. Even though he was involved in various kinds of jobs for income, his basic interest was in ethnology and folklore. His scholarly work was a combination of the two published works titled *Tabou et totémisme à Madagascar: étude descriptive et théorique* in 1904 which was part one of his thesis, and *Mythes et legendes d’Australie* in 1906 which included the collection of Australian myths and legends translated into French. He also pointed out the problems in Durkheim’s works which later on made him less acceptable as a front-row academic intellect among French academic circles. Following the two articles, there was debate over totemism, taboo, and the classification of narratives. It grew up as a continuous conflict with the ideas of Emile Durkheim towards which Arnold van Gennep was strict in his consciousness and understanding of the concept. He was neglected by the French group of sociologists due to his criticisms that later academicians like Bjørn Thomassen and Arpad Szakolczai would agree with as per their understanding of the concepts. The group, *Annee sociologique* founded in the year 1896 and led by Durkheim, excluded him from being one of them even though he had exemplary credits for research works that would equally compete with any of the members of the group, including that of Durkheim. Van Gennep’s works on folklore were ignored by the group for reasons that folkloristic data is unsystematic compared to ethnography which is integrated and organic (Belier, “Arnold van Gennep and the Rise of French Sociology of Religion” 142).

“Van Gennep is no doubt one of the “most under-rated social scientists ever” (Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern Living through the In-Between* 3). Bjørn Thomassen explains his perspective on the reason why Van Gennep was a secluded genius among his contemporaries. This exclusion happened primarily because of Van Gennep’s criticisms of Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* published in 1912 on both empirical and theoretical forms. This failure to include his works in the forefront led later authors on religion to regard other subjects other than what Van Gennep had discovered. According to Arpad Szakolczai’s argument in the *Encyclopaedia of Theory in Social and Cultural Anthropology*, Van Gennep is regarded as a social science theoretician because of his theorising method outside a neo-Kantian framework that highly anticipated contemporary developments (322).

As mentioned above, his initial study was based on the representations of taboo and totemism in Madagascar. Though he has a great oeuvre, Arnold van Gennep is acknowledged for his study of the rites of passage in 1909 which describes the patterns and features of a number of rituals. In *Les rites de passage* which describes the rites of passage and was later regarded as his classical work, he refers to certain rituals where transfer from one situation to the other occurs in a sequence. His research covers several stages of life such as birth, youth, initiation rites, pregnancy, betrothal, marriage, funerals, seasonal observances, and so on. The differentiations that he provides to these phases, stressing the significance of transitions are *rites de separation*, *rites de marge*, and *rites d'agre'gation* (Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* vii). The concept of rites of passage when translated into English becomes rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation, respectively. The middle stage of his tripartite structure was called by him the *liminal period*, the transition rites as *liminal rites* and the rites of incorporation as *post liminal rites* (11). This sequential structure of rites is Van Gennep's central theoretical innovation (Szokolczai, "Gennep, Arnold van" 322). Separation is a response to any kind of crisis from an individual perspective or on a larger scale and is a detachment from the everyday processes of life such as social relations or cultural conditions. An exit from the normality of life and an entrance into a threshold suspended identity, time, or space denotes the phase of liminality. The reintegration or reincorporation phase allows the individual or group to get back to their normality. The applications of ethnological methods and psychology to technological societies are considered the pivotal breakthroughs of his work. *Les Rites de Passage* was translated into English by Monika B. Yizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee and was published in 1960 by the University of Chicago Press.

In the introduction to *The Rites of Passage* by Solon T. Kimball, the lists of societies that Van Gennep selected to conduct his comparative analysis are listed. It includes the native Australians, the Todas of India, the Masai of Africa, and other tribal groups in America, Asia, and Africa (Van Gennep vi). The word 'life crisis' by Van Gennep is indicated to denote the unstable social or religious position of a person who undergoes a transition where the person's state remains uncertain. This uncertainty is caused by the separation from the past and the state of not being

incorporated into the future. He commented in his work *Les rites de passage* that his interest was not in the particular rites but in their order and the typical pattern in which it occurs (Van Gennep viii). He was referring to the pattern in which the rites of passage occurred in such rites. Solon T. Kimball, who wrote the preface to Van Gennep's translated version named *The Rites of Passage*, recognised it as an empirical study of ritual behaviour and its implications for life crises. (Van Gennep xvii).

Turner describes the meaning behind the use of the word 'state' as "a relatively fixed or stable condition" (Turner, "Betwixt and between: The Liminal Period in Ritual Process" 46) and also "ecological conditions in which a person or group may be found at a particular time" (46). In the book by Chapple and Coon (1942), differentiation between rites of passage that concentrate on individual and non-periodic changes by Van Gennep and that of the rites of intensification which are associated with groups and periodic changes are seen (*Principles of Anthropology* 458). Van Gennep's rites of passage began to be known by different names like crisis-ceremonialism, life crisis, crisis rites, etc. Critics like Needham and Leach who were leaders of the British neo-structuralism regarded *Les rites de passage* in high esteem unlike the French sociologist group led by Emile Durkheim. In 1921, he became a *Docteur ès Lettres* at the Sorbonne University. Van Gennep submitted his book on totemism, published in 1920, and *Les rites de passage* published in 1909. The two contributions were the most substantial works ever presented for a *Docteur* title in France. *Rites de passage, La Formation des legendes* published in 1910, *Les Demi-savants* in 1911, *L'Etat actuel du probUme totemique* in 1920, and *Le Folklore* in 1924 are the major theoretical works of Van Gennep (Senn 236). He was invited to deliver lectures in different parts of the world including America for his excellent studies in folklore. In the latter years of his life, he concentrated more on folklore which he developed in his own way for the following three decades without being salaried for his contributions. He was a genius who is known as the father of French folklore even without holding any academic positions in France. Regarding the state of mind that is considered in this research, the below explanation provides a substantiating notion. It is written that,

“According to his original discussion, the first stage of a rite of passage, the *rites de separation*, marks a physical separation as well as a psychological *preliminal* state; the second stage of *rites de marge* keeps the subject physically marginalized from the social group while psychologically in a *liminal* stage; and the third stage of *rites d’agrégation* incorporates the subject both physically and psychologically back to the group with a new status through some *postliminal* rites.”

(Zhang, “Rites de Passage” 703)

Victor Turner considers Arnold van Gennep as “the father of formal processual analysis” (166) in his book *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. H. A Senn writes about him as “the pioneer of structuralism” (242) in his essay “Arnold van Gennep: Structuralist and Apologist for the Study of Folklore in France” in 1974, Belmont subtitles his book as “the founder of French ethnography” in *Arnold van Gennep: The Creator of French Ethnography* in 1979 and Zumwalt as “the master of French folklore” in his 1988 book title, *The Enigma of Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957): Master of French Folklore and Hermit of Bourg*.

French positivism, which is focused on the knowledge of natural phenomena, their properties, and relations based on classification was parental to Van Gennep. Positivism claims that the verified data received from the senses can be stated as empirical evidence. In his *Les rites de passage*, Van Gennep considers this categorisation and classification. He related the similarities in ceremonies to the fact of transition. “The universe itself is governed by a periodicity which has repercussions on human life, with stages and transitions, movements forward, and periods of relative inactivity” (Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* 3). Mentioning the universality of the rites of passage, Van Gennep writes, “The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another” (2). From Victor Turner’s point of view, society or *societas* is a dialectical process with the successive phases of structure and *communitas* rather than a being a thing as considered generally (*The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* 203). Although Van Gennep divides the tripartite structure in the names of rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation, he also uses the terms, pre-

liminal, liminal, and post-liminal rites based on its theoretical scheme (Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* 11). Terming the tripartite structure as the basis of the centrality of the middle phase of 'transitional rites' or liminal phase, he has highlighted the importance of the intermediate phase with that of the other two marked positions. Van Gennep has stated in the same book that he is not the first person who has been struck by the resemblances among the components of the ceremonies discussed in his book. He gives credit to Robert Hertz for recognising this transitional stage (Van Gennep 272-273). It is this middle phase of Arnold van Gennep's tripartite structure that was studied most fruitfully in the discipline of anthropology by Victor Turner.

In *The Rites of Passage*, Van Gennep distinguishes rites into sympathetic and contagious rites based on operation and function. The rites based on belief in the world and the dead, animistic basis, and dynamic are called sympathetic rites, whereas the belief that natural or acquired characteristics are material is called contagious rites (7). He further divides rites into direct and indirect rites based on its pace of occurrence. The other distinguishing aspect is the positive and negative nature of the rites. Positive rites contain positive volitions, and negative rites contain taboos of negative volitions (8-9). In the next section, he discusses ceremonial patterns where the rites of passage are sub-divided into three phases such as rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation. He describes the importance of this classification. The first phase denotes the separation of a person from the previous world when he/she enters into a new one in-between the first and the third rites of incorporation. As ceremonies consist of various rites, while considering them in isolation, they are removed from their context which gives them meaning as a whole (Van Gennep 89).

In the chapter titled "Pregnancy and Childbirth", he describes certain steps in which the rite takes place. The stages start when the pregnant woman is forbidden from entering villages and sacred places. There is a ceremony of leaving the hut that starts when she drinks sacred milk. She will be moved to her home for around seven months until she delivers her child. The mother and the child are separated from society to live in a special hut. Gifts are brought to her secluded bed, and the relatives spit on the mother and child. She is allowed to leave her house and have sexual relations only after forty days. The mother and the child are relieved into their normal

lives only after a ceremony of the sprinkling of holy water in the corners of the house. In such a ritualistic process in the term of pregnancy and birth, there is a division of the processes into the three phases of separation, transition, and reintegration. While explaining the pattern in the childhood rites, Van Gennep notes the process of childhood rites as cutting off the umbilical cord, sprinkling and baths, loss of the reminders of the umbilical cord, naming of the child, first haircut, a first meal with the family, first teeth, first walk, first outing, circumcision and dressing of the baby according to their gender. The ceremony of the bath is regarded as a rite of separation, and the events surrounding its naming are regarded as rites of incorporation. Initiation rites refer to the rite of passage between puberty and adolescence. Van Gennep highlights physiological indications of transition from childhood to adolescence, such as breast enlargement in girls, pelvic expansion in boys, pubic hair, initial menstruation, and beard growth in boys. Similarly, Arnold van Gennep describes the rites of betrothal, marriage, and funeral in detail by breaking them down into three parts. Betrothal is the transitory stage of marriage where the two individuals transit from the stage of dependence on their parents into the status of marriage with the acceptance of their families and communities. The symbolisation processes during the rites differ according to the community they belong to. The funeral is a separation rite between the living and the dead where the deceased leaves the world for another, and the emptiness creates a suspended social life for the affected, depending on the relationship and closeness between them.

Several other rites are also mentioned by Arnold van Gennep in the ninth chapter of his book. These rites are performed by people in societies for a short period of time. Rites of hair, rites of the veil, language rite, sexual rite, flagellation, and seasonal rites are mentioned. In detail, rites of hair refer to the cutting process, dedicating it as symbolic of dedicating one to the sacred world and consecrating or sacrificing it. Likewise, the rite of the veil denotes the use of a veil on the head during worship, indicating separation from the previous. A language rite refers to the shift from the known language into the unknown during a ceremony, transition period, or worship. The sexual rite leads to the prohibition of any sexual activity during the period of certain ceremonies. Flagellation refers to a powerful means of whipping or erotic stimulation. Seasonal rites mark the seasons of the year's events. Therefore, by

depicting the different stages of all these rites in detail, Arnold van Gennep tries to prove that his tripartite structure is prominent in the general aspects of the ritual process. He focuses not only on the spiritual or social relevance of these rites in the individual but also highlights it psychologically.

It took over five decades to recognise the soul of the work *Les rites de passage* by Arnold van Gennep in the academic world. Gennep's tripartite structure was noticed only after the publication of the book's English translation. Victor Turner, a symbolic anthropologist from Britain, was interested in the work of Gennep which gradually led him to re-discover the intermediate phase of liminality introduced by him. In "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology", it is written that if *rites de marge* or the transition rites were a phase to denote the passage from one state to the other, for Turner, it was "a period betwixt and between the categories of ordinary social life" (Turner 273) that had a lack of order. Other than liminality, he also concentrated on transition, *communitas*, social drama, symbolic action, symbolic multivocality, and structure and anti-structure.

2. 2. Victor Turner and Liminality

Victor Witter Turner was born on May 28, 1920, in Glasgow, Scotland. He began studying poetry and classics at University College in London when he was eighteen years old. As a result of his extensive reading, his interest in literature switched to anthropology. After receiving his honours degree at the age of twenty-nine, he joined as a research officer at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Northern Rhodesia, which is now known as Zambia. Later, he joined the University of Manchester to learn anthropology. Max Gluckman influenced him with ideas to complete his PhD as a Research Fellow of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in 1955. His kind of writing was based on metaphors, symbols, and rituals based on the Ndembu tribes.

Turner conducted ethnographic research along with his wife, Edith Turner, among the Ndembu tribe – a Bandu group from Zambia, from December 1950 to February 1952 and from May 1953 to June 1954. They concentrated in the village of Mukanza in the Mwinilunga district. He continued at Manchester as a Senior Fellow and Senior Lecturer for many years. His thesis titled *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life* was published in the year 1957. He

wrote his significant work, *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes Among the Ndembu of Zambia* while he was a Fellow for Advanced Behavioural Science at Stanford University. Turner was a member of the Royal Anthropological Institute, the American Anthropological Association, the American Folklore Association, and numerous other academic organisations related to anthropology and folklore studies (McLaren 19).

According to the classification by Victor Turner, rituals deal with seasonal or cyclic events where repetitions in a cyclical manner occur according to the change in climate or activities like planting, harvesting, the celebration of the Thanksgiving Day parade, etc. Contingent events such as life crisis ceremonies and affliction rituals are used to respond to an individual or community crisis. Life crisis rituals mark the transition from one stage of an individual's life cycle to the next at milestones such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. In affliction ceremonies, exorcisms of forces believed to have afflicted the villagers with any form of disease, injury, or other ailment are held. The other types of ritual are initiation rituals where a new participant enters a ritual process. As with the differentiation of rituals, they are also divided according to the perspective on the ritual process. Rituals are divided into three categories, such as exegetic, operational, and positional. The production of meaning and significance of a ritual based on the perspective of insiders who participate in the ritual process is referred to as exegetic. It is subjective in nature. The second is operational, which is from the perspective of an outsider who views and records the ritual process and the behaviour of the participants in the ritual process. It is objective in nature. The third is contextual, in which the outside society connects the ritual's symbolism to other representations in society and culture. It is purely based on the symbols used in the ritual process from the perspective of outside society. Turner's concern in developing liminality was to study how people experienced major life transitions and coped with them. He tried to understand the role of liminality in tribal communities and contemporary societies (Bigger, "Victor Turner, liminality, and cultural performance" 212).

Turner identified cultural, literary, and artistic genres as 'processes' rather than functional or static moments. In his 'processual' studies, the relational becoming of an entity is traced through events and occurrences that lead to the ultimate reality

(McLaren 8). In Alfred North Whitehead's philosophical view, the actual world itself is a process (22). Process thinking has the advantage that it leads to general applicability and applies to all aspects of nature. It is evident in certain works of Michael Bakhtin, Henry Bergson, Paul Stenner, George Herbert Mead, Lev Vygotsky, and many others. Even though he was trained in the school of British functionalist rationalism, his change in direction was influenced by Arnold van Gennep's rites of passage. At that time, Van Gennep's ideas were not considered serious enough for further study. His emphasis on diachronic processes, individual choice, and emotion sets him apart from other anthropologists. Turner was an anthropology professor at the University of Chicago from 1968 to 1983, as well as at the University of Virginia from 1977 to 1983.

Turner was influenced by his mother in framing his notion of drama and performance; Max Gluckman on social structure and process; ritual expression and resolution of conflict; and Arnold van Gennep who introduced rites of passage. He was also inspired by Clifford Geertz, Kurt Lewin, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Richard Schechner (Shipton 468-471)

In Turner's book *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life*, he introduced social dramas based on the conflicts and resolutions of the Ndembu villagers. He defines it as "a sequence of social interactions of a conflictive, competitive, or agonistic type" (33). It is related to the social life of a particular group that he studied for his research work. Turner noticed conflicts within the society that are interpersonal or comprise some members. There was a pattern that was detected in the eruption of conflict between them. The development of the patterns followed one another in a regular sequence. Turner distinguished the phases into four that have a processional form and called it 'social drama'. The divisions made to explain the stages of social drama are breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration or schism. Breach refers to its meaning of 'to break' from what was previously. The crisis stage occurs after the breach, which is often regarded as an extension of the first division. At this point, the participants become unsure and suspicious of their opponent. At this point, the threat of a breach becomes apparent. In the third stage, society responds to the crisis by implementing adaptive and redressal processes. It varies according to the nature of culture and crisis.

It can include personal advice, social meditation, or formal judiciary intervention. If redressive action fails, the crisis intensifies which may lead to outbursts on a larger scale in society. The final stage has two options. The first one is reintegration into society or schism where the society splits to prevent further conflicts.

In the essay “Victor Turner’s Social Drama and T. S. Eliot’s Ritual Drama” published in 1985, Ronald L Grimes identifies the relationship between the phases of social drama and those of the rites of passage. He parallels the phases of breach and crisis to the first phase of the rites of passage, i.e., the separation or the pre-liminal phase (81). The third stage of social drama is related to the middle stage of the rites of passage, i.e., the transition or the liminal phase. Reintegration, the fourth phase of social drama is paralleled with the third and final phase of the rites of passage, i.e., incorporation or the post-liminal phase. He gives a recapitulation to this piecing together of Turner’s argument by writing that redress was also stressed much like how liminality was concentrated in the rites of passage. Redress acts as a connecting link in the same way liminality serves in the tripartite structure (81). Rites of passage used by Turner from Arnold van Gennep is a model for ritual studies and liminality, which is the middle phase in it and is a cultural mode of reflexivity that can heal a social breach that gives rise to aesthetic narrative and drama. He refers to his usage of narrative in the sense that it means a chronological connection between events (82).

Though it was proposed based on Turner’s research on the tribal community in Zambia, it is now widely used at various applicable levels. Turner studied *matriliny* which is a word for tracing descent through the female line and viriloidity where the displacement of wives to their husband’s home after marriage (Turner, “Social dramas and Stories about them” 151). He identified periods of crisis, social and metro-political tensions, and forced rifts or reconciliations in their lives. He referred to these activities of social drama as ‘symbolic action’. He also witnessed their life-crisis rituals of divination, healing, and exposure including the ritualistic celebration of a girl’s puberty and matriliny. To them, rituals ensured security, reconciliation, emotional catharsis, and transcendence over uncertainty. Liminality gives rise to the characteristic features of anomie, alienation, and angst as it represents the situations of disease, death, despair, suicide, or similar breakdown (Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, In Play, and Ritual” 78). It is a seclusion period (64). In the context of rituals,

patrilineal identity denotes the dominant phase, and matrilineality represents the communitas who is also considered the submerged (Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* 125). Turner's perspective on symbols was that they were meaningful vehicles in the ritual process. The major focus was on the life-crisis rituals as it "refers to that class of rituals which mark the transition of one phase in the development of a person to another phase" (Deflem 8).

The Anthropology of Experience published in 1986 explores the nature in which people experience their culture as expressed through narrative, literary work, ritual, theatre, carnival, literary work, reminiscence, and life review. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness* published in 1982 echoes his theories of play and subjunctivity. He has also published articles such as "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality" (1979), "Images of Anti-Temporality: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience" (1982), "Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media" (1985), and "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology" (1974) regarding his further studies and perspectives on liminality.

Turner examined Van Gennep's studies on the importance of rituals at transitional times in a person's life in order to highlight his works based on the intermediate phase of Van Gennep's proposed structure. Turner became interested in conducting further studies on the middle phase, i.e., the phase of transition rites, also called the liminal phase. Turner identifies it as the state and process of mid-transition ("Variation on the theme of Liminality" 37). His first essay based on his research on liminality, "Betwixt and between: The Liminal Period of Rites of Passage" was published in 1964 in *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society* based on the Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion. Victor Turner coined the phrase "betwixt and between" to describe his idea of liminality, a major aspect of the framework he devised in the late 1960s to study rituals of passage within tribal sociocultural contexts (Cook-Sather 110). It was a turning point for Turner to divert his focus onto developing the possibilities of application based on liminality in ritual processes. His works on liminality and related concepts like communitas, liminar/liminal entity/liminal personae, liminal space, anti-structure, permanent liminality, etc. are scattered in various essays that he published in the following years.

This essay on liminality was later published in his elaborate study based on ritual characteristics in the book *The Forest of Symbols*. He includes a collection of essays explaining Van Gennep's liminality as a state of limbo, of suspension between and between, and to some extent as a symbolic death and preceding rebirth in his book *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, released in 1969. The book is divided into (1) the structure and the role of symbols in rituals related to the Ndembu tribes and (2) theoretical arguments based on the relationship between liminality and *communitas* in relation to structure.

In his first essay on liminality, he gives reference to Van Gennep's tripartite structure and informs that he will single out the middle stage, which is the marginal or liminal period of his studies. "The limen suggests a space more explicitly understood as a site of transgressivity, a point of entry into another zone. Unlike the closed space or place given form by its perceived limits (*limites*), the liminal space or site of the limen is one of opening, unfolding, or becoming" (Tally Jr xi). It is also mentioned as a threshold which can lead to a transition (Turner, "Variations on the theme of Liminality" 37). The liminal stage occurs when participants are separated from the rest of society to achieve an 'in-between state'. Turner's title of the essay itself gives a hint to the study that he conducts. He has given the first part of the title as 'betwixt and between' which a phrase is of betwixt to denote what is not complete either of two things. It leads to a 'neither here nor there' situation in the participant. *Liminality and the Modern: Living through the In-between* gives an idea of the condition in the liminal phase as "the human emotions that are built up in the liminal period are actually perplexing and deeply ambivalent" (Thomassen 84). Turner identifies that the participant does not experience any status, property rank or kinship position during the liminal stage of transition (Turner, *The Ritual Process* 111). During the liminal period, the attribute of the participant is "ambiguous" (94), which means the cultural space through which he passes has few or none of the characteristics of the past or the coming state.

"Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such; their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural

transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and an eclipse of the sun or moon”

(Turner, *The Ritual Process* 95)

Turner calls the participants involved in a liminal phase ‘liminal personae’, meaning threshold people (95) who are structurally and socially invisible as they have passed through their previous stage and have not yet entered into the next. In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas recognises them as ‘polluting’ and ‘dangerous’ which have great potential. It produces the potentiality of being a period of scrutiny for the central values and axioms as it withdraws from the normal modes of social action during the particular time of its liminal phase of liminality (Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* 167). Edith Turner recollects that Victor Turner had recognised many liminal people in literature who often are in “a betwixt and between state – in a state of marginality, people who for some reason had not settled into the static structure of society” (Turner, “The Literary Roots of Victor Turner’s Anthropology” 167). She quotes the figures of Francois Villon, Rabelais of Abbey of Theleme, Shakespeare’s King Lear, Othello, Shylock, Richard of Bordeaux, Walt Whitman’s the hobo, Dostoevsky’s the gambler, Baudelaire’s drug addict, Rimbaud’s homosexual, etc. The process of writing is also considered a liminal activity by Turner who considers writers as ‘liminals’. Edith Turner names Lewis Carroll, George Borrow, Huck Finn, Jack London, Wilfred Owen, Thomas Mann, Kerouac, and Kenzaburo Oe as the writers who often loved to be in their liminal state by creating liminal spaces and liminal characters. In *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*, liminal people, according to Victor Turner, are liminars/ initiands/ novices in transition from one sociocultural stage and status to another, or even entire populations in transition (Turner 159).

Liminality is a transitional phase that marks the existential position of the liminal personae. It is stated that

“liminality cannot be confined to the processual form of the traditional rites of passage in which he first identified it. Nor can it be dismissed as an undesirable (and certainly uncomfortable) movement of variable duration

between successive conservatively secure states of being, cognition, or status-role incumbency.”

(Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* 2-3)

In his essays, liminal entities are considered those who undergo initiation rites. They are required to obey their instructors and are subject to accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. Based on the ritual performances, he distinguishes three components of liminality. They are (1) sacramental communication – which reveals the secret symbols, (2) ludic deconstruction and recombination – where familiar objects are presented in distorted forms, and (3) ritual instructors’ dominance over perfectly subservient and obedient adepts (Deflem 14). Turner writes this to symbolise their situation of being “reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (Van Gennep 359). Such behaviour by the liminal entities leads to a state of intense comradeship and egalitarianism. The identities of the liminal entities are homogenised. Turner calls this union of liminal entities as ‘*communitas*’. It is binary to the system of structure in society as structures are based on the hierarchical system of differentiation. The normative identity of an individual in a structure is based on the individual’s status, role, or office within society and the relative comparison with other individuals within that society (Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* 131). *Communitas* is a Latin term borrowed by Turner to represent such kinds of communities and “distinguish the very modal quality of their social relationships from an area of common living” (96). As part of Turner’s liminality, *Communitas* is a highly acclaimed concept. It is the relation of one individual with the other individuals or groups that exhibit the same existential qualities. Detailing about *communitas* in the essay “*Communitas: Model and Process*” published in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Turner writes about the divisions in *communitas*. He distinguishes it into (1) *existential* or *spontaneous communitas* which is direct, fully spontaneous and immediate and also free from all structural demands. Here, equality is an outcome of personal experience which may not have a permanent existence. (2) *Normative communitas* or *existential communitas*

are involved in a social system due to time, resources, and the need for social control to pursue goals. It is permanent in its occurrence of togetherness, unlike the existential/spontaneous *communitas*. (3) *Ideological communitas* refers to a Utopian model society with permanent *communitas* that functions optimally under social conditions (Turner 132). They are formed as part of certain ideological compatibility between people/groups. Turner explains that there would be a feeling of endless power while being in spontaneous *communitas* (Turner, “Liminal, to Liminoid, In Play, Flow, And Ritual” 79). The interactions of individuals in the spontaneous *communitas* create unity by making it a single, synchronized, and fluid event.” (79). They form due to opposition to the structure and as a product of anti-structure. Victor Turner introduced his concept of anti-structure as part of his perspective of liminality which exists as an important term in the whole of the discussion.

While discussing the term ‘anti-structure’, Victor Turner has said that he has used it to denote both liminality and *communitas*. He did not refer to a structural reversal but meant “the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc. from the normative constraints” (Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* 44).

Anti-structure gives rise to liminality when the normal structure in the previous phase is reversed. In this circumstance, liminality is perceived as a temporal interface whose attributes partially flip those of the previously established order (Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, In Play, Flow and Ritual” 73). Social structure, in the context of anthropology, is the arrangement of positions or statuses. In short, *communitas* is a structure-less society that occurs in the liminality of equal experience (136) which is opposed to normative social structure. The group of liminal personae can be called as *communitas* when they are all bonded equally to one another in experiencing the same liminal situation. It resembles Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnival sense of the world where strict rules of piety and formality are stripped of their structures to welcome the unlikeliest of people together by allowing them to interact freely without limits. Maskers and clowns, anonymity, gender reversals, and a variety of other phenomena and processes suggesting liminality are all symbols of this carnivalesque character (Turner, *The Anthropology of Experience* 41). In such a sense, the theoretical concept of *communitas* is much more inclusive than the social structure.

In Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, the description of the carnival resonates with the ambiguous body "in transformation, and as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming" (Bakhtin 24). The intermediary phase of ambivalence functions in the medieval carnival described by Bakhtin. It relates to the temporary liberation from the usual social order which is inverted by "the feast of becoming, change, and renewal" (10). The binary opposition presented in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* reveals the deconstructive dualism argued by Jacques Derrida in his essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" published in 1966. The ambiguity of liminality, the deconstruction of linear processes, binary oppositions, and hierarchies, typically hinges on chronological and causal reversals and progresses to the absolute questioning of precession and succession. The shift from normal status to unusual liminal situations occurs during the transition from pre-liminal to post-liminal phases. The concept of 'difference' explained by Derrida escapes from logocentrism as they

"can no longer be included within philosophical binary opposition, but inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, but without ever constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics... Neither/nor, that is, simultaneously either/or."

(Derrida, *Positions* 43)

The "reversals, inversions, disguises" (Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual" 54) in Turner's liminality can be connected with Homi Bhabha's hybridity that discusses the hierarchical oppositions. Though there is no transition from the coloniser to the colonised, Bhabha's theory of "hybridity as camouflage" discusses the constant disruption and reconstruction of binary oppositions and examines margins, limits, and liminality (Klapcsik 12). Hybridisation occurs in distinct forms like linguistic, cultural, racial, political, etc. where there arise situations for the construction of ambivalent subjectivities due to the formation of space for a varied cultural identity. The mutuality of cultures gives rise to cross-cultural exchange and thus the 'in-between' space and the formation of identity becomes significant (Mambrol, "Homi Bhabha's Concept of Hybridity"). From the viewpoint of the theorist Homi Bhabha, hybridity is considered a form of liminal space – also called

the Third space that he describes as the cutting edge of translation and negotiation (Bhabha 38). The notion developed by Edward Soja with the influence of Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopology and Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974) gives direct interconnections with liminality and liminal space. The applicability of hybridity formed in the diaspora can also be related to the liminal 'in-between' state of the migrants who shift their location from their home country to the host country. They become liminal from analysing their spatial existence and the gradual transitions in the cultural spheres of life. The diaspora is influenced by the culture of the host country and tries to adapt to it. But, in reality, they exist neither as part of the cultural attributes of their home country nor of the host country. This in-between existence of the diaspora is addressed through the discussions connected with diaspora and liminality.

Similarly, Michel Foucault's heterotopia explained in "Of Other Spaces" (1986) has a link to the concept of liminal spaces. Heterotopias are therefore regarded as a specialised form of liminality (Derrida et al. *The Animal that Therefore I am* 29-35). They exist as primary spatial relations and configurations.

Regarding the rituals, Turner distinguishes the opposition between the conditions of liminality and normality. These binary characteristics help to differentiate liminality from that of the normal phases. The liminal phase of the transition records the characteristics presented in the first column of Table 1 and the normative phases in the second column.

Liminality	Normality
Transition	State
Totality	Partiality
Homogeneity	Heterogeneity
Communitas	Structure
Anonymity	Systems of nomenclature
Absence of property	Property
Absence of status	Status
Nakedness or uniform clothing	Distinction of clothing

Sexual continence	Sexuality
Absence of rank	Distinctions of rank
Humility	Just pride of position
Total obedience	Obedience to superior rank
Unselfishness	Selfishness
Sacredness	Secularity
Sacred institution	Technical knowledge
Silence	Speech
Suspension of kinship rights and obligations	Kinship rights and obligations
Simplicity	Complexity
Acceptance of pain and suffering	Avoidance of pain and suffering
Heteronomy	Degrees of autonomy

Table 1: Liminality contrasted with status system (Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* 106-107)

Liminality is not confined to the middle phase of the rites of passage. It is an entire period from the beginning of the separation phase through the seclusion period until the liminal entity is back into normal life. Sometimes, there happens to be a state called permanent liminality. It is deliberately compelling to inhabit the fringes and interstices of the social structure. The condition of liminality, when it prolongs from its temporal behaviour into a permanent condition, the situation of permanent liminality occurs in the liminal persona involved in liminality. “‘Permanent liminality’ allows us to better exploit the full potential of liminality for social theory” (Szokolzcai, “Permanent (trickster) liminality: The reasons of the heart and of the mind” 232).

In the chapter “Humility and Hierarchy: The Liminality of Status Elevation and Reversal” published in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), Turner discusses two types of liminality based on rituals such as rituals of status elevation and rituals of status reversal. In rituals of status elevation, the liminal entity irreversibly raises its position, and in rituals of status reversal, there is a reversal from

low status to high and from high to low. It is evident in the Ndembu chieftain ritual where the chief has to submit themselves to communal abuse for a short period which is marked as their liminal phase. Another major ritual is the coming of age for boys when they undergo circumcision. Even though all the boys in the ritual process come from different households, they are considered equals during the process. Rituals like the *Isoma* ritual, twinship ritual, etc. are conducted in the same pattern. As an example, Turner explains the *Isoma* ritual in relation to female infertility in the Ndembu culture. There is a contradiction between the act of staying and pleasing the husband and honouring one's own maternal village. The process is a ritual where a social norm is violated and comes into conflict. Here, the liminal entity, who is a woman, proceed away and towards an *ikela* (known to be a hole in the ground) which represents her journey to death and witchcraft and also her return to health-restoring fertility. It also represents her relief and liberation from the curse of her forebears. The woman walks between the past *Isoma* veterans and their husbands to show a balancing of the contradictory obligations bestowed on her (Turner, *The Ritual Process* 27-28). Turner tried to understand the symbolic representations of these rituals in order to extract the processual framework within the rituals so as to discover the liminal phase through which the liminal entity passes during the ritual process.

The next major term explained by Turner connected with liminality is liminoid. It is a liminal experience that is optional and does not have the determination to lead to a personal crisis. Liminality is reconfigured in the situation where liminoid is applicable. Turner differentiates it from the tribal culture as liminality found in modern industrial leisure. It is well explained in his essay titled "Liminal to Liminoid, In Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology" which was published in the year 1974 by Rice University Studies. The application of liminoid is more in terms of modern consumer society, as represented by art, theatre, and the broader leisure industries. Novels, short stories, poems, films, paintings, gaming, gambling, carnivals, and other liminoid activities can all be classified as liminoid. It's a mixture of uncertainty and innovation. Liminoid is coined by Turner from the Greek word *-eidos* which means resembling. It has such meaning because it resembles liminality without being identical to the actual context. He gives an analogous reference and equates it to the '*oid*' in the meaning as similar to how it is in an

asteroid, a star-like, *ovoid*, egg-shaped etc. (64). Victor Turner's essay "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality" which was published in 1979 points out:

"Liminoid genres - which would include the writing of novels and essays, the painting of portraits, landscapes and crowd scenes, art exhibitions, sculpture, architecture, and so on, as well as individually written plays."

(Turner 492)

Turner quotes Sutton Brian Smith in his "Liminal to Liminoid, In Play, Flow, and Ritual" for his usage of liminoid phenomena to refer to charivaris, fiestas, Halloween masking, and mumming. Sutton Smith considers liminal and liminoid situations as the basis for new symbols, models, and paradigms as initiators of cultural creativity (Turner 60). There is a fundamental distinction between the operation of liminality in small-scale tribal societies before the industrial revolution and large-scale societies after it. In traditional societies, the whole community participates in the rituals without an exemption from ritual duty as it is mandatory for them. There is no distinction between work and play as per tribal and agrarian ritual and myth as they are intrinsically connected as a collective entity. As per tribal and agrarian ritual and myth, there is no differentiation between work and play as they are inextricably linked as a collective entity. In post-industrial cultures, there is indeed a clear distinction between work and play, or work and leisure. Leisure means choice in such a large-scale societal framework. The choice of being in a liminal period is open to them. Liminoid is not only removed from the context of rites of passage in complex societies, but it is also individualised. Therefore, in such societies, the liminal period is characterised as liminoid. In this context, the difference between liminal phenomena and liminoid phenomena put forth by Victor Turner has significance. He draws certain distinguishing aspects between liminal phenomena and liminoid phenomena. Liminal phenomena predominated in the tribal and early agrarian societies and were called mechanical solidarity, whereas liminoid phenomena appeared in organic solidarity, especially following the industrial revolution in which capitalism considered labour a commodity. Liminal phenomena are considered collective, calendrical, biological, social-structural rhythms or as a crisis in social

processes. They form as natural breaks during the flow of natural and social processes which are considered necessary. Liminoid phenomena are individualistic, though they have collective effects. They do not possess the quality of cyclical as liminal phenomena are, but are continuously generated as leisure activities with optional characteristics. Negativity and subjunction are represented by liminal phenomena, whereas liminoid phenomena are multiple, fragmentary, and experimental in nature (85). Liminal occurrences are typically collective in nature, affecting all members of a group with a shared intellectual and emotional meaning. Liminoid phenomena, on the other hand, are unique or quirky in nature, with symbols that are more ‘personal-psychological’ than ‘objective societal’ in nature (86). Liminal phenomena are ultimately ‘eufunctional’ in nature even though they may appear to be inversed to the social structure. On the other hand, liminoid phenomena are often part of social critiques where both coexist as cultural pluralism (86). In short, liminal experiences tend to be a part of society through the integral nature of social or religious rites which are not conditional in its aspect while resulting in a status change. On the contrary, liminoid experiences are a break from society which is conditional in nature having no change in its status. They serve as transitional moments in time.

With a simplified explanation, liminal phenomena can be said to be different from those liminoid phenomena. When liminal phenomena are the result of internal adjustments, external adaptations, or unexpected disasters such as earthquakes, invasions, or plagues, the liminoid phenomena are typically collective and mass effects such as carnivals, spectacles, sporting events, folk drama, or theatrical experiences (Turner, “Variations on the theme of Liminality” 44). According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s perspective on flow in *communitas*, flow entails the blending of action, awareness, and an ego-less state (49). *Communitas* also shares the same attributes and can occur in both structured and unstructured situations. He writes that liminoid phenomena are total without the characteristic of flow.

More than being focused on the contemporary Ndembu rituals, he was interested in its application in public culture.

“In addition to illuminating past religious and political movements as well as popular currents in American society of the 1960s, Turner brought his theory of liminality to bear upon the phenomenon of religious pilgrimage, a generally ignored subject in the history of religions.”

(Ray, “Turner, Victor”)

He equated the rites of passage and liminality with religious pilgrimages, monasteries, convents, and communes. His field study based on Christian pilgrimages was published in *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* in 1978. Countercultures and anti-war protests were also linked to the same in larger moments during the 1960s and 1970s. He coined the term ‘*liminoid*’ to refer to the liminal transitions in larger communities where it is optional in its characteristics.

Analysing his essays and books based on his field studies in Ndembu villagers and related applications in other contexts, it would be apt to say that he was both an empiricist and a theorist. Turner’s main theoretical study was to show how rituals are processes, not states, in the social world, which itself is “a world in becoming, not a world in being” (*Dramas, fields and metaphors* 24). Turner’s theoretical ideas that were formulated accurately are scattered in his different publications (Deflem 21; Rowe 58). His influence extends far beyond the limits of his work in anthropology. The theoretical trajectories of Turner’s works are being utilised in the disciplines of psychology, sociology, literature, comparative religion, public health, architecture, and other fields due to the versatility of its application. Turner’s view of liminality does not oppose the introductory insights by Arnold van Gennep, but it is much larger and more detailed. Turner makes clear his view of liminality by arguing that “for me the essence of liminality is to be found in its release from normal constraints, making possible the deconstruction of the uninteresting constructions of common sense into cultural units which may then be reconstructed in novel ways.” He continues to say that the exploration of liminality “must bear some traces of its antecedent and subsequent stages” (Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience* 159-160).

Other recent researchers and academicians have also developed Victor Turner’s liminality according to their perspectives. Their arguments will also be considered in the research to recognise the wider scope and aspect of liminality. The

contributors are Arpad Szokolczai, Bjørn Thomassen and Paul Stenner who conducted their parts of the studies in recent times. Arpad Szokolczai is a Professor of Sociology at the University College Cork in Ireland. His major contribution related to liminality is in the elaborated description of the permanent liminality that was introduced by Victor Turner. He writes about permanent liminality in his essay, “Permanent (trickster) liminality: The Reasons of the Heart and of the Mind” in 2017. When Turner was describing how a liminal state might become fixed when social life takes on a permanent and suspended nature, he created the term “permanent liminality.” Szokolczai suggests a solution by adopting Blaise Pascal’s philosophy of the heart, which says the heart knows better than reason, as explained by Pierre Bourdieu in his *Pascalian Meditations* (2000). He has published an article titled “Liminality and Experience: Structuring transitory situations and transformative events” (2009) and a book named *Permanent Liminality and Modernity: Analysing the Sacrificial Carnival* based on his perspectives on permanent liminality. He concentrated his studies on the permanent liminality proposed by Victor Turner in detail. A liminal situation is temporary, transitory, and transient. If it lasts longer than expected, it will become permanent in nature. In *Reflexive Historical Sociology* (2009), Szokolczai writes that permanent liminality denotes the paradoxical ambivalent situation of modernity (215-26).

The applicability of liminality in the modern world context is studied by Bjørn Thomassen, an Associate Professor at Roskilde University in Denmark, in his book *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between*. The track of the development of liminality from Arnold van Gennep to the recent studies in liminality is described in the book along with the reasons why Van Gennep was not well recognised for his works on the rites of passage. He studies the influence of liminality on modern social life. He dedicates his chapters to discussing the seventeenth century as a liminal period for early modernity to arise, about political revolutions, games and gambling, and Western bungee jumping. His work reconsiders periods of transition as liminal phases in the modern context. He has also edited a collection of articles based on liminality in the book *Breaking boundaries: Varieties of Liminality* along with Agnes Horvath and Harald Wydra. It discusses case studies relating to historical, societal, and political crises in order to discover the application potential of liminality.

In Thomassen’s article, “The Uses and Meanings of Liminality” (2009), he writes about the applicability of liminality in fields other than anthropology. He is also concerned about liminal experiences and the permanent structures of lasting effects. In his book *Liminality and the Modern* (2014), he proposes a descriptive model and a typology to identify various spatial and temporal dimensions of liminal situations. He claims that liminality can be applied to individuals as well as bigger communities. He classifies experiences of liminality on the basis of subject-hood as single individuals, social groups, and whole societies that include the entire population or even civilizations. On the temporal dimension, it is related to moments, periods and epochs.

The table used to divide them accordingly is given below:

Time	Subject		
	Individual	Group	Society
Moment	Sudden event affecting one’s life (death, divorce, illness) or individualised ritual passage (baptism, ritual passage to womanhood, as for example among the Ndembu)	Ritual passage to manhood (almost always in cohorts); graduation, ceremonies etc. Ritualised passage within a cosmological event-calendar, such as New Year, Harvest, Solstice.	A whole society facing a sudden event (sudden invasion, natural disaster, a plague) where social distinctions and normal hierarchy disappear Carnivals Revolutionary moments
Period	Critical life-stages Puberty or teenage	Ritual passage to manhood, which may extend into weeks or months in some societies Group travels	Wars Revolutionary Periods

<p>Epoch (or life span duration)</p>	<p>Individuals standing outside society, by choice or designated Monkhood. In some tribal societies, individuals remain ‘dangerous’ because of a failed ritual passage Twins are permanently liminal in some societies</p>	<p>Religious Fraternities, Ethnic minorities, Social minorities, Transgender Immigrant groups betwixt and between old and new culture Groups that live at the edge of ‘normal structures’, often perceived as both dangerous and ‘holy’</p>	<p>Prolonged wars, enduring political instability, prolonged intellectual confusion. Incorporation and reproduction of liminality into social and political structures Modernity as ‘permanent liminality’</p>
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Table 2: Types of Liminal Experiences (Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* 90)

Thomassen gives priority to the special aspect of liminality which was highlighted by Arnold van Gennep in his chapter titled “Territorial Passage” in *The Rites of Passage*. He relates liminal places to specific thresholds, extended areas like borderlands or countries, or even larger civilizations. The spatial dimension of liminality is classified into three. The first are restricted spaces, specified spots, or thresholds, such as a doorway in a house, a line separating holy from sacred in a ritual, specific things, in-between items, and human body openings. The second broadens the scope of the limit to include places, zones, and closed institutions such as international border areas, monasteries, jails, sea resorts, and airports, among others. Countries, larger areas, and continents make up the third group. He uses Karl Jasper’s axial era as an example of a transitional phase between two organised world perspectives. It has similarities to the liminal stage in its characteristics of uncertainty and contingency. Liminality is the disintegration of identity at the individual level, and the suspension of social order structure at the societal level (Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* 92).

In *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality*, Bjørn Thomassen describes the general significance of the term liminality. He writes that liminality is essential for human existence without which social life would be void. It is through the experience of liminality that human beings deal with transitions in their social and cultural lives (Horvath et al. 40). Liminality is what is outside the normal routines and repetitions in life that challenge us with novel situations.

The psycho-sociological and socio-psychological nature of liminality is highlighted through the words of Paul Stenner, who is a Professor of Social Psychology at The Open University in the United Kingdom. He has introduced two major terms that further give strength to the psychological aspects of liminality. The first term is the liminal hotspot. It gives a connection to liminality regarding the affective nature of the person who experiences liminality under certain conditions favourable for the production of various emotional variations due to liminality. The emergence of the concept of liminal hotspots is a trans-disciplinary process that includes psychology and studies in social aspects. These findings are from “Liminal hotspots: Conceptualising the dynamics of suspended transition” based on a workshop conducted by Paul Stenner, Monica Greco, and Johanna Motzkau. People feel like they are being caught suspended in limbo in the condition of a liminal hotspot. It produces uncertainty, paradox, ambivalence, polarity, paralysis, and tension in the affected individual. It is referred to as the epitome of emotions during permanent liminality where it acts like a happening or an event between two specific points in life. The second term introduced by Stenner is liminal affectivity, where we experience liminal volatility of emotions. It is referred to as the dynamic process between potential and actuality, which occurs when harmony or stability gets in trouble.

In his essay titled “Theorising liminality between art and life: The liminal sources of cultural experience” (2021), Stenner writes about the spontaneous liminal experience and the devised liminal experience on the basis of the categorisation by Turner of liminality as staged and unstaged (6). In the works of Arpad Szokolczai, the staged liminal situations refer to Van Gennep’s rites of passage because of its unpredictability and temporality of suspension. Social dramas are described as unstaged. Likewise, spontaneous liminal experiences lead to unanticipated events and

situations by breaking the previous point of life (7). Devised liminal experiences are what we do to ourselves in a rarefied and virtual space/time and are experiences mediated by dedicated cultural forms. Therefore, Stenner writes that “transitions between relatively stable positions, liminal occasions of passage, to put it metaphorically, are gaps or cracks or voids in the psycho-socio-cultural crust of human forms of life” (7).

Affectivity and liminality are considered together for their relational parallelism. They can be connected through the link of anti-structural elements common to both of them. Being anti-structural in nature, affectivity goes on the same track of liminality. As an example, Stenner writes about a mother’s grief when her child is dead. The information about death breaks the structural position of the mother, transforming her into a highly volatile and affective space. She is forced to incorporate herself into a new identity status from that point onwards. This situation is also related to the liminal moment of transition from her previous state to another. In an article by Jette Koefoed and Paul Stenner, published in 2017, they explore a setting in a Danish school with a group of youngsters. Sana, a young woman who recently transferred from another institution, is the centre of attention. The situation of the girl is described as being targeted by being gossiped about and criticised by her classmates. The issue of inclusion or exclusion is extended and amplified through five episodes in the paper in which Sana’s liminal hotspot is described. The inclusion as exclusion experience leads her into a liminal hotspot (“Suspended liminality: Vacillating affects in cyberbullying/research” 170-172). Stenner points out a paper by Mie Scott Georgsen and Bjørn Thomassen in 2017 that discusses the protests in Ukraine that led to liminal features such as volatility, ambivalence, and an uprising of *communitas* (Stenner et al. 143). He refers to similar cases of liminal hotspot experience to frame his theoretical aspect of the study. Even though the liminal hotspot has a psychological orientation, it is one with rich transdisciplinary potential. Considering the application part of liminality, there is numerous research in various disciplines that have made use of the utility of liminality to define their research problems. As liminality has flexibility in its use, it is widely used as part of the research. It is used to explain the liminal transitions in semiotic terms where the observable meaning called the ‘Significance in Praesentia’ and the ‘Significance in

Absentia' interact. It concludes that "the liminal condition is grounded and triggered by meanings that the person retrieves from the socio-cultural context" (Salvatore and Venuleo 11). In the research paper titled "The Rites of Passage Framework as a Matrix of Transgression Process in the Life Course", the changes in mental and physical health, as well as changing roles in society, are viewed through a functional-structural analysis founded on the principle of rites of passage and the theory of liminality (Janusz and Walkiewicz 151-159). Dianne Dentice and Michelle Dietert suggest that the temporal liminal state is experienced by individuals having a physical transformation from one gender identity to the other. They also discuss the liminality of transgender people who are not transsexual. The liminality of gender issues is the key aspect of their research through the lens of liminality (*Liminal Spaces and the Transgender Experience* 69-96). The description of liminal zones, periods, and experiences that lead to the experience of fantasy in the selected works of Marie Ndiaye, Marie Darrieussecq, and Marie Redonnet are explored by Jean H. Duffy in her research article (*MLN* 901-928). It is the research article that uses the various concepts of liminality to explore the works of three writers. Mathieu Deflem provides a systematic outline of Victor Turner's theoretical stance, functional analysis, methodological frame, and processual mode along with a brief note on his personal life. It gives the hint that Turner's theoretical ideas, although presented with great accuracy, were scattered over many essays (Deflem 21). In the application of liminality based on the discipline of architecture, the research paper by Veronica Mg and Jia Pey Lim explores the theoretical idea of liminality from a transdisciplinary point by connecting it with other disciplines to explore the emergence and manifestation related to the discussion of spatial conditions, spatial division, and spatial experience ("Tracing Liminality: A Multidisciplinary Spatial Construct" 76-90). The research paper titled "The Ritual of Making Magic: Disney Films Through the Lens of Turner" utilises Turner's theory to frame the phases of liminality in the plots of various Disney movies. It compares the characters that were mostly in their transitional phase (Mateja 7-11).

It would be suitable to introduce research works based on the application of liminality to literature as this research is specifically confined to the area of literature. Liminality is a wider topic that has its application in various disciplines to identify its

ritual base or on account of the metaphorical and interpretative ground of having in-between situations or settings. Including research works by scholars from various disciplines would only help to divert the focus of the research from its application based on the literary aspect.

The doctoral thesis *Violence and Liminality: Spenser's and Shakespeare's Contested Thresholds* examines Spenser's *Faerie Queen* and Shakespeare's plays based on their adolescence, gender, sexuality, mental state, and physical disability. It analysed how the impact influenced the social and religious thresholds of the period (McLelland 2). Liminal transformations as points of entry for extra-textuality are used to understand the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, Stephen King, and Phillip Pullman (Crowley, *Liminality in Popular Fiction*). The presence and applicability of liminality and anti-liminality are traced in the narratives of Victorian novels such as *Jane Eyre*, *Oliver Twist*, etc. The concept of *communitas* is also traced in the novels of the time (Gilead, "Liminality, Anti-Liminality, and the Victorian Novel"). Liminal aspects of science fiction are explored with special reference to Darko Suvin's works. The hospitable aspect of marginalised sections such as racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities in the liminal world of science fiction is explored in the research work (Sanchez, *Liminality, Marginality, Futurity*). The presence of liminality and Anti-liminality in Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* and *Jane Eyre* are explored through analysis and application of various concepts in Victor Turner's liminality (Gilead, "Liminality and Antiliminality in Charlotte Brontë's Novels: Shirley Reads Jane Eyre"). J M Coetzee's novels such as *Foe*, *Disgrace*, *Elizabeth Costello*, *Slow Man of a Bad Year* are analysed for their liminal characters and narrators to highlight the societal conflict and its results. It formulates a personal stance on liminality in terms of text as well as contemporary postcolonial society (Grobler, "Liminality: choice and responsibility in selected novels by J M Coetzee").

Apart from these applications of liminality in the later phase of its development, Victor Turner himself has equated his concepts with relevant events in some of the popular literary works by prominent writers. He has pointed out the rites of passage or tripartite structure formation in the nineteenth century *Bildungsroman* genre fiction where the elevation of the hero is gradually described through several incidents by the author. Turner focuses on the protagonist character's transition from

poverty to glory and innocence in such fictional works. Also, as part of his examples that he relates along with the introduction and explanation of major concepts, he also points to examples from Achilles's encounter with Priam in the *Illiad*, Raskolnikov's and Sonya's longing, and Paul Friedrich's painful discovery of one another in *Crime and Punishment*. The concept of Turner's *communitas* is explained in the liminary outcasts in *King Lear* with the help of characters such as Lear, Tom O'Bedlam, Kent and the Fool. Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* puts forth the women's *communitas* and many episodes in Henry Fieldings' *The History of Tom Jone: a Foundling* and Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* also deliver the concept of the same in its carnivalised plots (52).

Moreover, the essay "Play and the Problem of Knowing in Hamlet: An Excursion into Interpretive Anthropology" in *The Anthropology of Experience* lists the characteristic features of liminality expressed in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It highlights the situations of uncertainty, ambiguity, paradox, absurdity, despair, structural contradiction, and identity crisis prevalent in the scenes depicted in the play. The edited book by Kathleen M. Ashley with several essays, *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology* provides the information that Turner had subconsciously recognised rites of passage in Moby Dick, *Crime and Punishment*, Mahabharata, and Ramayana for its shipwreck on Caliban's Island, the quest for whale, the passage from guilt to redemption, the journey of the Pandava brothers, and Sita's kidnapping and rescue, respectively (Turner, "The Literary Roots of Victor Turner's Anthropology" 167).

Sandor Klapcsik's *Liminality in Fantastic Fiction: A Poststructuralist Approach* defines liminality as a constant oscillation with continuous transference and transgressions. Through the interpretation of liminality with the help of poststructuralist theories of Homi K. Bhabha, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, the detective stories of Agatha Christie, the fiction of Neil Gaiman, Stainslaw Lem, and Philip L. Dick are analysed. The significance of liminality in contemporary culture and society is explored by the author in these works.

Beyond the Threshold: Explorations of Liminality in Literature, edited by Hein Viljoen and C. N. Van der Merwe, examines the transforming capabilities of liminal states and hybridising processes in chosen South African literature. The

presence of liminality is investigated in the writings of Keri Hulme, Ivan Vladislavic, Douglas Livingstone, and others. Intriguing liminal people, dangerous liminal settings, and distinctive alterations in marginal characters are discussed in this book. The possibilities of inner transformation provided by the liminal zone where the accepted structures and truths are abandoned are described in the work.

2. 3. Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Though the theoretical insights based on the processual framework discussed by Victor Turner would be sufficient in framing an outline of the presence of liminality in the characters, space, and situations in the selected works of George Saunders, in order to study a detailed trajectory of transition that happens in them, there is a need for additional support that would provide a detailed description of the state of the person in transition with respect to his positions in the rites of passage. Transition theory by Dr Nancy Schlossberg is utilised to describe the effect of the transition using their positions of moving in, moving through, and moving out which is similar to the tripartite structure of pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases proposed by Arnold van Gennep.

Dr Nancy K Schlossberg is a Professor Emerita at the University of Maryland in the United States. She is affiliated with the College of Education's Department of Counseling and Personnel Services. She worked at Wayne State University, Howard University, and Pratt Institute previously. She is noted for her competence in the areas of adult transitions and adaptations as a result of his work. She was the first female executive of the American Council on Education, where she founded the Office of Women in Higher Education in 1973. She worked as a Senior Fellow at the same institution, where she specialised in Adult Learning. In 1983, she was designated an American Psychological Association Fellow, a Fellow of the Gerontological Association, and a distinguished scholar at the University of Maryland. The American Psychological Association recognized her as one of the eminent women in psychology in acknowledgement of her contributions to the field. The National Career Development Association, the American College Personnel Association, the National Association for Women in Education, and the American Society for Training and Development have indeed given her prominent awards and honours. Her important

books include *Going to Plan B: How You Can Cope, Regroup, and start Your Life* (1996), *Getting the most out of College* (2001), *Revitalizing Retirement: Reshaping Your Identity, Relationships, and Purpose* (2009), *Overwhelmed: Coping with Life's Ups and Downs* (2007), *Counselling Adults in Transition: Linking Practice With Theory* (1984), *Improving Higher Education Environments for Adults* (1989) and *Perspectives on Counselling Adults* (1986).

Schlossberg's work on transition was first published in the article "A Model for Analysing Human Adaptation" in the journal *The Counselling Psychologist* in 1981. Later, it was successful in linking theory and practice in the preface to her book. Schlossberg, in her book, *Counselling Adults in Transition: Linking Practice With Theory* (1984), defined a transition as "any event that results in a change in relationships, routines, assumptions, or roles with the setting of self, work, family, health, and/or economics" (43). Being an academic person with her own model for transition, she was invited to give more than a hundred keynote addresses at several scholarly gatherings in different countries. Schlossberg has been quoted in *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, *Reader's Digest*, *Family Circle*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, U.S. News and World, Consumer Reports, and many more national and international agencies. Her contributions to the academic world are priceless for which she was awarded the latest 2019 American Psychological Association Presidential Citation.

Schlossberg's model of transition is "a systematic way to predict, measure, and modify people's reactions to change" (*Peace Corps Times* 4) consisting of the classifications into anticipated, unanticipated, and non-events. Four key tenants enable a person to cope with a transition. It was developed while revisiting the theory by Anderson and Goodman in the book *Counseling Adults in Transition, Fourth Edition* (2012). They are identified as situation, self, support and strategies. These are referred to as the 4S. The theory was continuously revised in 1989 and 1995 with the help of Mary Anderson and Jane Goodman, in which the new conceptualised theory proposed three components such as approaching stock, coping with change, and taking charge. The focus was given to loss and resilience, diversity in culture, social justice, adulthood transition, unemployment, and transcendence. The third edition, published in 2006, acknowledges the global community, technological impacts, cultural

diversity, and spirituality. Coping change refers to the previously discussed 4S where taking charge discusses the transition passage of the process of moving in/through/out. In moving in, the individual learns to become familiar with the rules, norms, regulations, and expectations of the new system. Transitional is grounded on the premise that adults continuously experience transitions. This point of Schlossberg gets more validation when we discuss the state of mind of an individual that continuously gets into several altering emotional and situational differences. She also elaborates the premises to include the viewpoint that adults' reactions to transitions depend on the type of transition, the context in which it occurs, and its impact on their lives (Goodman et al. 53). This is highly relevant in the analysis of the characters in the selected works of George Saunders through the lens of liminality. The liminal phases and the transition from one to the other, especially from moving into the liminal phase to moving out of the liminal phase are more related to the type of transition, the context in which it occurs, and its impact on the lives of the characters. As she concludes the premises of the transition framework, she states that “a transition has no end point; rather, a transition is a process over time that includes phases of assimilation and continuous appraisal as people move in, through, and out of it” (Goodman et al. 53).

Dr Nancy Schlossberg's transition theory is more applicable and versatile. Though much of the research has been conducted based on student transition cases, the theory developed by Schlossberg has the potential to be applied beyond the limits. Each person completes the process of transition in different ways, and the outcomes for each are also different. It depends on the factors of transition described in the theory. She bases the foundations of her theory on empirical shreds of evidence and the theory of others. Schlossberg writes that,

“to understand the meaning of a transition for a particular individual, we need to examine the type of transition (anticipated, unanticipated, or non-event), the context of the transition (relationship of the person to the transition and setting in which the transition occurs), and the impact of the transition on the individual's life (on relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles)

(Goodman et al. 40)

The transition model by Schlossberg is based on the view that the structure for understanding transition is stable even if transitions differ according to individuals. It helps counsellors, social workers, psychologists, and others to systematically analyse their clients. The model is divided into three sections: [1] Approaching Transitions, Transition Identification, and Transition Process, [2] Taking Inventory of Coping Resources, and [3] Taking Charge. In the first phase of the first part, i.e., the approaching transition, the nature of the transition is identified to understand the best perspective to deal with it. The next phase, i.e., transition identification, enquires about what change is about to happen. It gives a hint as to whether the change that occurred is anticipated, unanticipated, or a non-event. It is easier to analyse the challenge faced by the person involved if the change is known. The effect of the change occurs at this phase of analysis.

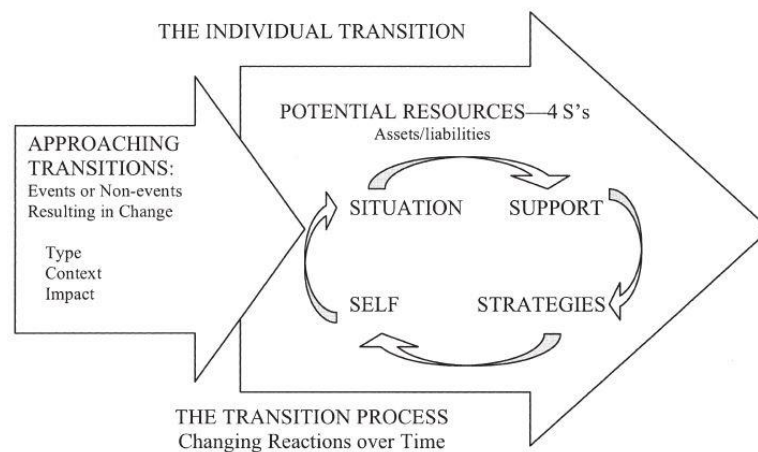


Figure 1: Schlossberg's representation of an individual in transition (Goodman et al. 33)

The transition process identifies the position of the person in the transition. It analyses the moving in, moving through or moving out stages of transition. The next phase of transition is taking stock of coping resources in which the four S's such as situation, self, support, and strategies are analysed. The third part of the transition is taking charge where new strategies are utilised to control the transition. The below figure depicts the transition process in an individual (Goodman et al. 32).

As a result of the transition, which is regarded as a life event, there are possibilities for gains as well as losses. It can be positive as well as negative in nature.

Schlossberg divides transitions into three types. They are as mentioned above: anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions, and non-events. The anticipated transitions are predictable in nature as they are expected to happen at some point in life. For example, marriage, graduation, retiring, etc. fall under the category of anticipated transitions. There is an opportunity for a rehearsal, which will enable the person to face the event when it arrives. Unanticipated transitions are the kinds of transitions in life that suddenly occur as non-scheduled events. They lead to crisis, eruptive circumstances, and sudden twists in life. Unanticipated events include, for example, a promotion, an accident, a divorce, a premature death, a sudden illness or death, natural disasters, and so on. Non-event transitions are those that were expected but did not occur, thereby creating a change in one's life. For example, the condition of a couple who expected to have children in their mid-40s, when they realise that it will not occur anymore, goes through this type of transition. When the expected transition does not happen, it also changes the individual who expected it to happen. She gives an example to summarise the three types of transitions. According to it, a planned retirement is an anticipated transition, and a retirement due to the sudden closure of the plant in which the person was working is referred to as an unanticipated transition. If the person continues to work even after the retirement period due to economic necessity, it comes under the non-event transition (Goodman et al. 35).

Furthermore, she expands transition with concepts like relativity, context, and impact. Relativity happens when the meaning of the same event changes, it is different for different individuals. If retirement is a planned process for one person, for another it may be unplanned, and for still another, it may be a non-event. Regarding context, the relationship of the individual to the event or non-event has to be considered. The primary setting has to be identified in order to analyse a transition. For example, parents consider their children's tragedies and joys to be their own. The next consideration is the impact of the transition on the individual. It can be identified by looking at the individual's pre-transition and post-transition periods (Goodman et al. 35-38). As a result, in order to comprehend the significance of a transition in an individual, we must examine the nature, context, and impact of the shift at issue. Almost similar to the tripartite structure developed by Arnold van Gennep but differing in the placement and definitions, Schlossberg attempts to introduce a three-

phase pattern in her transition theory. She calls it an integrative model of the transition process. In it, the first phase is termed moving in which denotes the process of moving into a new situation that is entirely new to them and they need to become familiar with the attributes of the new system. For example, a new marriage, new job, new place of education, etc. makes a person in need to get adapted to it.

The next phase of moving through resembles the period of liminality. It is a neutral zone of emptiness and uncertainty where the process of renewal happens for the individual. In this phase, the individual handles the new roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. The final phase, i. e., moving out, signifies the separation or end of one transition and the beginning of the other. While being separated from familiar surroundings, people feel grief and experience disequilibrium. For example, shifting home, returning to school, changing jobs, etc. looks into the loss of the former situation, and there is a self-made restriction to pass on to the next.

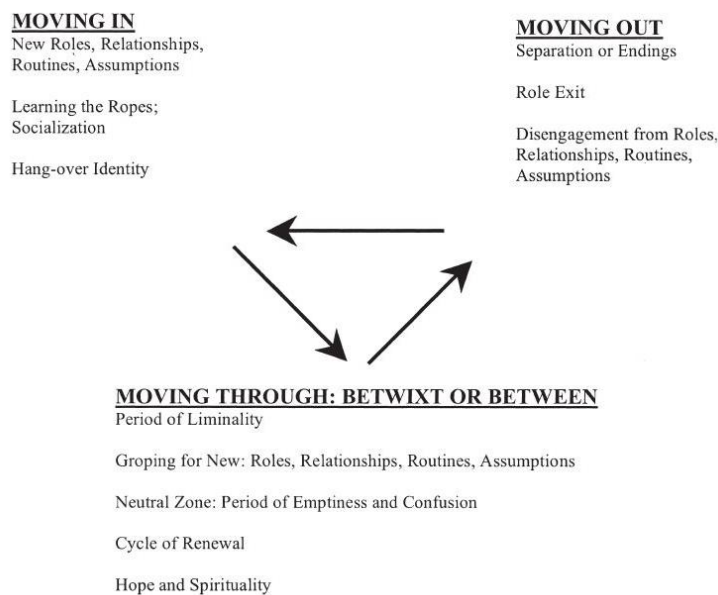


Figure 2: Schlossberg’s integrative model of transition (Goodman et al. 50)

In the next section of her transition theory, she introduces certain factors that influence transition in an individual. Interestingly, she framed it as 4S. A person in transition copes with the change according to these factors that are regarded as potential assets and/or liabilities. They are known as coping resources for an individual in transition. The 4S’s are situation, self, support, and strategies.

Considering the first S, it is built based on certain factors such as trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience, concurrent stress, and assessment. The trigger refers to the influence or factor that forced the start of the transition. It can be anticipated or unanticipated, an event or a non-event that may lead to a change in an individual's life. A trigger can be external. It helps individuals to have a new dimension to their lives. Even though the trigger is external in nature, it can have intense internal conflicts and consequences. For example, the retirement of the husband can trigger fear and anxiety about ageing in his wife. The external factor leads to an internal trigger happening more intensively. Transitions are influenced by the time at which they occur. Depending on the situation and perspective, it can be termed a good time or a bad time of transition.

When transitions occur at an off time, it is considered uncomfortable. For example, a newlywed couple will consider separation from their parents as a good time of transition, whereas, from the perspective of their parents, who wish to have their children with them at their old age, they will consider it a bad time. In the majority of transitions, the individual's level of control is critical in determining how they adapt to the change. It is the individual's decision that is more influential if the transition is internal. The response to a transition decides whether the individual should cope with it or not. If the transition is handled stably, the individual will be successful in coping with the transition. It is decided on the basis of how the individual considers the transition internally and how the individual interacts externally. The next factor in the first S is the role change that happens to an individual in transition. Role change includes role gains and role losses. The degree of stress in a transition depends on the nature of the role change. In events like marriage, parenthood, employment, promotion, etc. there occurs role gain for the individual, whereas in events like divorce, retiring, being widowed, etc. there is role loss for the individual in transition. For example, in the period following the birth of a first child, women assume the role of mother. That woman's feelings about being a mother will be mixed. She will experience joy and satisfaction in giving birth to her child. At the same time, she will also feel exhausted, anxious, frustrated, and uncertain about her new responsibilities as a mother. She will experience a loss of freedom and will also be guilty of her negative feelings. Even though the event is anticipated and prepared,

the role change would give such a mixed experience. The duration of the transition is an important factor in forming the perspective towards the transition. A permanent change will be considered differently from a temporary change. If an event is temporary, it will be accepted by the individual with the satisfaction of going back to his/her normal days. But if the transition is permanent, the consequences of that particular realisation on the individual will be high compared to those of the temporary transition.

Stress and the negative effects of transition can increase if the duration of the transition period is unknown. Past experiences through similar transitions give an idea of the nature of the transition for the individual. If an individual was successful in a transition of the same kind in the past, it is probably certain that it will be repeated the next time it occurs in the same context and circumstances. Conversely, if the person was defeated by the situation, he/she would be more vulnerable to overcoming it in the future. Concurrent stress discusses the stress and transitions that are stimulated by transitions in one area. It checks whether there are any other sources of stress present in the individual undergoing a transition. The individual's opinion on who or what is responsible for the shift, as well as how the individual appraises the transition, is the focus of the assessment. Individual reasons, other people's actions, or societal issues can all be influenced by one's perspective. There are certain questions based on the above-mentioned factors that rule the situation in the 4S. In short, the questions can be: what triggered it? Was it a good or bad time? Who initiated the transition? Was there a role change? Was there any previous experience? How did the individual assess it?

The 4S's second factor is self. Personal and demographic traits, socioeconomic situation, gender, age and life stage, state of health, ethnicity/culture, psychological resources, ego development, attitude, commitment and values, and spirituality and resiliency are all discussed. Variation in the personal and demographic conditions of an individual including socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity or culture, age, health conditions, etc. decides the impact of the transition on the individual. If these conditions are the worst for a person, the impact of stress and the consequences of such transitions will also be negative for the individual. In many of these transitions, the environment in which the individual interacts will be crucial in

determining the transitional impact. Biological, social, and behavioural differences according to gender influence the coping process in an individual. With regard to age, the biological and physiological nature of the individual affects the transitions. In expert views, the chronological age has less importance compared to that of the psychological age that enables one to respond to social pressures and tasks, the social age, which denotes the extent to which the individual is a part of the social roles, and the functional age, which decides the ability to perform according to the expectations. The psychological resources include ego development, optimism, self-efficacy, commitments and values, as well as spirituality and resilience. Individuals in transition approach the transition with different psychological perspectives. It depends on the maturity level of the individual with respect to their ego development and age. Optimism and control over the situation are important in handling the transition positively. It boosts their resilience.

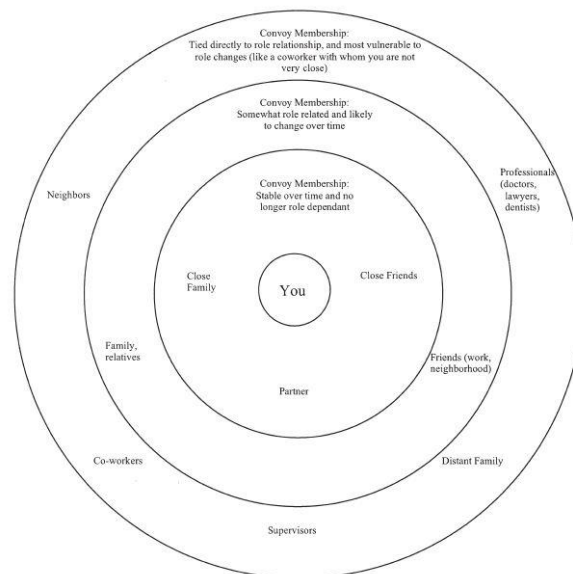


Figure 3: Representation of social support in 4S by Schlossberg (Goodman et al. 78)

The next factor in the 4S is the third, i.e., support. During the process of transition, an individual may encounter troubles and problems coping with it. In such a situation, the external factor of support from intimate relationships, family, friends, institutions, or communities is very essential to the individual.

The feelings of trust, understanding, and confidence will definitely give support to the individual under stress to positively accept his transitional situation. If

there is no such support from the individual's surroundings, the individual's condition will be worse. Sometimes, seminars, lectures, workshops, or other types of discussion group programmes can help the individual to successfully experience the transition. Support can also take the form of love, affection, material aid, information, time, and so on. The final factor, i.e., strategies, is the coping methods taken by the individuals in transition to overcome the stress and tension that they bear during the transition period. In the view that resembles transition theory, it says that the process of coping happens before, during, and after the particular challenging situation (George and Siegler 37). Researchers have identified three types of coping. The first type is the responses that modify the challenging situation, like negotiations, discipline, optimism, seeking advice, etc. The responses that control the meaning of the problem are in the second category. Here, situations are neutralised, substituted, compared, or ignored. The third category includes responses that aid in stress management after an event has occurred. It can be denial, acceptance, withdrawal, avoidance, etc. - coping strategies that rely on people's psychological attributes such as self-esteem and mastery. It can be emotional discharge, self-assertion, or passive forbearance. According to Lazarus and Folkman, as mentioned in their book *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*, published in 1984, there are two coping orientations: one option is to change the situation, which is instrumental in nature and the other option is to relax oneself by accepting the situation, which is a palliative method. There are four different sorts of coping mechanisms that might be used. They are direct action, information seeking, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic.

The transition model of Schlossberg is applied mainly to identify the transition processes of students who are in the process of transition from their school life to college life or to study the undergraduate or training transition during their academic days. It also analyses the transition that happens to non-traditional dropouts from college. The transition process of students belonging to the undergraduate senior year of college is explored with the help of Schlossberg's theory of adult transitions. It focused on the liminal experience of the students who participated in the phenomenological interview (McCoy). The 4S and other concepts of the Transition theory are applied to identify the drop-out males from a Western four-year bachelor's degree programme. Transition theory is useful in identifying the situation, self,

support, and strategies during their admission, learning period, and drop-out period from college (Powers). Another research area where Schlossberg's Transition is used is to explore the experiences of parents whose children transit to and from a military base school. Schlossberg's 4S transition model guides the study's conclusion (Moran 3-107). There are other research papers and PhD dissertations that have applied Schlossberg's point of view. They are, in one form or another, connected with the transition of students or adults from one position in their lives to the next. Apart from the limited examples mentioned above, the theoretical scope of Schlossberg's transition model can go parallel to that of Turner's liminality. Hence, the transition model by Schlossberg would be the best tool to analyse the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases of the character's life events in the works of George Saunders as it resembles more the moving in, moving through, and moving out process described by Schlossberg. Moreover, the 'moving through' process of transition has been equated to the liminal phase which directly proves the interconnection and similarity of the processual trajectory with that of the stages of transition theory.

Based on the insights gained from gathering valuable information about George Saunders, Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, and Dr Nancy K Schlossberg, it is reasonable to conclude that these intellectuals are linked by a common thread of knowledge that will be revealed by this research. The theoretical contributions of Victor Turner and Dr Nancy Schlossberg, along with the contributions of Arnold van Gennep, Arpad Szacolzcai, Bjørn Thomassen, Paul Stenner, and others, will be a guiding pathway to discovering the presence of liminality in the works of George Saunders. Because the research's main goal is to explore liminality, the main focus will be on the middle phase discovered in the characters while analysing through the tripartite structure. Transition theory is thus linked with liminality in order to analyse the characteristics of the characters in the three phases, such as pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal.

Liminality by Victor Turner is based on the ritual and ceremonial context in the discipline of anthropology. It is based and focused on the cultural aspects followed by certain tribal groups in performing their rituals. Turner had taken it as a basis to correlate his findings to explain the theatre experience through liminality under the title social drama. In the following decades after the contributions of Victor Turner,

liminality was adapted to many other disciplines, taking the conceptual aspect of the theory. The in-between situation of events and settings were analysed with the help of Turner's liminality along with other research studies on the topic. The pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases that are borrowed from Arnold van Gennep for the explanation and research on the intermediate phase are centred around the ritual context. In this research, the different phases of liminality explored and described by Victor Turner are applied to a wider context. It is not restricted to the ritual side of the explanation, but is elaborated to explore the possibility of liminality in different situations of life forms, especially that of human beings. While referring to the works of George Saunders, the research focuses on the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases in the life period of the characters included in the work. The advantage of liminality in this research is that it allows viewing the characters and the work from a different perspective to explore their situational variation and transition. Exploring the selected works of George Saunders through liminality is different from the research done by other scholars as it paves a new path to the interpretation of the texts. Schlossberg's transition model, especially the application of 4S in the research, gives an extra advantage in analysing the intermediate phase of the characters in the works of George Saunders compared to that of the pre-liminal and post-liminal phases.

Though Turner's liminality is used and compared with the pre-liminal and post-liminal phases of the characters, the concepts put forward by Turner in relation to liminality are also considered for its application in the texts of George Saunders. In this study, the concepts highlighted for application are liminal entity/personae, liminal space, permanent or temporary liminality, anti-structure, and various forms of *communitas*. Along with the application of Turner's liminality, 4S of Schlossberg's transition model is also incorporated to develop clarity on the nature of the transition that happens to the characters and the stories due to the transition from the pre-liminal phase to the post-liminal phase through the liminal phase. As Schlossberg's transition model has depicted the relationship between the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases with that of the moving in, moving through, and moving out concepts of transition, the relationship between Turner's liminality and Schlossberg's transition model is strong. Rather than sticking to the ritual or cultural aspect of Turner's liminality, this research utilises it metaphorically. Such an application of the theory

would help to understand the liminal nature and liminality in the selected works of George Saunders that discuss various themes and issues as fictional stories. The application of liminality in analysing the selected works of George Saunders is conducted in the following chapters, where more concepts related to liminality are used.

Therefore, Victor Turner's liminality along with insights from Arnold van Gennep's rites of passage, Arpad Szakolczai's permanent liminality, Bjørn Thomassen's modern liminality, and Paul Stenner's psychological aspects of liminal hotspots and liminal affectivity, are explored with the required details from their basic explanatory texts and other resources. The theoretical extracts from liminality and transition theory will be restricted to selected quotes in the following chapters. This is to avoid repetition of the same as a major part of the analysis is grounded in the identification of the tripartite structure to explore liminality. This chapter will serve as a reference framework for the analytical and interpretative research conducted in the following chapters that deal with the application level of liminality and transition theory.

Lincoln in the Bardo: A Liminal Perspective

This chapter explores George Saunders' debut novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* from the analysis of the liminal existence of the major characters in the bardo setting presented by the author. The processual framework is applied to distinguish the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases of the characters so as to discover the unusualness and instability in the characters during the intermediary phase. Also, the setting of the bardo used in the novel to place the ghost characters is equated to a liminal space where the anti-structural aspects of the altering situations tend to develop a sense of *communitas* in the bardo dwellers. The various concepts that come under the broad area of Turner's liminality are applied and the respective findings are recorded.

During the period of the American Civil War, the vigilance and efficient work done by Abraham Lincoln in his office were much higher than any other American President in the history of the country. Apart from the basic functions of government, he also had to manage the other departments by giving a primary concern to controlling the ongoing civil unrest in the country. It was not as easy as a war between two countries, because the people involved in the war were the citizens of the country itself. He had immense pressure from both the northern as well as the southern states regarding the issue. The American Civil war lasted from April 12, 1861, to May 19, 1865, during Abraham Lincoln's presidency, which began on March 4, 1861, and ended on May 19, 1865. The war was fought between northern states that supported the union and the southern states that established the Confederacy to oppose it. The southern states were in support of continuing slavery to boost their production and economy, whereas the northern states advocated for their freedom and the abolition of the institution of slavery. It turned out to be a battle between the eleven southern states that seceded from the union and the official American state unions. The issue of slavery was not a sudden outbreak after Lincoln became President. It was a long-term discussion matter of conflict within the union. From 1815 onwards, the northern states began to concentrate more on modern ways of development other than sticking to

traditional agricultural modes of the economy. They invested mainly in the industrial and financial sectors by developing the basic infrastructure in their states. Therefore, the northern states were more advanced compared to the southern states. The southern states focused on large plantations where the need for a large part of the labour force was inevitable. For the availability of the labour force, they had to rely on the migrant workers, whom they considered slaves. Unlike the northern states, the southern states invested more in their slaves than in the land. So, the abolition of slavery was not an easy task for them to accept all of a sudden. The need for state rights was advocated by the southern states, as they wanted political power to decide the rules related to their issues in connection with their states.

The rise of morality and interest in protecting free labour after the Mexican-American war of 1848 led the northern states to support the abolition of the bondage of slavery in many states. The southern states became polarised towards the northern states as their ideologies and interests did not match each other. When the war began in 1861, Abraham Lincoln's primary aim was not to end slavery but to fight for the unity of the nation. It is evident in his letter to Horace Greeley, the editor of *The New York Tribune*.

“My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that.”

(Lincoln, “Letter to Horace Greeley”)

This statement from Lincoln on the initial status of the conflict was due to political reasons. He, being the President, did not want to lose the support of even the states that advocated slavery. Therefore, he took a mild stand on the issue by concentrating on the unity of the nation. With the onset of the Civil War, the American soldiers from the southern states had some confusion within them as to whether to join the union or in support of their home state. Those who continued with the union had to face personal pain from their friends and relatives in their home states.

Lincoln's win was without the support of any southern states, which was also the reason for the outbreak of the conflict. Lincoln felt it was his duty as a president to unite all the states of America. He did not accept the separation of the Confederate states from the Union. Southern states such as South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Virginia, and Texas seceded from the Union after Lincoln became the President. Jefferson Davis was elected as the president of the Confederacy. In July 1861, the Confederate forces won the First Battle of Bull Run, which affected badly the Union led by the President. In 1862, the Second Battle of Bull Run was also a defeat for the Union. The war continued between the two sides of the United States of America, which killed almost six to eight lakh civilians. On September 22, 1862, Lincoln issued his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, which was effective from January 1, 1863, stating the freedom of slaves both in the Union as well as the Confederate states. Lincoln had to face criticism for his Emancipation Proclamation, as it was not a major concern at the beginning of his support for the northern states. Though he was inaugurated for the second term as President of America in 1865, he was shot to death by John Wilkes Booth on April 14, 1865, while attending a play at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C.

Literature had a great influence on the progress of the Civil War by increasing the number of supporters in support of the abolition of slavery. The most influential literary work was the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, written by Harriet Beecher Stowe. It created widespread awareness among people about the injustice and cruelty of slavery and convinced people from the northern states to join the abolitionist movement. It boosted the impact of the civil war by invading the morality of the people through literature. Though the book received appreciation from the northern states, it was attacked with harsh criticism from the southern states. They claimed that the book exaggerated the situation in order to create sympathy for the other side. The Civil War was discussed in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature as a tragic mistake that resulted in the decline of a superior mindset in society, a chance for a new beginning by ending the immorality of slavery, the trauma of the southern states, and a destructive phase in America's history as it led to civilian clashes. The most well-known works on the Civil War were written by Thomas Nelson Page, Walt Whitman,

Margaret Mitchell, William Faulkner, William Styron, Stephen Crane, and Charles Frazier. Among them, Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* in 1895 and Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* in 1997 serve as the most important ones in depicting the fictional constructions of American society. The psychological impact of the war was well portrayed in the poems of Walt Whitman, such as "The Wound-Dresser" and "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" published in 1865. John Este Cooke, in his novel *Surrey of Eagle's Nest* in 1866 and Sidney Lanier's *Tiger-Lillies* in 1867, described the reality of the Civil War in detail. The short story collection of Ambrose Bierce titled *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*, published in 1891 was inspired by the writing of the experience of being into the scenes of the war (Isensee, *American Studies Journal*). Many such known and unknown writings have been about the American Civil War as it was an important historical event that decided what America had to be in the future.

Literary works help the readers get attached to the time frame and context discussed by the author in the book. *Lincoln in the Bardo* is such an experimental work by George Saunders that it takes the reader beyond time frames and even out of the very existence of the world. Though the major setting of the novel is based on the Buddhist religious belief of Bardo, major discussion based on the period of the American Civil War also aligns with the plot. The emotions and feelings of the 1861-65 period are reflected through the setting of bardo by the characters involved in the novel. He portrays the shabby, colourful, demented, and ignoble side of American life, which is occasionally sympathetic and upright (Wilhelmus 336). Because of this mention, the American Civil War period becomes important in the discussion of the novel. The theme of racism and the setting of the American Civil War are shadowed throughout the novel that travels in parallel with the storyline. Saunders has blended historical elements with fiction so as to produce a neo-historical novel. The historical context of the American Civil War and the death of Willie Lincoln are intermixed with the fictional world of Bardo borrowed from the Buddhist religious concept. The reader gets a feeling of jumping from fiction to reality and back to fiction continuously through the quotes that are taken by the author to fit into the real incidents, which is also not completely true while referring to its historical roots. The incidents described in the novel are not exactly true, but it makes the reader believe

they are true by giving references to the quotes and dialogues from historical texts, which may or may not have a historical basis. Saunders has “defiantly and brilliantly entered into the neo-historical project, combining a kind of verisimilitude with a technique that exposes verisimilitude as a convention like any other” (Moseley, “Lincoln in the Bardo: “Uh, NOT a Historical Novel”” 9).

In his attempt to write a neo-historical novel, George Saunders has tried to be neo in his methods of writing the novel. *Lincoln in the Bardo* is undoubtedly an experimental piece of writing that, even though it projects itself in the form of a novel, has deliberately deviated from the conventional norms of presenting a novel. This is evident from the dialogues and quotations used in the novel. Gradually, as the reader moves along with the tone of the characters, he or she will be able to enjoy the reading even without the references or the speaker’s names. As the narration is handed over from one character to the other, the reference of the person who delivers the dialogue becomes secondary to the reader who gets into the interest of the story. The novel has 108 chapters and 166 major and minor characters. As the novel is written from the perspective of a wide range of characters, it can be said that there is no specific narrator for the novel. The book review in *The Washington Post* about the novel’s narrative style says,

“Saunders has said he came to see his role as a novelist expanding to include the role of “curator.” So, is this actually a novel or a script? At first, the conscientious reader struggles to consider these passages as though they comprised a tall stack of individual epigraphs. But quickly *Lincoln in the Bardo* teaches us how to read it. The quotations gathered from scores of different voices begin to cohere into a hypnotic conversation that moves with the mysterious undulations of a flock of birds.”

(Charles)

As there are many characters involved in progressively driving the plot of the novel, one character takes his/her chance after the other, and Saunders has taken great attention to verify the flow of the storyline without getting into unwanted intrusions. Though many major and minor characters are included in the storytelling process, the major portion is handled by Hans Vollman, Roger Bevins III, and the Reverend

Everly Thomas. Their conversation seems to be like dramatic monologues wherein they also describe the internal conflicts or personal experiences of a different character with clear and evident knowledge of them in a similar way to how the description is given by a third-person narrator.

The shift from the events of the past and the final hours of Willie Lincoln's life is described through excerpts from different historically relevant books and letters. He has also included diaries, newspaper articles, personal testimonies, and scholarly contributions that discuss the point of view of Lincoln's friends, colleagues, opponents, and even the workers close to the President. They are not exactly the original and authentic sources for the excerpts, as they are interpreted or created by the author himself for the smooth flow of the novel and to make the readers believe that the historical events and dialogues referred to in the novel are true. He uses the method of verisimilitude in such chapters and intermixes it with some of the authentic texts referring to the situation at the White House during the last hours of Willie Lincoln. It gives Saunders "the role of a curator" (Charles, *The Washington Post*). George Saunders has taken much effort to build an interconnected link of excerpts, even though most of them do not exist. A review about the novel in the *National Public Radio* justifies it with an example mentioning,

"Throughout *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Saunders intersperses chapters packed with quotes from historical sources. He gives citations for these historical sources and some are legit — like Doris Kearns Goodwin's book on Lincoln, for instance. But other sources are made up. All the historical passages are tossed together indiscriminately."

(Corrigan)

It took George Saunders approximately four years to write *Lincoln in the Bardo*. The interesting fact behind the novel is that he had decided to write it twenty years back as the historical events related to the death of Willie Lincoln evoked "a melding of the Lincoln Memorial and the Pieta" (Mallon, *The New Yorker*) in his mind that made him feel empathetic towards the American icon on his loss of his favourite son. This picture of Lincoln and Willie Lincoln stuck in his mind when he came to know from the newspaper reports of that time that Abraham Lincoln had

visited the crypt of Willie Lincoln several times after the funeral. These thoughts came to Saunders when his cousin mentioned the history behind the crypt in Oak Hill Cemetery in Washington D.C. Therefore, the inspiration behind writing the novel did not come to him all of a sudden, as it had been with him for a long time. He tried to write it in several other forms which became unsuccessful due to his writer's block. The major confusion faced was about the framing of a suitable structure for the presentation of the idea. As the content of the book goes two centuries back, Saunders was conscious of presenting it in a different format to avoid the work being evaluated as a work of the nineteenth century. Even though he could not write it in any form for almost sixteen years, he continued to collect important details connected with Willie's death from different sources that came to his attention.

Saunders intended to highlight the emotional grief in the novel due to the loss of Abraham Lincoln's son. More than the parental grief, he would have tried to explore the possibilities of its parallel effect on the reader. As in his short stories, he aimed to create empathy by showcasing the grief of a father who is also the most respected icon in America. Reference to the historical records of Willie's death and Abraham Lincoln's reaction to it have substantiated his fictional modifications to the basic background of the plot. The reason for the loss in the novel is the permanent loss of Willie Lincoln, the son of Abraham Lincoln. Though the grief is also experienced by Willie's mother, as portrayed in the initial chapters of the novel, the plot develops to focus on the grief of Abraham Lincoln. Such a treatment of the character of Abraham Lincoln in the novel has two dimensions. The grief and emotional disturbance experienced by Lincoln are shown to the reader directly by fictionally describing the situation in which he went through. However, there exists an indirect meaning or hidden grief within the character of Abraham Lincoln, which the author tries to convey without directly describing it. The reader is expected to trace it out by interpreting the textual clues about the period in which it happens. If the most projected grief in the novel is about the personal loss of Abraham Lincoln as a father, the parallel grief that the author tries to convey is about the grief of Abraham Lincoln as the President of America. The mass death of soldiers and civilians during the American Civil War is referred to as the symbolic grief behind the personal grief expressed in the novel. In the article "Magical thinking: experiences of grief and

mourning in George Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo* and JEsmyrn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*" published in *Exploring Grief: Towards a Sociology of Sorrow*, it says:

"In *Lincoln in the Bardo*, the great loss of young soldiers gives rise to a collective grief displayed to the readers by way of excerpts from memoirs and letters that express the collective rage, grief and mourning among relatives – in contrast to the lack of equivalent material representing the mourning for dead slaves."

(Bale and Bondevik, ch.4)

Therefore, the interpretation of the incidents discussed in the novel throws light on the symbolisation made through the death of Willie Lincoln and the resultant grief of Abraham Lincoln, as well as the deaths of numerous soldiers and civilians during the American Civil War and the resultant grief of Abraham Lincoln as the President of America. In most of the short stories written by Saunders, there is an overemphasis given on empathy and compassion. The author is always keen on directing his readers towards the same track of sentimental narration. The article titled "'To Soften the Heart': George Saunders, Postmodern Satire, and Empathy" describes how Saunders deploys the concept and meaning of empathy as,

"Empathy is the primal faculty of recognizing the mindedness of Others; it is the human capacity to "feel into" another consciousness; it is an act predicated on receptivity to and acceptance of the Other, even when—especially when—the Other is stupid or deluded or degenerate, in other words, when the pathetic Other expressly does not deserve our benevolent receptivity."

(Neeper 287)

The empathy expected in the novel does not confine itself to Abraham Lincoln or Willie Lincoln alone, but it is also displayed while referring to the previous life and the bardo condition of other characters too. As every ghost character in the novel is trapped in their bardo condition without being able to move to their previous or postcondition, the reader is expected to develop the same emotion towards those characters as well. Each character, whether it is major or minor, narrates their brief story, which, even though it does not have relevance to the major plot, has to be

valued as it creates sparks of empathy in the reader. In an interview in *The Guardian*, the author admits the objective of his novel is that “at its heart, *Lincoln in the Bardo* is an exploration of empathy” (Cocozza, “George Saunders: ‘When I get praise it helps me be a little bit more brave’”). He also explains how the reader reads the story to its best so that the empathy in the reader is evoked automatically. Saunders gives two types of reactions while reading his works. In the first type, the reader accepts the details described by him without any opposite reaction from their logical thinking. The second type of reading makes them disagree with what he has tried to establish through his writing. If the reader follows the first pattern of reading, it is easier to make the reader feel close to the story as well as stand foot-to-foot with the author. The reader believes most of the details in the story, and the positive reaction expected by the author is easily produced in the reader. If the reader has not accepted the idea due to the many off-ramps between the writer’s thoughts and the reader, which makes the reader becomes a stranger to the emotions that are expected to be produced due to the story. Saunders has also stated in an interview in *Writer’s Digest* that even though the climax of the story is not much stronger, it can have a huge effect if the reader and the writer have a close bond between them through the interlinking medium of the ‘work’ done by the writer (Moss, “The WD Interview: George Saunders”).

In an interview titled “George Saunders, on His Debut Novel, Abraham Lincoln and Donald Trump”, it is stated that George Saunders did not aim at giving a sketch about Abraham Lincoln in *Lincoln in the Bardo* (Begley, *Time*) as there are numerous pieces of writing based on the man who has a prominent place in world history, especially in the political history of America. Saunders was keen on discovering the state of mind of Abraham Lincoln during the moments after the death of his son, as he was emotionally excited to explore the condition of a man of high status undergoing such tragic moments in life. More than being a historic adaptation, the novel tries to explore the altering state of mind of an individual during the unusual periods of life.

3. 1. Liminality in the Lincoln(s)

To start with the analysis of the text in general, it would be better to begin with the title of the novel itself. The title ‘Lincoln in the Bardo’ may not have been coined

without a broad thought to generate a meaning behind it. The first part of the title is familiar to the reader, and the second part might not be as familiar as the first. The title of the novel refers to the name of 'Lincoln' without giving clarity to which 'Lincoln' it points. This confusion might occur while analysing the intentional meaning behind the title in the light of liminality. In the novel, there are two Lincolns highlighted, i.e., Abraham Lincoln and his son, Willie Lincoln. As far as both these names have equal importance in the novel, the title of the novel can be interpreted in two ways. The first possibility is that it might be referring to Abraham Lincoln, who visits the crypt of his son after the funeral. While reading the novel, it is evident that Abraham Lincoln was the most disturbed person due to the death of his son amid the tensions of the American Civil War. Most of the usual features of the state of liminality were profound in his behaviour and actions from the time when the reader is informed about the critical condition of Willie Lincoln. This phase of liminality was at its peak when he went to see the body of his son in the cemetery. Although the relationship between Abraham Lincoln and liminality is proven, this interpretation of the title faces an opposing question as the title contains the word bardo rather than liminality. To get clarification on this question, details of Bardo have to be explored in detail, which will help to understand the novel in the light of a traditional Buddhist perspective.

3. 1. 1. Saunders' Buddhist Concept of Bardo

Bardo is not a limited topic that can be explained within a paragraph or two as it has deep layers and different interpretations by several renowned people practising the traditional and religious beliefs of Buddhism. Critics and readers are always interested in knowing about the link between Saunders and Buddhism, after which he adopted the concept of Bardo from the traditional texts of the Buddhist religion. In an interview with W. Brett Wiley, Saunders clarified the confusion about the relationship between the Buddhist Bardo and the bardo in his novel. He stated that the concept of bardo used in *Lincoln in the Bardo* is not exactly the original concept of bardo described in the Buddhist spiritual texts. He had indeed taken inspiration from the traditional concept prevalent in Tibetan Buddhism, but not in the same way. The concept of bardo in the novel is used as a major setting for the interaction of the

ghosts to take place. Even though the bardo in the novel can also be defined as an intermediate space between death and the afterlife, it has some modifications made by the author to fit into the slot and intention of the novel. The concept of bardo in the novel is an entrapped space wherein the ghosts are unaware that they are dead. The only way out of bardo is to accept their death at the earliest, which will initiate a *matterlightblooming* phenomenon, creating a ‘bone-chilling’ and ‘fire sound’ to transit them from their bardo space. The concept of bardo used in the novel is in its simplified form and has not looked into the complexity of the concept. Interestingly, the author uses the word, ‘Bardo’, only in the title of the novel. We find only certain features attributed to the setting that is tried to describe, and we do not find a single mention of the word bardo. The ghosts, or bardo dwellers, do not accept the reality that they are dead, which makes them unable to move out of their bardo condition. Those stuck inside the space of bardo are not able to go back to their previous life in the world and are also restricted by limited access. In the perspective of liminality, the liminal entity is separated from their previous life, values, and sentiments and they are alternatively forced to think about it. It is a stage of reflection of the memories and events through the liminal personae (Turner, “Betwixt and between: Liminal Period in Rites de Passage” 53). Even though the ghosts enter Abraham Lincoln’s body to convince his thoughts, they are not able to be back in connection with the world in the same state they were before. The bardo dwellers are subject to a change in their identity as they are no longer human beings and are considered ghosts who are separated from their previous state of living to an intermediate state of uncertainty regarding their existence. The novel highlights the anxiety and indecisiveness of Willie Lincoln, who is trapped in the bardo condition. By referring to the emotional variations of Willie, the author tries to connect it with the other bardo dwellers also. The disturbance, stress and depression experienced by Willie and other characters in the bardo are well portrayed through their dialogues. The alienation experienced due to their current unusual existence makes confusion in them regarding the state of bardo. The transition from bardo to the next level of existence is felt difficult for Willie as he believes his father would often visit him, and the passage to the next level gets difficult as time passes.

George Saunders has not only taken the effort to borrow the concept of the space of bardo to his novel, but also the interpretations of bardo related to the psychological nature of the people undergoing the process of transition. Bardo originally exists in the Nyingma literature's *Bardo Thodol*, a traditional Tibetan Buddhist text that describes the realm of bardo in detail via its six bardo stages. Padmasambhava is believed to have created *Bardo Thodol* in the eighth century, which was discovered by Karma Lingpa in the fourteenth century. It was kept inside the confines of religion until the concepts described in the text aroused the curiosity of the Western academic community. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which is more famous than the *Bardo Thodol*, was translated into English by Walter Evans-Wentz and published by Oxford University Press in 1927. The state of different Bardos, signs of death as well as the rituals to be followed at the time of death or after it happens are stated in the text. The text is read to the dead person aiming to maintain a clear and positive mental state upon entering death. It is in the belief that the consciousness will gain the preparedness to depart for the bardo state. In their belief, the lack of proper guidance will lead the individual not to realise the death and wander in a ghostly form until the next birth (Moreman 133-134). The six conventional bardos are: [1] the bardo of life, [2] the bardo of meditation, [3] the bardo of dream, [4] the bardo of dying, [5] the bardo of Dharmata, and [6] the bardo of existence. A psyche's psyche is transformed towards nirvana through a gradual cycle of activity from one bardo state to the next. The agonizing wilderness and scary hallucinations increase one after another, making it feel like an encompassing experience to the psyche. In *Luminous Emptiness – Understanding the Tibetan Book*, the engulfing and escaping pattern of Bardo is interpretatively described as,

“There are heightened qualities of different types of ego and the possibility of getting off ego. That's where Bardo starts – the peak experience in which there is the possibility of losing grip of ego and the possibility of being swallowed up in it.”

(Fremantle 54)

Although Saunders does not produce Bardo in a completely traditional or psychological sense, he has tried to interpret the situational experience most

appropriately. The interpretation of ego by Francesca Fremantle has been diluted to make it a prominent feature of bardo in the novel. Ego is equated with the acceptance of death by the bardo dwellers.

If they do not accept their death and existence in the Bardo, they are engulfed by the intermediate state of the Bardo. Sogyal Rinpoche defines ego, which is referenced in relation to Bardo, as a person's failure to remember own identity and, as a result, assuming false identities, which causes insecurity and fear. In the context of the novel, the real identity of the ghost characters' existing situations is a state after death that they have been oblivious to, leading to an emotional imbalance in the psyche and periods of deep uncertainty, angst, restlessness, paranoid delusions, ambiguity, bewilderment, confusion, tension, and conflicts. These psyche's fluctuating emotions during the bardo transition lead to statements like Chogyam Trungpa's saying that the Bardo is a very practical way of looking at our lives (*Transcending Madness: The Experience of the Six Bardos* 69).

The term 'bardo' implies the idea of 'intermediate state', 'transitional state', 'between state', 'gap', 'interval of suspension', and so on, with *Bar* meaning 'in-between' and *do* meaning 'suspend' or 'thrown'. It is also known as 'no man's land'. Similar to the bardo setting in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, there are other spaces described in various outstanding works of world literature. Such settings or situations also have the same attributes as bardo. It is the high point or apex of an experience, as well as a position of tremendous tension stuck between two opposing forces (Fremantle 54). Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* has its first part titled "Inferno", the second as "Purgatorio" and the third as "Paradiso" which is the most quoted literary work while reviewing Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo* because of the similarity in the intermediate passages used in both the works. The second part of the *Divine Comedy* gets connected with Saunders' bardo, resembling an interconnection between the Catholic Christian concept of purgatory and the Buddhist traditional concept of bardo. T. S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men* also utilises a setting similar to that of the bardo, where the Hollow Men and the narrator of the poem are trapped. Most of the characters in *Lincoln in the Bardo* are directly or indirectly connected with the bardo, described as a setting that produces these peculiar features. Each ghost figure is linked to the liminal quality of the bardo setting by Saunders, who uses it as a single interlinking

relationship between the ghost characters. The Bardo is a temporary or permanent space into which the spirit characters depart from their everyday lives. Their decision largely determines the temporality or permanence of their life in the bardo. Before obtaining their freedom from the afterlife, they pass through this transitional realm, which acts as a stage in between.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead claims that the Knower, or principle of consciousness, is detached from the deceased person's body and enters a slumber or trance state of mind. This initial stage is known in Tibetan as the *Chikhai Bardo*, or a transitional state at the time of death. The Knower enters the second bardo, the *Chonyid Bardo*, or the transitory condition of reality, while admitting the fact of death. The final stage of *Sidpa Bardo*, or the transitory state of rebirth, combines with this one. As mentioned in the text, the principle of consciousness takes rebirth in a human, another world, or the paradise realms. It is in the second state the Knower experiences "symbolic visions, one by one, the hallucinations created by the karmic reflexes of actions done by him in the earth-plane body" (Evans-Wentz 29).

Acknowledging the features of the concept of Buddhist bardo in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the conclusion important to the study is the analogous similarity between the concept of bardo and liminality. Though it is rooted in Buddhist spiritual terms, it produces certain liminal space peculiarities. The bardo described in *Lincoln in the Bardo* is more attached to the features of liminality than to the more complexly patterned Buddhist Bardo. Turner's liminality also takes a parallel route to that of the bardo. As the setting of the bardo in the novel is an intermediate space between death and the afterlife, it comes under the category of liminal space described by Turner in his interpretative studies on liminality. Similar to how liminal space has a separation and reintegration phase, the novel's setting of Bardo has a 'separation phase' from the previous life in the world to an intermediate space of Bardo where the inhabitants are expected to move to the next level beyond the limits of Bardo. Thus, there are three phases in the concept of bardo discussed by Saunders. It leads the concept to the tripartite structure introduced by Arnold van Gennep, which paved the way towards the discovery of liminality by Victor Turner. In comparison between Bardo and liminality, liminal situations are referred to as "highly specialised physical and emotional conditions" (Simmonds, "Contemplating Spiritual Experience" 4) where

there is a “deliberate setting aside of usual, ordinary, everyday reality in order to facilitate the experience of the spiritual or sacred, regarded as a more comprehensive reality” leading to a situation of suspension of disbelief (2). The primary motive of the novel is to save Willie Lincoln from the intermediate stage of bardo and into the next level of the afterlife, as it is dangerous for the existence of the soul of Willie there. Towards the end of the novel, most of the ghost characters escape from the trapped condition of the bardo as they hear the truth about the reality of death that they have all been through.

On the other side of the spatial characteristic of bardo, the most evident aspect that it lights onto the characters is the psychological and emotional peculiarities of being in the bardo. As it is a liminal space in-between death and the afterlife, the inhabitants also experience a similar characteristic of the space in which they are trapped. To a reader of *Lincoln in the Bardo*, it is easily understood that all the bardo dwellers also exhibit the liminal features produced by the setting of the bardo. While referring to the previous life and the bardo condition of the major characters like Hans Vollman, Roger Bevins III and the Reverend Everly Thomas, the reflection of the features of the liminal space of the bardo is high. The spatial nature of bardo has extended to the psychological aspect of the characters which is denoted as the presence of liminality in the characters in the liminal phase. The transition from the previous phase to the next is evident in their state of mind also. It might be the excitement to explore this particular state of mind in the characters which made the author write about them.

3. 1. 2. Abraham Lincoln and Multiple Liminalities

Considering the character of Abraham Lincoln, he is the most highlighted character outside the spatial limits of the bardo in which the ghost characters are trapped. Even though the character of Abraham Lincoln does not belong to the spatial setting of the bardo like the other ghost characters, he is also influenced by the features that are particular to the liminal space of the bardo which is reflected in his emotional and psychological stance during the progress of the novel. Even Abraham Lincoln’s wife who is also equally affected by losing her son is not highlighted as much as the President is shown in his grief. The name of Mary Lincoln is mentioned in a few

initial chapters during the peak point of the sickness of Willie Lincoln. After those chapters, the author does not give importance to her character's grief and sorrow. There might be an intention to project the character of Abraham Lincoln in the novel other than any other living characters represented in it. For discussing the need for the novel to focus on the character of Abraham Lincoln, the period of the death of Willie Lincoln and the American Civil War has to be compared. Through the analysis of the period of both the events, the connection between Abraham Lincoln with both the events as well as his importance in the novel will be evident.

As per the novel and the historical records, Willie Lincoln was at the peak of his typhoid sickness in the month of February 1862 and died on day 20 of the month in the afternoon. In the journal entry dated February 20, 1862, John G. Nicolay, who served as the private secretary of Abraham Lincoln writes,

“At about 5 o'clock this afternoon, I was lying half asleep on the sofa in my office, when his entrance aroused me. Well, Nicolay, said he choking with emotion, “my boy is gone—he is actually gone!” and bursting into tears, turned and went into his own office.”

(“With Lincoln in the White House” 71)

The same reference is used by George Saunders in his novel to inform the readers of the death of Willie Lincoln through the voice of Abraham Lincoln. His use of references for the purpose of storytelling is exciting as it was selected in a way that suits the situation. As per the excerpt from “Lincoln Lore: Bulletin of the Lincoln Life Foundation”, No. 1511, January 1964, provided by Saunders in the novel, on February 22, the body of Willie Lincoln was embalmed by doctors named Brown and Alexander, as per the instructions by Dr Wood (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 27). From the historical records, it is noted that on the same date, “Dr Charles D. Brown embalmed Willie's body” (*Lincoln Day by Day* 96). During these events, Abraham Lincoln was continuously disturbed by the tension of riots and violence in different states in America. As per the historical records, the Battle of Fort Donelson, which was won by the Union, took place from February 11 to 16, 1862. The days after Willie's death was also making him get busy with the responsibilities of the President. On February 21, information about “England's disapproval of U.S. proposals in the

Mason-Slidell case” (91) and the failure of the President’s recommendation for an industrial exhibition in London (91) was discussed with the President. On February 22, Tad Lincoln gets sick. On February 23, Abraham Lincoln and Sec. Stanton met at the War Department for discussion, and the expedition to New Orleans was instructed by General Butler.

On February 24, 1862, Willie Lincoln’s funeral service was conducted by Dr Phineas D. Gurley at 2 P. M witnessed by a large crowd (*Lincoln Day by Day* 91). The seriousness of the American Civil War that was haunting the country as well as its President even at the time of the death of Willie Lincoln is described in *Lincoln in the Bardo* by giving a reference to Jason Tumm as,

“Young Willie Lincoln was laid to rest on the day that the casualty lists from the Union victory at Fort Donelson were publicly posted, an event that caused a great shock among the public at that time, the cost in life being unprecedented, thus far in the war.”

(Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 152)

The details of the casualties and losses of the war were communicated to Abraham Lincoln on that day itself. The whole of America, including the President, was shocked by the report of the losses the country had suffered due to the war. The next day after the funeral ceremonies were also scheduled with official meetings for Abraham Lincoln. Saunders describes how the emotional stability of the character of Abraham Lincoln was very much affected by that time. It might have led him to visit the Oak Hill cemetery where Willie Lincoln’s body was buried. The transition and transformation in the psychological aspect of the character of Abraham Lincoln happen from that particular moment when he decides to secretly go to the cemetery to see the body of his son. Saunders mixes his creative vision about the condition of the President with that of the authentic references with quotations such as “Mr. Lincoln seemed truly mindful of the irreversibility of the loss” (*Lincoln in the Bardo* 56) that emphasise the situation encountered by Abraham Lincoln. By providing such a description of the situation, the author tries to plot the liminal phase of the character.

The book *Lincoln in His Own Time* states that “Willie’s death was a great blow to Mr. Lincoln, coming as it did in the midst of the war when his burdens

seemed already greater than he could bear” (Gurley, “Extracts from an Unpublished Manuscript [1860s?]” 65). Saunders writes citing Maxwell Flagg’s “Lincoln: A story for Boys” about the dedication of Abraham Lincoln to his position by describing that after having placed the body in a coffin at the temporary cemetery borrowed from Judge Carroll, “the President left his boy in a loaned tomb and went back to his work for the country” (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 24). Though the situation of the country did not allow him to spend time with his son, it does not mean that Abraham Lincoln was not affected by the loss. Saunders takes quotes about the relationship between Abraham Lincoln and Willie Lincoln as per the details provided by people who knew them. In the book *Lincoln in His Own Time* edited by Harold K. Bush, it is said that Willie was Abraham Lincoln’s favourite. The two were inmates and were seen hand in hand most of the time (Willis, “Sketch on the Funeral for Willie Lincoln, 1862” 73). The description points to Abraham Lincoln who came to the funeral service “with a burden on his brain at which the world marvels – bent now with the load of both heart and brain – staggering under a blow like the taking from him of his child!” (73).

In the book *Abraham Lincoln, a Man of Faith and Courage*, the writer finds how Abraham Lincoln had been affected by the loss of his son. Before being the President of America, during his term as President and till the moment of his death, he had to face several challenges in his personal, social, and political life. “Of all the multitudinous sorrows life dealt Lincoln, none could compare to the death of Willie” (Wheeler 183). From these details from the texts related to the biography of Abraham Lincoln, it is evident that Lincoln saw Willie as a mirror of himself, with great and fondest hopes (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 49). The foremost transformation brought to Lincoln by the death of Willie Lincoln was the thought of the need for God in his life, unlike before. The criticism of his administration as the war was not going well, along with personal loss, together made “the deepest spiritual awakening of Abraham Lincoln’s life” (Wheeler 183). Even though he turned out to be a strong believer, he adamantly denied the rumours of his interest in spiritualism. “A simple faith in God is good enough for me, and beyond that, I don’t concern myself very much” (Gurley, “Extracts from an Unpublished Manuscript [1860s?]” 65) was his response to such news that continuously annoyed him.

George Saunders might have focused his story on the Lincolns because of their bond between them. He extended the intensity of their love beyond the death of Willie through the fictional setting of bardo. According to the writing of Saunders, it was the love for his son that made Abraham Lincoln visit the cemetery in the early morning of February 25, 1862. It is in this decision that Abraham Lincoln unknowingly connects with the bardo condition of Willie Lincoln by being in the depths of his liminal phase. Due to the disturbances from his responsibility as the President of America, he might not have been completely affected by the liminality produced in his liminal phase. He decided to concentrate on his liminal phase and to be with his lost son's memories during the night-time at the cemetery where Willie's body was left after the funeral ceremony. Nobody who attended the funeral would have thought about such a move from the President of America who stood strong to the public even at the worst times of the challenges in his life.

The intensity of the grief and sorrow of the character of Abraham Lincoln is high which resulted in his decision to visit the cemetery. It was an outburst of the well-controlled emotions of a father who also serves as the President of America. The anxious, unusual and uncertain state of Abraham Lincoln is shared through the perspective of Hans Vollman as,

“It is out of control. Who is doing it. Who caused it. Whose arrival on the scene began it.

What am I doing.

What am I doing here.

Everything nonsense now.”

(Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 115)

Individuals try to explore themselves and slip into the world of memories when they give themselves time to get lost in their world apart from the engagements of their daily work life. Abraham Lincoln gave himself some time to be with his son, even though it was after the funeral. This particular decision leads him more into the phase of liminality from his previous phase, i.e., before the severity of the sickness and the death of Willie Lincoln. As per the details provided by Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage*, the death of a person can evoke liminality. There is a phase

before, during, and after the unexpected or expected event. With the limited information within the novel, the three phases of liminality can be distinguished as the phase before the information on the severity of the sickness of Willie Lincoln which is academically known as the pre-liminal phase of Abraham Lincoln, the phase of sickness that gets severe and ends up in death which can be identified as the progressive development of the intermediate phase of liminality which is called the liminal phase; and the phase after which Willie moves out of his bardo condition can be referred to as the final phase of liminality known as the post-liminal phase. The liminal phase for Abraham Lincoln is comparatively longer than the other two phases as it is considered from the beginning of the information about the sickness of Willie Lincoln. It is through the intensity of this liminal phase that the reader is able to know how passionate the parental love of Abraham Lincoln was for Willie Lincoln. At that point in time, the fatherly figure of Abraham Lincoln is highlighted through his grief by the author. The identity of being the president of a nation is kept apart when Abraham Lincoln spends his time at night with his most beloved son whom he lost all of a sudden due to the play of fate. This shift of identity at times is an interesting feature of human beings which is often practised knowingly or unknowingly when situations and priorities change in life. Victor Turner, in the essay “Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media” (1985), describes this transition as three stages wherein the second stage is the rites of margin or *limin* occurring in limbo space and time. From the angle of rites discussed by Arnold van Gennep and Turner, the participants in the second stage experience transition – a neither here nor there but betwixt and between applying to mundane life before and after the rites occur, leading to the loss of the previous status for passing through the liminal status to the new place or order (Turner, “Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media” 208).

The priority of Abraham Lincoln at the moment while being in the cemetery is to be with his son for some moments without any external disturbances to his public figure and responsibilities. Due to the continuing tensions of the American Civil War and other political matters, he could not completely shift into the identity of a father figure, though he had the most throbbing heart for the loss of his son. As he completely shifted into the identity of a father figure, the liminal phase of the period got intensely strong in producing the resultant emotions of grief, anxiety, uncertainty,

ambiguity, and indecisiveness in him. He was going through an unusual situation in his life. It can be described as a blank state of mind wherein he could have experienced a limbo effect in life. The moment after realising that someone or something has been lost forever would evoke a feeling of hollowness in the victim of the situation. Here, Abraham Lincoln's loss of his son is permanent in nature which would result in the characteristic features of liminality. Through the narration of Willie Lincoln's ghost character, Saunders describes the emotional outbreak of Abraham Lincoln when he held the body of his son in his hands.

“Mouth at the worm’s ear, Father said: We have loved each other well, dear Willie, but now, for reasons we cannot understand, that bond has been broken. But our bond can never be broken. As long as I live, you will always be with me, child. Then let out a sob
Dear Father crying That was hard to see And no matter how I patted & kissed & made to console, it did no”

(Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 61)

George Saunders tries to point out the emotional situation of Abraham Lincoln wherever possible. He notes that even though Abraham Lincoln “formulated a goodbye in some sought of positive spirit” (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 231), he was overwhelmed with “sadness, guilt, and regret” (231). He was colder and sadder than before as he was engulfed by the intermediate state of liminality. In his liminal moments in the cemetery, he was remembering the moments with Willie Lincoln when he was alive. The recalling of memories is an act of the person's wish to have a chance to get back to those days. Abraham Lincoln might have wanted to go back to the pre-liminal phase of his life where he could be with his son who was alive at that point in time. In a liminal passage, there is no going back possible as the tripartite structure is linear in one direction with the possibility of a transition from the pre-liminal to the post-liminal phase. Either the person involved in the liminal passage can be stuck in the intermediate phase or can even escape to the final phase of reintegration with a possible transformation. As the death of Willie Lincoln was already certified, even though Abraham Lincoln wished for him to be back to a normal life, it would not happen in the real world. As there is no going back to the

pre-liminal stage, the only possibility lies in moving forward through the liminal phase of life in order to find ways to move out of it to the post-liminal phase.

In the case of Abraham Lincoln, the novel provides an external force that gives him relief from the liminal phase of his life. While sitting at the chapel, he began remembering and reviewing certain things about Willie, concerning his illness (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 281). His recollection and reviewing can also be considered a meditation process in which he was making himself adjust to the situation by accepting the reality that his son was dead. Acceptance is a coping method that is best used throughout the novel by every character to move out of their liminal phase.

In the fictional layer of the novel, the author details the entering of the ghost characters into the body of Abraham Lincoln to convince him, so that it makes Willie move to his afterlife. They are able to taste and feel what he feels inside. Willie explains how he felt while entering his father for the first time as, Willie “Could feel the way his long legs lay, How it is to have a beard Taste coffee in the mouth and, though not thinking in words exactly, knew that the feel of him in my arms has done me good” (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 61). Other characters, especially Hans Vollman, Roger Bevins III and the Reverend Thomas also entered Abraham Lincoln. For the last time when Willie Lincoln entered Abraham Lincoln, he was able to know that his father was recollecting about him and his funeral. It made him realise that he was dead. As this realisation came from the thoughts of Abraham Lincoln, Willie was sure of its authenticity. When he told other bardo dwellers about the discovery of his death, they were also accepting the information as they too believed Abraham Lincoln.

“Dead! The lad shouted, almost joyfully, strutting into the middle of the room.
Dead, dead, dead!
That word.
That terrible word.”

(Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 296)

This led to relief for Abraham Lincoln, who was affected by guilt, grief, and sorrow for the loss of his son. Simultaneously, Willie was also taken to the afterlife

from the setting of the bardo. Through the acceptance of the reality of the situation, both Abraham Lincoln and Willie Lincoln were moved out of their liminal phase. It is written that Abraham Lincoln had a startling and sudden jolt in his seat at the moment when Willie left, through the process of *matterlightbooming*.

“Momentarily unsure, it seemed, of where he was.

Hans vollman

Then got to his feet and made for the door.

Roger bevins iii

The lad’s departure having set him free.

Hans vollman

So quickly did he move that he passed through us before we could step aside.

Roger bevins iii”

(Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 302)

In certain situations of liminality, that is, as a result of someone’s death, the only possible way out of the intensity of the liminal phase is to accept the reality of the situation as it has happened and to move on. This reaction will help to overcome the negative nature of the liminal period of the particular situation. Therefore, the character of Abraham Lincoln is a perfect example of the transition and transformation due to liminality. The characters, including Abraham Lincoln and Willie Lincoln, experience the state of liminality as described by Victor Turner. They experience neither one state of mind nor another; they are in-between the different states in the novel. An interpretation of Turner’s liminal insights by Timothy Carson explains the rites of passage as: “Pre-liminal – the known and assumed structure of life; Liminal – the ambiguous transitional period; Post-liminal – the new adjusted and transformed state of being” (*Neither Here nor There* 4). Analysing the transitional liminal phase through the lens of Schlossberg’s transition model, the first and foremost visible characteristic is that the liminal phase of Abraham Lincoln was unexpected. However, when the sickness got severe, Abraham Lincoln and Mary Lincoln might not have confirmed anything other than Willie’s death. Therefore, it began as an unanticipated event in the life of Abraham Lincoln which gradually progressed to an anticipated event at the moment of Willie’s death. In the nineteenth century, the death rate due to typhoid was high, and it was expected to be in the worst

condition if it was affected. Schlossberg's 4S are the major sets of factors that influence a person's ability to cope with the transition (See Table 3). Considering the first S, i.e., situation, the triggering factor of Abraham Lincoln's transition is the sickness and death of Willie Lincoln at the off-time of his social clock. Being a father, it was a total loss for him. According to the novel, the uncertainty of the event lasted for a few days until he accepted reality. Even though there were challenging situations in his life previously, this was one of the most challenging in the life of Abraham Lincoln. During his liminal phase related to the death of Willie Lincoln, there were other stressful events connected to the American Civil War that was haunting and disturbing him. The whole country was in support of him during his pathetic situation. His personal staff, security wing, and other officials have noted the incident in their letters and diaries. Even though all the factors were in support of the President, he could not be out of his liminal phase. Here, the coping can be interpreted in two ways: [1] Abraham Lincoln himself went through a recollection through meditation, which made a transformative transition in him; or [2] the fictional element of the novel where Willie entered his father made all the changes. Even if it was any one of them, the ultimate result was satisfactory as Abraham Lincoln was relieved from his anxieties and concerns about his son. He could get out of his liminal phase through a positive transformation that was reflected in his decisions after that event. Saunders describes the decision that Abraham Lincoln reached at last as a result of the unusual instabilities of his state of mind. It is expressed to the reader through the words of Mrs. Francis Hodge who reads the mind of the President as,

“I will go on, I will. With God's help. Though it seems killing must go hard against the will of God. Where might God stand on this. He has shown us. He could stop it. But has not. We must see God not as Him but as IT, a great beast beyond our understanding, who wants something from us, and we must give it, and all we may control is the spirit in which we give it and the ultimate end which the giving serves.”

(Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 310)

The positive transformation of Abraham Lincoln can be related to his position as the President of America. The courage and exactness without being indecisive that

he achieved through his transformation reflected in the decision-making that helped to provide a conclusion to the American Civil War. According to her model, there is moving in, moving through and moving out in the process of the liminal phase of Abraham Lincoln. The moving in can be equated with the point at which the pre-liminal phase meets with the liminal phase. The shift from the pre-liminal to the liminal phase can be identified as the moving in process. The moving through denotes the gradual progress in the phase of liminality. The moving out is the point at which the liminal phase merges with the post-liminal phase. The moving in point of this particular liminality in the life of the character of Abraham Lincoln in the novel is the point in which he comes to know about the seriousness of the sickness of his son Willie Lincoln. After moving into the liminal phase, the effects of liminality on Abraham Lincoln increased as he moved through the phase. It comes to a peak when he is at the cemetery holding the body of Willie Lincoln where he feels volatility of emotions at the liminal phase. The moving out point is when he got relieved from the pain and sorrow of losing his son; the point at which Willie recognised his death and resulted in the moving out of bardo.

The above was the analysis of the liminality experienced by the character of Abraham Lincoln in his personal life as a father who lost his favourite son. It is the most highlighted part of the novel which the author was focusing on. In a direct reading, the reader is subject to the reading experience of the personal identity of Abraham Lincoln and the liminality that he had to experience in the context of the death of his son. Is there a liminal experience for Abraham Lincoln in the novel beyond the liminality due to his personal loss? Yes. Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo* describes two contexts of liminality at a time. It can also be said that by representing the grief of Abraham Lincoln in losing his son, Willie Lincoln, Saunders also tries to describe the pain of Abraham Lincoln as a President in witnessing the worst conditions in the country where the civilians engage in the war between them. From the beginning onwards, when the reader is informed about the sickness of Willie Lincoln, the official tensions of Abraham Lincoln are also mentioned due to which he could not be with Willie all the time during his last hours. There were official meetings and dinner parties which both Abraham Lincoln as well as his wife had to attend. "Willie was burning with fever on the night of the fifth, as his mother was

dressed for the party. He drew every breath with difficulty. She could see that his lungs were congested and she was frightened” (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 9). Saunders quotes that the party conducted by Lincoln was savagely attacked even though most of the important dignitaries attended it. The novel provides a huge list of attendees to the party. He also quotes from Kunhardt and Kunhardt that “Yet there was no joy in the evening for the mechanically smiling hostess and her husband. They kept climbing the stairs to see how Willie was, and he was not doing well at all” (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 15). This informs the reader that even though they conducted an official party at their residence, their mind was disturbed due to the sickness of Willie Lincoln that became worse every hour.

Saunders writes about the last visit of Abraham Lincoln, Mrs. Lincoln, and Robert to Willie after his death. They had spent nearly half an hour there with him. Saunders quotes from *Witness to the Young Republic: A Yankee’s Journal, 1828-1870* that “While they were thus engaged there came one of the heaviest storms of rain & wind that has visited this city for years, and the terrible storm without seemed almost in unison with the storm of grief within” (French, et al. 389). There is a reference to the grief that happens outside, i.e., in nature as well as inside the characters closely attached to Willie Lincoln. The perturbation inside the characters is because of their personal relationship with the child, which does not relate to anyone else from the outside. Whereas the disturbances shown in nature are a symbol of the tension that prevailed in the country at that particular time, which has a wider dimension than the inner conflicts of mind in the characters. If the inner is confined to a family, the outer relates to the whole country.

Therefore, Abraham Lincoln was equally affected by both the loss of his son and the conflicts in the country. “Some rites of passage involve the individual over and against the structure of society, while other liminality is social and includes entire groups, even nations” (Carson, *Neither Here nor There* 5). Even before the sickness and death of the child, he was into the liminality produced as an effect of the American Civil War. After being in the position of the President of America, from the very day of the beginning of the conflicts, Abraham Lincoln was haunted by the problems created in various parts of the country. It disturbed him intensely which did not allow him to spend enough time with Willie. Considering this particular liminality

that affected Abraham Lincoln, the pre-liminal phase is the period before the beginning of the conflicts which is regarded as the time before the American Civil War. The period in which the war progressed created massive deaths of both civilians and soldiers on the side of both the Union and the Confederate states can be regarded as the liminal phase. It is in this phase of Abraham Lincoln that his liminality due to the loss of his child begins. Therefore, the presence of double liminality is visible while considering the liminal conditions of Abraham Lincoln. This duality of liminality at a time can be categorised as a form of ‘multiple liminality’ where one overlaps with the other in a parallel mode. “Van Gennep argued that humankind’s existence comprises continuous transition or translation from one spatial state, symbolic situation, or social group to another and that these transitional rites and/ or liminal moments characterise the very essence of the human condition” (Downey, et al. 6–7). At the time when Abraham Lincoln was in the cemetery holding the body of Willie Lincoln, he was engulfed by the volatility of both liminalities. The liminality due to the onset of the American Civil War started first and lasted even after the other liminality ended in him. The main reason for such a liminal phase is the increasing chaos due to the war regarding the issue of slavery.

Saunders gives a hint about the bigoted beliefs of some of the bardo dwellers by describing them as white and black. Being white, some considered themselves superior and dominant and saw blacks as emotionless creatures that needed to be oppressed. The best example shown by Saunders is the character of Lieutenant Cecil Stone who fails to understand the importance of equality. He was racist in his attitude towards the black community and also restricted the black bardo-dwellers from mingling with the whites. In his life in the world, he was a racist lieutenant who enjoyed raping his slaves. Such ghosts in the bardo who nurtured their racist mentality while being in the world, continued the same while being in the bardo. Most of the characters, like Elson Farwell and Thomas Havens, rejected the views against blacks and even spoke against Lieutenant Cecil Stone. Considering the position of Abraham Lincoln, he was also prejudiced at the beginning, even when he led the Union in the American Civil War. His preliminary aim was not to oppose slavery but to bring unity to the country. Saunders creates an interesting moment when all the bardo-dwellers get inside Abraham Lincoln. It was a moment when everyone in the bardo united

without the discriminating boundaries of race. Some whites and blacks got into Abraham Lincoln to convince him. While being inside him, the bardo-dwellers felt the pleasure of being together.

“What a pleasure. What a pleasure it was, being in there. Together. United in common purpose. In there together, yet also within one another, thereby receiving glimpses of one another’s minds, and glimpses, also, of Mr. Lincoln’s mind. How good it felt, doing this together!”

(Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 253)

For such a purpose, no one wished to be excluded as everyone, one after the other, entered into the body of Abraham Lincoln. Their selfish concerns were set aside with a positive intention (Saunders 254). They felt that they were restored to their natural fullness. They all felt good while being together in the body of Abraham Lincoln (Saunders 256). This joining together for a cause is a symbolic representation of the unity that the nation had to achieve, which was the primary motive of Abraham Lincoln’s involvement in the war. He wanted a country where the Union and the Confederates would join together as a single nation with a single ideology. He had foreseen the strength that they could gain as a country when they were together rather than divided. By representing such an event in the novel, Saunders gave an idea about unity and its importance for which Abraham Lincoln was trying. The effect of being together was positive for the bardo-dwellers. Hans Vollman looked clothed in normal size, the number of body parts in Roger Bevins III became correct, the Reverend Thomas did not look shocked or scared, and Litzie Wright regained the capability of speech. The sense of equality in them while being inside Abraham Lincoln denotes the idea of being together as a single nation without the bigotry and discriminatory boundaries in the name of the race. Saunders showed that while being together, the imperfections become perfect as everyone is considered equal.

In the novel, Saunders adds a twist, making this togetherness a temporary process. The bardo-dwellers inside Abraham Lincoln had a hope that they could convince him to stay back for Willie. When Roger Bevins III asked the Bachelors to find more souls to convince Abraham Lincoln, they refused to do so. Losing hope in their unity, the bardo-dwellers were disappointed and “began to abandon Mr.

Lincoln” (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 263) one after the other. The main reason for the refusal was that the Bachelors were not with the other bardo-dwellers and could not experience the fruitfulness of their unity. Unlike the other bardo-dwellers, the Bachelors had no collective empathy. They could only think from an individual perspective with the abundant burden of selfishness. These events throw light on the reality of the American Civil War. There was no unity among the people, especially between the Union and the Confederate groups which were the major reasons for the continuity of the war. Though there were efforts to unite them, they were all in vain. Saunders puts forth the idea that unity means inclusion and cooperation followed by each person. Even if a small group gets distracted from the idea of unity, it will have a wholesome effect on others too. In the case of the American Civil War, the Confederate states were against the policies of the Union and formed a parallel government of their own, which was the primary reason for the war. Therefore, the failed attempt of the bardo-dwellers to get united with Abraham Lincoln represents the failed attempts by the President of America to unite the nation.

Later, in the novel’s conclusion, at the time of multiple *matterightbloomings* taking the bardo-dwellers away from the bardo, they all get united in the decision they take to leave their liminal space, i.e., the bardo. Abraham Lincoln is relieved from the tensions that haunted him for several days, and the bardo-dwellers could experience a powerful, reduced, ruined, remade, merciful, patient, and dazzled (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 305) Abraham Lincoln, which they would like to get into.

The revival in the decisions of Abraham Lincoln made him feel more powerful than before with a strong intention and clarity about the actions that he would take in the future. He was in a stand to fight to the maximum to achieve his intentions. He recognised that America “was for everyone, for everyone to use” (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 308). The rethinking that he had about his vision of America made him decide that the slaves had to be made free like any other white man in the country. He wanted a country where everyone was free and united. This particular decision taken by Abraham Lincoln can be regarded as a conclusive result of the anxieties and uncertainties that he had during the peak of the civil war and also the resultant unusual political situations. It is at this decision that Thomas Havens, who represents the black, decided to join Abraham Lincoln without escaping to the afterlife like

others, recognising that the newly transformed President has no aversion to black people. Saunders writes through the character of Thomas Havens that,

“I was comfortable in there. And suddenly, wanted him to know me. My life. To know is. Our lot. I don’t know why I felt that way but I did. He had no aversion to me, is how I might put it. Or rather, he had once had such an aversion, still bore traces of it, but, in examining that aversion, pushing it into the light, had somewhat, already, eroded it.”

(*Lincoln in the Bardo* 311-312)

The above-mentioned details and analysis of Abraham Lincoln give an idea about the possibility of Abraham Lincoln being the Lincoln mentioned in the title of the novel. The next person to be analysed is Willie Lincoln. The character in the novel given paramount importance next to Abraham Lincoln is his son, Willie Lincoln. Although many other characters are present in the novel to tell their tale, the author is interested in focusing on Abraham Lincoln and Willie Lincoln. After narrating their stories, the other characters too get involved in describing the situation, emotions, and progress in the state of Willie’s bardo period. They all try to save the child from being permanently trapped in the bardo. Saunders uses all the other characters, living, dead, and even the people who come in the quotations from various sources to narrate the story that is mainly about Abraham Lincoln and Willie Lincoln. Willie Lincoln becomes important as it is him who is dead and trapped in the bardo, whom Abraham Lincoln comes to visit personally out of his grief during the night-time without informing anyone else who is related to him.

3. 1. 3. Willie Lincoln and the Bardo Existence

Saunders gives a vivid description of Willie Lincoln through the quotes from historic books written by important personalities as well as from the ones that he created. From what Saunders collects from the book *Tad Lincoln’s Father* says, “Willie Lincoln was the most lovable boy I ever knew, bright, sensible, sweet-tempered, and gentle-mannered” (Bayne 3). There is also praise for his extraordinary self-possession. During the funeral oration by Phineas D. Gurley on February 24, 1862, he commented about Willie that he was active, inquisitive, conscientious, amiable, affectionate, kind, generous, gentle, and attractive (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo*

51). Saunders also includes a description that says even though the boy was naughty, wild, and overwrought, he was good (54).

If the character of Willie Lincoln in the novel is divided as per the tripartite structure introduced by Arnold van Gennep, in order to understand more about his liminal period in the light of the insights from Victor Turner, there are pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases that comprise his existence in the world, bardo space, and the afterlife. In a close analysis, there are two liminalities present in the novel related to Willie. Though the first liminality is of less importance when compared to the second, it also has to be addressed. The first liminality of Willie is concerning his sickness. The period before being sick can be considered the pre-liminal phase of Willie's life, where he was leading a normal life without any unusual happenings in life. The period of sickness to death is the liminal phase for Willie where he had to fight the anxieties and worries of his typhoid disease. Here, the post-liminal phase that is initiated with death is merged with the following liminality of the bardo. Death acts as a point where Willie escapes from the previous form of liminality, only to get into the next. As per the details in the novel, during the first liminal phase, Willie is visited by his parents, who were busy with the party that they hosted. Willie's death brought relief from the pain and distress due to the sickness, but it also brought immense sadness to the people who loved him. The release from the first liminal period was bliss to Willie, and it was a point at which people like Abraham Lincoln and Mary Lincoln became more immersed in the intensity of their liminality. The major part of the novel discusses the second liminality of Willie, where he was trapped in the bardo. With regard to the liminality of the bardo condition, the pre-liminal phase of Willie can be distinguished as the period before his death. The liminal phase is the duration in which Willie was stuck in the bardo along with the other bardo-dwellers. The post-liminal phase is the afterlife attained when he realises the truth that he is dead, and there is no way back to his life through the thoughts of Abraham Lincoln.

Willie, being new to the bardo, had no idea of it when he was introduced to the situation for the first time. Hans Vollman, Roger Bevins III and the Reverend Thomas helped him to convince about the problems of staying there for a longer period for people of Willie's age. It was the effort of the three ghosts that helped Willie to realise that he should not stay there for a longer period of time. He was emotionally

attached to his father and wished to stay in the bardo to see his father again. As with other bardo-dwellers, Willie also experienced similar kinds of anxieties, dilemmas, indecisiveness, tension, and uncertainty while being in the spatial condition of the bardo. He experienced discomfort and was disoriented at times due to isolation and alienation from the world and people familiar to him. As in the case of Miss Traynor, the tendrils, each the width of a wrist, were also a threat to Willie. In his case, he was reluctant to move to the afterlife because of his attachments in the pre-liminal phase that made him stay in the bardo. He had believed that he would be able to interact with his father. This attitude of Willie made the other bardo-dwellers see him as a ray of hope. They also thought that they too could move to their normal life. The progression of the liminal period of Willie can be identified as the journey from the belief saying, “My father was here and has promised to return. I am trying to last” (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 119) to a realisation that “Father will not return here. And none of us will ever be allowed back to that previous place” (298). Within the liminal phase itself, Willie is subject to this transformation which influenced his moving out of the bardo. After the final entry to the body of Abraham Lincoln, and by understanding the recollection of his memory about the funeral, Willie realised that he was dead. Hans Vollman quotes what Willie said, “Father said it, he said. Said I am dead. Why would he say that, if it weren’t true? I just heard him say it. I heard him, that is remembering having said it” (297). This point of realisation helped Willie and other bardo-dwellers to exit their bardo and move into their afterlife.

While considering the post-liminal status of Willie Lincoln, he says that he is allowed to do whatever he wishes to do. He recounts getting out of bed, going down to the party, swinging from the chandelier, rising up to the ceiling, flying out the window, and other things. This gives an idea that Willie has already exited from the state of bardo and is in the post-liminal phase, i.e., his afterlife. He compares his identity while being in the world with that of his identity being in the afterlife state. It is a comparison of the pre-liminal phase with that of the post-liminal. He says,

“Whatever that former fellow (willie) had, must now be given back (is given back gladly) as it never was mine (never his) and therefore is not being taken

away, not at all! As I return (who was of willie but is no longer (merely) of willie) return. To such beauty.”

(Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 301)

Willie’s identity in the pre-liminal and post-liminal phases is mentioned by him in his words. His words could be out of the wisdom that he gained after his exit from the bardo to the afterlife. These words by Willie resemble the thoughts of Abraham Lincoln, which he had earlier mentioned by referring to Willie’s life. Hans Vollman, while being inside Abraham Lincoln, says about the thought of Abraham Lincoln on Willie Lincoln that “he came out of nothingness, took form, was loved, was always bound to return to nothingness” (244). In the context of the nothingness before and after the worldly life of any person, the statement by Abraham Lincoln can also be interpreted through the lens of liminality. The pre-liminal and post-liminal phases of an individual become the ‘nothingness’ and the liminal phase as the duration of the individual in the world. Therefore, the liminal phase is the phase having more significance than the other two phases, as it is the phase where all the activities and transitions occur.

Liminality prominent in Willie Lincoln is closely related to Schlossberg’s transition. The liminal phases of Willie can be explained based on the four S described by Schlossberg in her transition model. The four S is a tool that helps to analyse and find the reasons behind the transition or liminality (See Table 3). The four S such as situation, self, support, and strategies, help to trace the in-depth reasons that produced the transition in the character in the particular circumstances in which the character experiences liminality. Also, it substantiates the tripartite structural division of the characters in the novel. An analysis of the situation of Willie Lincoln would help to decipher the flow of liminality in the character. The triggering factor behind the liminal phase of Willie’s life is his illness and death, which led him to be stuck in the bardo. As it was not a pre-planned happening, it can be regarded as an unanticipated transition that could not be controlled by Willie. liminality in the liminal space of bardo is temporary in its duration without any prior experience of the same. Willie changes his identity from the son of Abraham Lincoln to a ghost in the bardo, and again from the role of a ghost trapped in the bardo to the unlimited freedom of the afterlife. In his liminal phase, he is a bardo-dweller who gets stuck in

the boundaries of bardo. At that particular time, the identity of Willie as the son of Abraham Lincoln was of very little importance. Liminality, also termed as transition, shifts his identity from one to the other and the next. Being in the liminal space of bardo, the reader could feel the grief, sorrow, and sadness experienced by Willie along with the characteristic features of liminality that make him in an in-between situation. Regarding support, he was taken care of by Hans Vollman, Roger Bevins III and the Reverend Thomas due to the consideration that he was young and innocent. All the bardo-dwellers were supportive and wanted to make him free from the boundaries of the bardo. Their care and concern for Willie are evident from their involvement in entering Abraham Lincoln to persuade him about the situation. The coping strategy used by Willie to escape the situation of bardo was that he accepted the reality of death, which he understood from being inside Abraham Lincoln's body. The thoughts and flashbacks recollected by Abraham Lincoln about the funeral of Willie Lincoln made him believe that he was dead. This acceptance of death was an opportunity for him to realise that there would be no going back to his pre-liminal phase. Considering the above discussions about the liminality in Willie Lincoln, it is appropriate to mention that the transition in Willie Lincoln occurred silently from the perspective of the world, though intensely subjective and explosive to him.

As per the analysis of Abraham Lincoln and Willie Lincoln through the lens of liminality by Victor Turner, the conclusion on the question about the 'Lincoln' in the title of the novel is that the possibility lies equally with both the Lincoln(s). Willie Lincoln can be the 'Lincoln' mentioned in the title while referring to the title in a direct sense without analysing the text through the lens of liminality. While reading the novel, it is clear to the reader that Willie is the person who gets trapped in the bardo, whereas Abraham Lincoln is not dead in the novel and does not enter the bardo described by Saunders. He is a person who visits the cemetery of Willie frequently due to his immense grief and sadness. But, while analysing the text through the lens of liminality, it is clear that bardo is a condition similar to liminal space. The liminality and the liminal phase of Abraham Lincoln can be paralleled to the bardo existence of Willie Lincoln. Therefore, in the case of Abraham Lincoln, the bardo is not taken in its exact physical experience, but rather it is considered as a mental state. In the case of Abraham Lincoln, as per the analysis, there are two different liminal

phases at a time which overlap with each other. Thus, the title of the novel fits both the ‘Lincolns’ giving two different meanings. Saunders has given two dimensions to the title of his novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* within the single word Lincoln.

3. 2. Other Characters in the Novel

Equivalent to the liminal experience of Willie Lincoln, the other bardo-dwellers too are victims of the attributes of the spatial situation in which they are held. Analysis of the presence of liminality and transition in the other characters that are discussed in the chapter exclusively highlights the ghost characters that are stuck in the bardo. They are referred to here as bardo-dwellers.

3. 2. 1. Hans Vollman

As for the other characters in the novel, it is the character of Hans Vollman that is important to the analysis of the novel as he is one of the major characters who narrates the novel as well as the first character to appear in the novel. The liminal stages of Hans Vollman are interesting through the description provided by George Saunders in the novel as he is subject to multiple liminal events. He begins by describing himself as a painter who was widowed when he was very young. The reader is informed about the character’s arrival in the bardo situation during that narration. Roger Bevens III relates Hans Vollman’s story near the end of the book, beginning with an introduction to the self of his former period of life, “his form began to flicker between the various selves he had been in that previous place” (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 299). That reversal of his comfortable life leads to negative consequences, such as binge drinking and frequent visits to prostitutes. When he was forty-six, he met Anna, who was eighteen, at a party on New Year’s Day and married her. Because of Anna’s fear, they agreed to live as friends until Anna requested sex. He had to be in his liminal phase of bardo when a beam killed him before he could fulfil his wish. The characteristics of the pre-liminal stage of the liminal phase of the bardo are comparably normal. He is joined with the common qualities in the same way that other spirits experience their liminal area when in the bardo phase. He is unable to return to his usual life or go to the next level. Therefore, the novel portrays two liminal phases of the character of Hans Vollman. It begins with the first marriage of Hans Vollman which can be identified as the pre-liminal phase of the character before his liminal phase where he

is widowed. In the liminal phase where he is widowed, he is depressed and mentally weakened, which is reflected in his activities like heavy drinking and visiting prostitutes. The life in the liminal phase of Hans Vollman is disoriented and disturbed. The marriage that is described at the beginning of the novel is the post-liminal phase, and it merges with the pre-liminal phase of the next liminality. The liminality that followed the first is permanent in nature. It is related to the waiting of Hans Vollman to have a sexual moment with his wife who restrained him till the moment she adjusted to him. Though he says that he accepted her situation and waited for her, the period of waiting was uncertain till the day when she gave him positive signs. Affection between them grew, but Hans Vollman could not have sexual intercourse with her. He was waiting for the next night, but got hit by a beam and died. The hitting of the beam had exited him from his second liminal phase, but it was an entry into the third liminal phase of the person. Bardo became his third liminal phase and a space where he could not agree with the reality of his death. As same as how Willie was affected by the liminal features of the bardo, Hans Vollman could also have had the same experience. He is alienated from the rest of the world into which he wants to get back. He believes almost to the conclusion of the novel that he is merely 'sick' and waits to recover to return to Anna to fulfil his unaccomplished desire. The identity shift from the living Hans Vollman to the ghost Hans Vollman is not realised by him. Though he exists in his bardo, which is his liminal phase, he is not ready to accept his death and is still wished to be in his pre-liminal phase which held him back from exiting the bardo space. For a detailed analysis based on liminality and transition theory, check Table 3.

3. 2. 2. Roger Bevins III

The next important character is Roger Bevins III who was heartbroken and slashed his wrists with a butcher knife. Roger Bevins III reached his liminal period after having bad ideas about his 'predilection' and eventually committing suicide. When his partner Gilbert left him to "live correctly," he turned to suicide as a way to escape his heartbreak (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 25). Roger had to face two liminal phases. The first one is related to his heartbreak when Gilbert left him. The pre-liminal phase with respect to the first liminal phase is where he led a peaceful life with Gilbert as

his partner. In the liminal phase, he had to struggle with the emotions that engulfed him when he had to face rejection even from his lover, Gilbert. Suicide was the method that Roger Bevins III found worth to exit the liminal phase where he was struggling to cope. As in the case of Hans Vollman, he was able to depart the liminal phase, but death did not bring Roger to freedom; instead, he was locked in yet another liminal phase, namely the bardo. Roger Bevins III entered the liminal phase of bardo in the hopes of escaping the humiliation and breakup he was experiencing at the time. He wishes to return to his worldly existence in the liminal period of bardo, but this will not happen anytime soon. His realisation of the beauty of the universe in which he was living caused his body parts to multiply, culminating in thousands of eyes, ears, noses, and mouths encompassing his form. Therefore, the character of Roger Bevins III described in the novel has two liminal phases wherein the second is elaborated for the purpose of the novel. There are certain triggering factors, duration, psychological changes, support, and strategies related to the character. A detailed description of the categorisation and analysis using transition theory is provided in Table 3.

3. 2. 3. The Reverend Everly Thomas

The flow of the three phases of liminality in *The Reverend Everly Thomas* is unique and different from other bardo-dwellers. Unlike others, *The Reverend Everly Thomas* has been to the three phases of liminality even at the moment he existed in the middle phase. The pre-liminal phase of *The Reverend Everly Thomas* is not mentioned in the novel. Importance is given to the description of his visit to the post-liminal phase, i.e., the afterlife. Only because he was afraid of the judgement he witnessed once when he went beyond the borders of bardo, he refused to proceed to the next level by leaving his liminal period of bardo. He witnessed the judgement of two people receiving their judgments where the first person was sent to heaven and the second who was in a funeral suit was sent to hell. *The Reverend Everly Thomas* was doubtful about his judgement verdict as he saw quite a negative response from the beings that were there for judging. He escaped his pre-liminal phase and entered his liminal phase, bardo. If he had not decided to sacrifice in order to spare Willie from being trapped in the bardo forever, the liminal phase of the bardo would have been eternal liminality.

When a person's temporal liminal phase prolongs its characteristics in the liminal personae, permanent liminality arises. The Reverend Everly Thomas decided to leave the bardo to save Willie from the tendrils that had caught him. If for others, acceptance of death was a measure to get beyond the limits of the bardo, for The Reverend Everly Thomas, it was his sacrifice that made him exit the bardo. In the case of The Reverend Everly Thomas, the most discussed phases are the liminal and post-liminal phases.

The transitional nature of liminality in Hans Vollman, Roger Bevis iii, and The Reverend Everly Thomas can be understood through a detailed analysis of the situation, self, support and strategies (See Table 3) related to the circumstances of the characters. Liminality in three of the characters is negative in nature as they are trapped in their bardo by not being able to go back to the world or move forward to their afterlife. They were not ready to accept the reality of death which could have helped them to escape their liminal phase much before they could attain it through the words of Willie Lincoln. The triggering factor for Hans Vollman was a beam that hit him accidentally when he was at work. It led him into the bardo which was unanticipated and temporary. In the case of Roger Bevins III, it is his act of cutting his wrist as part of suicide. The triggering factor for The Reverend Everly Thomas is not mentioned in the novel. He is introduced and described by Saunders based on his possible post-liminal phase or which can also be interpreted as his attempt to escape the bardo. Roger Bevins III's entry into the liminal phase was unanticipated because of the suicide attempt he made. Though it seems unanticipated, the suicide helped her to exit the ongoing liminal phase due to her confusion regarding being a homosexual. He wanted to exit from his liminal phase as he could not adapt to the rejection from his lover. The entry into a particular liminal space of bardo was unanticipated as he was expecting her death without further scope for remembering his past. It was her rethinking about the beauty of the world during the time after cutting her wrist that put her in the in-between situation.

The situation of bardo and their liminality is not under their control to manage and is temporary in nature. The major role change in these three characters' lives is the realisation and acceptance of the reality of death that they faced in their lives. It helped them to move out of the bardo when Willie announced that all were dead,

which indicated that there would be no going back to the world to fulfil their desires. The Reverend Everly Thomas could go beyond the level of bardo, leaving away his hesitation and doubt about his judgment. He did it to save Willie from the attack of the tendrils. The status of these characters reveals that they are all bardo-dwellers during their period of liminal phase. They share emotions of grief, sorrow, and isolation, hoping they can go back to their pre-liminal phase even though it remained uncertain to them until they realised the truth of their death. In The Reverend Everly Thomas, he experiences fear and anxiety about the judgement that awaits him if he moves out of the bardo. They all equally supported each other to exist in their liminal situation until they were able to exit the bardo, which depicts their strategy to escape the liminal space and phase.

3. 2. 4. Elise Traynor

Saunders sets as an example the character of Elise Traynor, or The Traynor Girl, to reveal the intensity for children of being in the bardo for a long period. Hans Vollman, Roger Bevins III and The Reverend Everly Thomas showed her to Willie Lincoln to persuade him about the problem of staying in the bardo. The pre-liminal phase of Elise Traynor was the period before her death when she had a great desire to have a baby of her own. She could not fulfil her wish as she was dead before being pregnant. She was forced to stay in her liminal period at Bardo due to her intense focus on the wish that she could not accomplish during her pre-liminal phase. She was fastened by the hellish tendrils to the iron fence, which is the boundary to the bardo. The linguistic abilities of the girl deteriorated, and she learned to use vulgar words in her sentences. Her suffering in her liminal phase was greater than others as she was held to the iron fence with the tendrils. Towards the conclusion of the novel, when everyone moves to the afterlife through a *matterlightblooming* phenomenon, she is also relieved of her constraints and moves to her post-liminal phase. Find more details based on transition theory in Table 4.

3. 2. 5. Thomas Havens

The character of Thomas Havens, who was a former slave, had a pre-liminal phase before his death where he was treated well by his master. Unlike other slaves who belonged to the black community, Thomas Havens did not suffer harsh treatment

from his master. Towards the conclusion of the novel, he gets into Abraham Lincoln, finding that he has no aversion to his people. Though he did not experience a matterlightbloom and moved out to the afterlife like the other ghosts who were in the bardo, he could find a space in Abraham Lincoln where he felt safer than the previous. His moving out of bardo did not occur as a process. But it is evident from his words that the black community who were considered slaves will experience a resurrection from the plight of being discriminated against and oppressed. He says,

“Sir, if you are as powerful as I feel that you are, and as inclined toward us as you seem to be, endeavour to do something for us so that we might do something for ourselves. We are ready, sir; are angry, are capable, our hopes are coiled up so tight as to be deadly, or holy: turn us loose, sir, let us at it, let us show what we can do.”

(Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 312)

Further details and divisions have been noted in Table 4.

3. 2. 6. Elson Farewell, Lizzie Wright and Francis Hodge

The other slave characters present in the novel as bardo-dwellers are Elson Farewell, Lizzie Wright, and Francis Hodge. All these characters have a pre-liminal phase before their death which was cruel to them in all ways. Being slaves to their white masters, most of them had to suffer the difficulties of discrimination and harassment at some point in their lives. Elson Farewell was not taken care of by his master's family when he fell on the side of a trail while travelling with the family. He had to face rejection from the side of the family at a point in his life, though he was treated well in the past, unlike the other slaves. He did not accept to move out of bardo as he wanted to take revenge against the family. He stayed in the bardo when all the others left the place. His decision brought him permanent liminality, unlike the others. “As a dramatic contrast, permanent liminality has also been expressed in itinerancy, in wandering. Rootlessness is also a social revolt against the dominant culture” (Carson 10). The dominant culture in this context is the domination of the whites over the blacks, which Elson Farewell is concerned about. If Thomas Havens decided to be within Abraham Lincoln as part of this wandering attitude, Elson Farewell decided to

be in his liminal phase itself to fulfil his revenge against the dominant culture. Lizzie Wright was raped by her various masters during her lifetime. Mrs. Francis Hodge, who has blood stumps in the place of her hands and feet, speaks for Lizzie Wright as she had no voice until she entered Abraham Lincoln's body. Lieutenant Cecil Stone is a character with a racist mentality towards the black community. He used to mention the fact that he raped slaves and tortured their husbands. He was disliked by the blacks in the bardo, especially by Elson Farewell, who was engaged in a continuous fight with his views. He keeps the same tone of hate even during his liminal phase. Eddie Barron and Besty Baron are poor married couples who, unlike Lieutenant Cecil Stone, do not have an aversion to the black people in the bardo.

In the cases of Elise Traynor, Thomas Havens, Elson Farewell, and Lizzie Wright, the liminal phase of bardo is influenced by certain factors that produce liminality in them. The triggering factor for the liminal phase of these characters is their death, which is only mentioned in their own description of themselves. For Elise Traynor, her intense desire to have a baby of her own is also a factor in her prolonged existence in the bardo. Elsie Traynor says,

“Brite promise of nights and nights of that, culminating in a choise, and the choise being made, it would be rite, and would become Love, and Love would become baby, and that is all I ask I wanted so much to hold a dear Babe.”

(Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 38)

Death being the triggering factor, the liminal phase and liminality in them are unanticipated with no prior experience with the bardo situation. Except for Elson Farewell, the other three characters experience temporary liminality as they move out of the bardo when they realise, they are dead. Elson Farewell decides to stay in the bardo itself as he was adamant in his revenge against his White master. Elson Farewell had no role change in him as he did not participate in the completion of the transition process. Others were ready to accept their death when Willie announced it to everyone. Though Thomas Havens, Elson Farewell and Lizzie Wright were former

slaves of their respective masters, during the period of their existence in the bardo, they remain equal in their status of ghosts or bardo-dwellers. Unlike others, Elise Traynor is a teenage girl. They experienced the common emotional variations of uncertainty, ambiguity, fear, loss, etc. When the other four bardo-dwellers accepted the reality of their death, only Elson Farewell decided to remain in the bardo to conduct his revenge (See Tables 4 and 5). Therefore, the other four bardo-dwellers completed their transition from the pre-liminal phase to the post-liminal phase except for Elson Farwell who continued in his uncertain or permanent liminality in the bardo.

3. 2. 7. The Three Bachelors

The other characters are the Three Bachelors who try to find romance in the bardo. They could not find it when they were alive and so they try to achieve it while being in their liminal phase. They were able to fly and do not like to make any commitment as they disliked to do what they do not like to do. Jane Ellis is a woman character in the bardo who wished to be back to her pre-liminal phase of a worldly living as she wants to be with her three daughters. She tries to get into Willie expecting him to take her back if he is allowed to go back to his pre-liminal phase. She is the first among the bardo dwellers who move out of the bardo through the process of matterlightbloom effect. She requests Willie, “Assure them I have been thinking of them since I arrived here and am trying to make my home, and that even as the ether was administered, I was thinking of them, of them and only” (Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* 79-80). The character of Abigail Blass exists in the bardo and tells Willie that she never received what she deserved in her life while she was in the world. She wished for many things while she was in the world. In the bardo, she exists with the mentality that she could not achieve the things that she deserved.

Considering the characters that are the bardo-dwellers, it is clear that all of them were not happy during their pre-liminal phase. They exist in the bardo containing the heavy memories of their past which restrict them to leave the liminal phase in which they were stuck for a certain period even after their death. The only coping strategy for them was to accept their death to leave their liminal phase. The moving through the period as described by Schlossberg is a phase where the adaptation or coping has to occur (See Table 5). In the context of the novel, the

‘moving through’ period, which is a transition period for the bardo-dwellers, is the liminal phase where they realise the reality of their current existence beyond the pre-liminal phase of their living in the world. The unusualness of their existence is realised by the bardo-dwellers who moved out of the bardo through the process of matterlightblooming effect. Elson Farewell decides to stay in his state of bardo as he was stern in his revengeful mind against the family of his master who left him without any reason.

3. 2. 8. Miscellaneous Characters

The other set of characters in the shape of a bean embedded in the tendril that emerges from the ground, though not explained in detail as the other characters, also possess pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases. The characters that are connected to the tendrils are named The Vermonter, The British Voice, The Bass Voice, and the Female Voice. They have supposedly moved out of their bardo existence to a partial hell space from where they emerge through the tendrils out of the ground. The Vermonter is damned to such an existence as he had engaged in sexual activity with children when he was in his pre-liminal phase in the world. The British Voice happens to be in hell because he betrayed his entire military regiment by massacring them for his enemy. The Bass Voice is in hell as he and his wife conspired to kill their newborn baby. The Female Voice had killed her husband as she found him irritating, which brought her to hell. Though these characters do have their own excuses, they cannot escape their ultimate judgement of the post-liminal phase.

Liminality in the Three Bachelors, Jane Ellis, Abigail Bliss, and Lieutenant Cecil Stone, is interlinked with that of Schlossberg’s 4S in her transition model (See Table 5). The triggering factor for their liminal phase is their death which was unanticipated and negative in its impact. They had to be in their liminal phase which was controllable and temporary. It is controllable as they had every chance to accept their liminal existence which they did not do as they were reluctant to get rid of their desires and memories during their pre-liminal phase. The role change in them can be identified as their acceptance of their death from the point of their rejection of the truth. The Three Bachelors were young men who desired to have a romance and who later had the strategy of accepting reality to exit their liminal phase which helped

them to complete their transition. Jane Ellis, the mother of three daughters, had the desire to be with her daughters in her pre-liminal phase. She too accepted the reality as her coping strategy to move out of her liminal phase. The existence of Abigail Bliss was sad and with an intense desire to get what he deserved. He too suffered from uncertainty, anxiety, loss, fear, etc. as same as how the other four characters also experienced as part of their liminal phase. They all could complete the process of transition as they could successfully move from their pre-liminal phase to the post-liminal phase through their liminal phase which expressed characteristics of Victor Turner's liminality.

3. 3. Conclusion

All the major characters discussed above from the novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* have a past that is different from their liminal phase while being in the bardo, which is also different from the post-liminal phase. "The person who moves through the rites of passage is a transitional being, a liminal person, and as such takes on a new identity and is defined by a whole new set of symbols. The condition is one of ambiguity, paradox, and confusion of all the customary categories" (Carson 5). The moving in and moving out phases of their tripartite structure or transition is a crucial point that initiated the change from the previous or existing phase of life. The change or transition has affected them mentally as well as physically due to the peculiarities of the bardo condition described in the novel.

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, Saunders has substituted the liminal phase of the characters with a more relatable space, i.e., the bardo. He created a world that would easily describe the effects of liminality on the characters that undergo the transition from their previous phase of life to a post-phase through a temporary phase of existence. The analysis of the novel conducted in this chapter has revealed the multiple liminalities in the character of Abraham Lincoln, the American Civil War as a liminal event, the bardo setting inspired by the Buddhist traditional concept of liminal space, and the interconnection between the American Civil War and Willie's death, which is also correlated with the liminal experience in Abraham Lincoln. The intermediary state of transition that has been identified in the major characters in the novel traces the altered peculiarities of being in the liminal phase. The discussion has

also helped to highlight the criticism against the racial mentality that evolved out of the exploitation and discrimination against those who had been regarded as slaves. Schlossberg's transition model, having four tenants helped to establish a base for the analysis of the novel from the perspective of liminality.

With the effective utilisation of the bardo-dwellers in the novel, Saunders points to the liminal phase of the people of America at the peak of the Civil War. The bardo-dwellers, who may be from different states of America, can be metaphorically regarded as the representatives of each state that was divided between the North and the South at the time of the Civil War. They had other distinguishable features, such as their racial history. Some were blacks who were considered slaves, and others were whites who believed that they were the dominating group. Characters such as Lieutenant Cecil Stone and Elson Farewell, who were in the bardo, are the representatives of such extremes of the black and white community, respectively. They felt like equals only when they were united together in Abraham Lincoln's body to convince him to stay back. It means that Abraham Lincoln could unite Americans regardless of their race or ideology. This idea of Saunders is expressed towards the conclusion of the novel when Thomas Havens asks Abraham Lincoln to go with him, as he felt he had no aversion to the black community.

Analysing the characters in *Lincoln in the Bardo* through the perspective of communitas, the togetherness of the bardo-dwellers and Willie Lincoln is momentary. They are trapped in liminal space and are expected to have been entrapped in such a situation for a long time. Willie Lincoln is told to escape the bardo without wasting much time there. Throughout the novel, the bardo-dwellers are having a bond between them as they experience the same liminal situations within the bardo space. Therefore, as per the insights shared by Victor Turner, it has to be considered that the bardo-dwellers, though they were experiencing normative communitas in their bardo space, managed to escape towards the end of the novel. In such a transitional occurrence, they, therefore, experience existential or spontaneous communitas. They were all having their own personal experiences that made them exit their pre-liminal situation and enter the liminal phase. It makes their individuality expressed more than their equivalence as a group of bardo-dwellers. In the case of Willie Lincoln, the descriptions of the novel give the idea that he has been through spontaneous

communitas as the entry and exit of his transitional existence in the bardo were momentary.

Lincoln in the Bardo describes the story of the grief of Abraham Lincoln in losing his son as well as the tension of the loss of his nation that he might have to face if there was a prolonged war without unity in the name of slavery. Through his novel, Saunders deals with the complexities of the anxiety felt by each character on a personal as well as a generalised level. Through the other characters and their pre-liminal and liminal phases, Saunders tries to draw his route to the core of the context discussed in the novel.

The next chapter would discuss the two novellas, one an allegorical fable and the other a morality tale, by George Saunders, in the light of Victor Turner's liminality. The above-mentioned criteria are applied to the different contexts discussed by the author to identify a new perspective on the texts through the theoretical lens of liminality along with the support of Schlossberg's transition model.

3. 4. Analysis at a Glance

Table 3)

LINCOLN IN THE BARDO - 1					
Names	Abraham Lincoln	Willie Lincoln	Hans Vollman	Roger Bevins III	The Reverend Thomas
Pre-liminal phase	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Before the illness and death of Willie Lincoln 2) Before becoming President 	Before death, not mentioned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Painter ❖ Widowed ❖ Marries and waits for sex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Homosexual nature ❖ Relation with Gilbert – broken ❖ Guilty of predilection ❖ Cuts wrist to suicide 	N.A
Liminal phase	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Willie’s death and a visit to the cemetery 2) American Civil War 	Bardo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Beam hits ❖ Enters bardo ❖ Wants to live with the wife 	Suicide leads to the bardo Wants to go back and live	Bardo
Post-liminal phase	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Out of the cemetery when Willie gets leaves the body of Abraham Lincoln 2) The decision to abolish slavery 	Afterlife	Afterlife	Afterlife	Afterlife
Type of Liminality	Multiple	Overlapping	Single	Single	Single
Positive or Negative Liminality	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
Triggering Factor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Willie’s death 2) American Civil War 	Death and bardo	Beam hit while at work	Suicide by cutting wrist	Not mentioned
Setting	White House and Cemetery	Bardo	Bardo	Bardo	Bardo
Anticipated or Unanticipated	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Unanticipated 2) Anticipated 	Unanticipated	Unanticipated	Unanticipated	Not mentioned
Control/Uncontrol	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Uncontrollable 2) Uncontrollable 	Controllable	Controllable	Controllable	Controllable
Duration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Temporary 2) Temporary 	Temporary	Temporary	Temporary	Temporary

Previous experience	No	No	No	No	No
Role change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Father with grief to accepting the loss 2) Inclination towards the blacks 	Lincoln's son to ghost in the bardo to escape to the next level	Waits to return to the wife while at bardo and later realises that he was dead	Decided not to live. But later found the world beautiful and wanted to go back to live	He was hesitant to leave bardo. But later he moved out of it to save Willie from tendrils
Status	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Willie's father 2) America's President 	Bardo-dweller	Bardo-dweller	Bardo-dweller	Bardo-dweller who witnessed judgment before the afterlife
Psychological Status	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Grief, sorrow, loss 2) Grief, loss 	Grief, sorrow, loss, fear, anxiety, uncertainty, ambiguity	Grief, hope, sorrow, uncertainty	Guilt, hope, loss, uncertainty	Uncertainty, fear, anxiety
Support	Nil	Fellow bardo-dwellers and Abraham Lincoln	Willie and other fellow bardo-dwellers	Willie and other fellow bardo-dwellers	Willie and other fellow bardo-dwellers
Coping strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Accepted the loss 2) Decided to sign the Enumeration Bill 	Accepted the truth that he is dead when he realised it from Abraham Lincoln's thoughts	When Willie announces, accepts the truth that he is dead	When Willie announces, accepts the truth that he is dead	When Willie announces, accepts the truth that he is dead
Transition	❖ Yes	❖ Yes	❖ Yes	❖ Yes	❖ Yes

Table 4)

LINCOLN IN THE BARDO - 2				
Names	Elise Traynor	Thomas Havens	Elson Farewell	Lizzie Wright
Pre-liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ She wanted a baby of her own ❖ Could not satisfy as she was dead before being pregnant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Slave of his White Master ❖ Treated good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Slave of his White Master ❖ Ignored when he fell on the side of a trail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Former slave ❖ Raped by her various masters
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Intense focus on her wish made her stay ❖ Linguistic abilities deteriorated ❖ Learned vulgar words ❖ Was held to the iron fence with tendrils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Had the desire to live free like Whites ❖ He was a bardo-dweller like others in the novel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Revenge minded ❖ Bardo-dweller 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ No voice to talk ❖ Bardo-dweller
Post-liminal	She moves out of bardo	He did not move to the afterlife. He went with Abraham Lincoln	Nil	She moves out of bardo
Type of Liminality	❖ Single	❖ Single	❖ Single	❖ Single
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative	❖ Negative	❖ Negative	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Death	❖ Death	❖ Death	❖ Death
Setting	❖ Bardo	❖ Bardo	❖ Bardo	❖ Bardo
Anticipated/Unanticipated	Unanticipated	Unanticipated	Unanticipated	Unanticipated
Control/Uncontrolled	Controllable	Controllable	Controllable	Controllable
Duration	Temporary	Temporary	Uncertain	Temporary
Previous experience	No	No	No	No
Role change	From having the desire for a baby to accepting the truth of death	From slave to freedom when he moves with Abraham Lincoln	Nil	From slave to bardo and afterlife

Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Teenage girl ❖ Bardo-dweller 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Former slave ❖ Bardo-dweller 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Former slave with revenge on his White Master and his family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ A former slave who has bad memories of her past ❖ No voice until she got into Abraham Lincoln
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Isolation ❖ ambiguous ❖ intense desire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ ambiguous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ Ambiguous ❖ Revenge-minded ❖ sad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ Ambiguous ❖ sad
Support	Bardo-dwellers	Bardo-dwellers	Bardo-dwellers	Bardo-dwellers
Coping strategy	Accepted the truth of death and left the desire to have a baby of her own	He went with Abraham Lincoln believing in his decision to abolish slavery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ He waited till he could go back and have his revenge. ❖ Did not move forward like other bardo-dwellers 	She went along with other bardo-dwellers by accepting the truth of her death
Transition	❖ Yes	❖ Yes	❖ No	❖ Yes

Table 5)

LINCOLN IN THE BARDO - 3				
Names	Three Bachelors	Jane Ellis	Abigail Bliss	Lieutenant Cecil Stone
Pre-liminal	❖ In search of romance	❖ Happy life with three daughters	❖ An unsatisfied person who condemns her fate for not getting what she deserves	❖ White Lieutenant ❖ Raped many slaves ❖ Tortured slaves' husbands
Liminal	❖ Wants romance ❖ Waits for love ❖ Fly freely ❖ Does not commit anything	❖ Had the desire to live with her three daughters ❖ Asks Willie for the purpose	❖ Stays with the same thought that she did get what she deserved while being in the world	❖ Extreme hatred towards the Blacks ❖ Restricts Black bardo-dwellers to talk with the White bardo-dwellers ❖ Argues in favour of his ideology against the Blacks
Post-liminal	❖ They move out of bardo	❖ She moves out of bardo as the first person after accepting the truth of her death	❖ Moves out of bardo after accepting the truth of her death	❖ Though his attitude did not change, he accepted his death to move out of his bardo
Type of Liminality	❖ Single	❖ Single	❖ Single	❖ Single
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative	❖ Negative	❖ Negative	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Death ❖ An intense desire for romance	❖ Death	❖ Death	❖ Death
Setting	❖ Bardo	❖ Bardo	❖ Bardo	❖ Bardo
Anticipated/Unanticipated	❖ Unanticipated	❖ Unanticipated	❖ Unanticipated	❖ Unanticipated
Control/Uncontrolled	❖ Controllable	❖ Controllable	❖ Controllable	❖ Controllable
Duration	❖ Temporary	❖ Temporary	❖ Temporary	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ No	❖ No	❖ No	❖ No
Role change	❖ From having the desire for romance to	❖ From a mother with an intense	❖ From a person who condemns her	❖ Bardo-dweller to afterlife ❖ No change in

	accepting the truth of death	desire to be with her three daughters to a person who accepts the reality of death	fate for not getting what is deserved to a person who accepted the reality of death	his ideology against the Blacks
Status	❖ Young men ❖ Bardodweller	❖ Mother to three daughters ❖ Bardodweller	❖ Bardodweller	❖ White Lieutenant ❖ Bardodweller
Psychological Status during the transition	❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ ambiguous ❖ intense desire	❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ Ambiguous ❖ Intense desire	❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ Ambiguous ❖ Sad ❖ Intense desire	❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ Ambiguous ❖ Hatred towards the Blacks
Support	❖ Bardodwellers	❖ Bardodwellers	❖ Bardodwellers	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	❖ Accepted the truth of death and left the desire for romance	❖ Accepted the truth of death and left the desire to be with her three daughters	❖ Accepted the truth of death and left her complaints about not getting what she deserved while in the world	❖ He accepted the reality of his death
Transition	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The Quirk and Quiddity of Liminality

The essence of liminality in George Saunders' fiction, such as two novellas, a fable, and a tale, is distinctive from its way of expression in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, which was analysed in the previous chapter. From the context of the history that deals with the American Civil War, issues of slavery and racism along with the personal liminal moments in the specific period in the life of Abraham Lincoln, liminality discovered in the characters and settings in the novel were structurally confined to the limits of the setting and situations of characters connected with the spatial, temporal, and situational liminality of bardo. While tracing the track of Saunders' fictional writing, the novel would be the point at which the creative side of Saunders met the blend of history and fiction that describes it as a "neo-historical project, combining a kind of verisimilitude" (Moseley 9) rather than fixing his focus to complete fiction with a surrealist touch.

Considering the novellas, short stories, and pieces of fiction by Saunders, the exhibition of reality is less, wherein the unusualness and anxiousness of the plot demand settings and styles slightly different from the real world, even though not completely strange. The impact of satiric expression on controversial topics is made more effective by adopting such an indirectly direct description of situations. *Lincoln in the Bardo* stands out among the writings published by Saunders in the genre of fiction because of its connection with reality in the past or present. George Saunders' stories, of varying themes and settings, are fictional to the extent that they act as a symbolic portrayal or allegoric representation of the problems prevailing in the social and cultural living situation in contemporary America. The sharpness of intention in the criticism present in one story differs from the other stories as they were written and published in magazines and newspapers during the relevant period of the concerned topic. Even though there are author-intended sub-meanings to the writings discussed by Saunders, the reader can identify through interpretation that the already discussed issues still prevail in society in one or the other form. If categorised according to the majoritarian view of the themes discussed in his published books,

they would be classified as *Lincoln in the Bardo* for its neo-historical approach, applying the verisimilitude technique, discussing the then mode of slavery, racism, American Civil War and the grief of Abraham Lincoln for his dead son Willie; *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* for the situational conflicts and prevailing tensions in American society; *Pastoralia* for the effects of capitalism and economic crisis on the working class; *In Persuasion Nation* for the prevailing persuasive approach of capitalism and the resultant consumerist culture in America, and *Tenth of December* for the unusual conditions or moments in the lives of people who are victimised by the control of power structures as well as the unanticipated situational conflicts. A holistic idea of the American way of living is depicted by Saunders, which often proved to be true beyond the limits of time and space.

Four major works, namely “Bounty”, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* and *Fox 8*, are discussed in this chapter. Though they seem to be dealing with diverse themes, the underlining connecting thread of liminality would describe the quirk and quiddity of these fiction of Saunders. In the literal sense of the stories, the incidents and shift from the normative plot structure indicates the perspective of Victor Turner stated in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* that

“in this gap between ordered worlds almost anything may happen. In this interim of ‘liminality,’ the possibility exists of standing aside not only from one’s own social position but from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements.”

(Turner 13-14)

Among the four, “Bounty” and *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* are novellas, and *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* and *Fox 8* are short fiction that is published as independent books. The two novellas and independently published short fiction express the author’s interest and concern for various issues pertaining to America’s current social, cultural, political, and economic situations. A reader unfamiliar with Saunders’ writing style, who has not been into the author’s fictional settings, would be perplexed by the context in which he writes, the sub-meaning, and the criticism that Saunders wishes to deliver through the works. A quick reading would not help much to analyse the extent of consciousness invested in developing

the theme and context of the works. Rather, a detailed reading is preferred to decode the meaning of Saunders' novellas and short fictions that are highly based on specific settings and characters that are unusual in expressing such serious issues of the real world, especially that of America. To attain the result intended in the real world, i.e., to evoke emotions in the reader and convey his thoughts, he utilises the resources to create unreal settings and characters that are differently indifferent. Saunders describes his way of writing in *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* as a soufflé (Ryan 14). In his email conversation, he writes, "could I get the stories to evoke emotion, even though their materials were designed for mockery? I felt that the answer with both was, yes, sort of" (87). The meaning of soufflé, as denoted here by Saunders, is about the low murmuring of the material written by him. It achieves the desired effect, but in a peaceful manner, where the material used to convey the idea and emotion would eventually be a mockery. Saunders' use of fictional settings in these novellas and stories highlights this opinion. May it be the 'Bountyland' or the 'Outer Horner' and the 'Inner Horner' or the habitat of Fox 8, they all lead the reader to a very distinctive setting, nowhere or very moderately relatable with the actual physical settings of the real world. He also emphasises his way of writing with the statement, "I am trying to get at something real, but to do so, I have to use unreal materials" (Ryan 86).

This chapter will analyse these four short fictions in the light of Turner's liminality and Schlossberg's transition theory. But the in-depth exploration based on their interpretational derivations, such as coercive liminality and liminality due to authoritarian and totalitarian dominance, will be discussed in the following chapter to avoid repetition of the same. The significant question of the quirk and quiddity possessed by liminality can be explained through George Saunders' selected works. For such an analysis, the perception on the type of liminality and the effect of liminality is very important. While discussing the appraisal of transitions, Schlossberg quotes Lazarus and Folkman (1984) to explain whether a transition is seen as positive, negative, or irrelevant. This is highly relevant in the research based on liminality, as the type of liminality can be understood from the situational existence and the other factors associated with 4S described in the transition theory. The analysis tables 6 - 9 give categorisation of the types of liminality and the psychological states experienced

by the characters. From the point of view of liminality and transition theories, it will provide a parallel track in the analysis of the selected works. From the perspective of Schlossberg's transition theory, the plots will be divided by the application of the processual framework and transition model so as to understand the liminal phase and the peculiar behavioural and situational changes expressed by the characters.

4.1 "Bounty"

Saunders' first published novella "Bounty" can be considered as his stepping stone that helped him to develop a similar setting for his stories. In one or the other way, the influence of "Bounty" is evident in his later novella *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*. The Outer and Inner Hornites' settings introduced in the novella by Saunders are a continuation of the setting of Bountyland as well as other similar fictional settings that take the reader beyond the boundaries of logical reality. "Bounty" is published as the last of the short stories in the anthology titled *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline: Stories and a Novella*. It discusses the journey of a brother named Cole who searches for his sister Connie who had escaped from their Bountyland with a Normal master named Mr. Corbett. Interestingly, Saunders includes surrealism in his characters by dividing them into two groups, such as the Normals and the Flaweds. The healthy are called the Normals, whereas the mutated group is known by the name Flaweds. Throughout the novella, the author tries to convey the dominance of the Normals over the Flaweds who are considered to be subjugated and malformed. Moreover, due to the difference in their status, they are enslaved and regarded as expendable subhuman trash by the Normals. In comparison to the Flawed, Normals have the advantage of being accepted, valued, and experiencing power. The mutated group of the population is considered expendable whereas the others vote to enslave them (Michel, *InsideHook*). The unfortunate reality of class and racial differences that continues to divide social life in America and the world can be traced as a sub-meaning of the text. The dominant class executes the tool of division to exercise power that maintains their existence.

"Bounty" is the longest piece of work among the other fictions in the anthology, giving rise to a surrealistic setting of a post-apocalyptic environment. Saunders' writing in the anthology "combines several of Saunders's key themes: not

only the loser dad, but also a theme park patronised by the rich and staffed by the disenfranchised poor, and the apocalyptic US governed more by private companies than elected officials” (Power, *The Guardian*). This combination of themes is concluded with the novella in which he has indirectly pointed out the discrimination caused by various ideologies highlighted by certain power structures in society. Considering the setting of “Bounty”, it can be identified as a millennial America in his imagination, which would be twenty-five years from then (Power). It gives the idea of a certain malformed group of people due to environmental poisoning caused in America (McInerney, “Virtual Realities”). This post-human scenario in the text points to a satiric criticism of every discriminating and differentiating situation in the world. Being a novella that focuses on this division among humans, the relevance and importance of “Bounty” does not diminish even after two decades or more.

Apart from the other perspectives of analysis for the novella, the presence of liminality is very evident in the situational existence of the characters while exploring its details through the lens of liminality proposed by Victor Turner. Both in the characteristics of the Flaweds’ living conditions and Cole’s journey in search of his sister, the characteristic feature of liminality plays a pivotal role in developing the sketch of Van Gennep’s tripartite structure. Moreover, Turner’s concepts such as *communitas*, liminal space, liminal entity, and permanent liminality have crucial interlinks in defining the liminal phase of the characters in the novella. Therefore, the analysis of the novella with the application of liminality can be conducted in two ways. As a first step, the general features of the two groups can be identified through the plot and conversations of major characters in the novella to understand the liminal status of the Flaweds compared to that of the Normals living in the Bountyland. In the second step of the analysis, the transition happening in Cole during his journey through unexpected and exploitable situations can be analysed for the presence and experience of liminality.

As discussed earlier in the previous paragraphs, the existence of the Flaweds is comparatively lower in status than that of the Normals. They are therefore considered financially unstable and socially unacceptable. This particular situation of discrimination arises due to the ‘differently formed’ or what is called “deformed” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 85) bodies of the Flaweds. Saunders makes

it clear through the description saying, “Out there genetic purity is highly valued and Flaweds are generally considered subhuman trash, so things look bleak” (80). Set in the milieu of a post-apocalyptic world, the land in which the two groups reside is called Bountyland where environmental poisoning has transformed their past into a new normal. In the process of the formation of such an environmental setting, there had been notable mutations in certain people who later became the Flaweds. Saunders gives a hint to the deformation that happened to the people of the Bountyland which forcefully made them known as the Flaweds. The “huge scalp veins” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 81) of Beatrice Connaly, Allan Burns’ “benign polyps all over his torso” (81), the claws instead of toes of Cole (85) and Connie’s “vestigial tail” (88) are the clues provided by Saunders to present the deformity in the Flaweds. These physical changes in the bodies of the Flaweds are highlighted by the Normals to marginalise them as people who do not belong in the category of normal humans. In a conversation with Cole, Mr. Oblerin emphasises the problematic nature of Cole’s easily visible deformity. He says, “... your deformed feet would scream out from every treetop the pertinent information on your unfortunate condition, by virtue of which, in the western portion of our nation, a man like yourself may literally be purchased and enslaved” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 85). Being a Flawed, Cole does not get the preference he is eligible to get and is even relegated to the position of a table boy. Because of a natural mutation that happened to his body, which is in no way related to his mistake, Cole is being judged and given a job status lower than what he had been assigned earlier. This prejudiced and untruthful imposition of domination over Cole makes him the victim of deformation. To her surprise, the answer was that the decision was all part of the Company spirit.

Connie is not excluded from similar experiences during her struggle to survive in the land without much support. Economic instability and life without a social status haunt Cole and Connie. In the case of Connie, it is her difference in viewpoint that makes her do whatever is ordered by her master, to whom she submits herself. From the perspective of Cole, she is a prostitute. But she was made to be a prostitute by the society. The difference in treating people has made the Flawed Connie adapt to the situations and do the possible activities that would make her survive. She says to Cole “I am never, ever starving or being made a fool of again” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in*

Bad Decline 90) when he finds her with a new master, being humiliated to a greater extent that a brother could not resist watching without being worried about what she might do. She also adds, “No matter what. I’ll sleep with the entire universe before I ever pick up another horse turd in a bucket” (90). Her words reflect the reason why she is forced to be a prostitute. It is not her wish to be involved in such an activity, but her situation, enforced by society, makes her do so. In her introduction to the novella, the reader finds her forced to repeat and act according to her master’s order. Saunders does not present Connie as a person who would like to do such activities in her life. Rather, the character of Connie is developed throughout the novella in the way she embraces the surrounding reality. Considering the situation of the Flaweds, it is clear from the dialogues and incidents that they are victims of liminality that is forced due to mutation as well as the resultant behaviour of the Normals. People or groups with an authoritative attitude take advantage of the powerless and subjugated group’s lack of a voice. In a powerless situation, the individual experiencing the oppression decides on his/her own because of the pressure from their situation, even if they do not want it to happen. In such cases, the victim who experiences such situations is forced to be in a nomadic phase of life between the forceful situations and their innate perspective about it. *Justice and the Politics of Difference* published in 2001 identifies five conditions in calling a group oppressed. The author writes, “I have arrived at the five faces of oppression – exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence” (Young 64).

In this context of analysis, the tripartite division cannot be directly adopted to describe the liminality of the Flaweds. Such a model can be applied only when the track of life has transitions that are the result of internal or external conflicts. The discrimination and marginalisation of the Flaweds are permanent in nature, with the exception of people like Connie who manages to escape the boundaries of the Bountyland to live with her master, who is a Normal of whom she felt “A rich Normal and he loves ME!” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 95). Mr. Corbett was a grace to her life as a prostitute, as he was ready to accept her as she was, without any problems or conflicts. Through him, she could have imagined a world outside the borders of Bountyland. Therefore, the Flawed group in the Bountyland can be identified as being in a “betwixt and between” (Turner, “Variations on a theme of

Liminality” 37) state in which they are neither able to have a permanent position in all aspects of being a prostitute nor able to live like how the Normals live their lives in the same society. In “Bounty”, due to these liminal characteristics of the Flaweds, every individual in the group can be identified as a liminal entity. They frequently become lost in the maze of classifications that generally identify states and their place in cultural space (Turner, *The Ritual Process* 95). In describing their attributes, Victor Turner highlights the qualities of a liminal entity. They are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, and convention, and ceremonial” (95). He also points out “the ambiguous nature and indeterminate attributes” (95) of such liminal entities. The liminal stage experiences powerlessness and a complete lack of autonomy, which creates apparent equality within them.

For Flaweds, powerlessness and subordination are effects of their liminal phase. They do not experience equality in Bountyland and are always considered sub-human. While the previous chapter discussed the character’s liminality by analysing their liminal phases concerning the pre-liminal and post-liminal phases, this particular section considers the state of mind of a group as a whole. Turner had written, quoting Arnold van Gennep’s rites of passage as “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age” (Turner, *The Ritual Process* 94). Turner writes, “To point up the contrast between ‘state’ and ‘transition’, I employ ‘state’ to include all his other terms. It is a more inclusive concept than ‘status’ or ‘office’, and refers to any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised” (94). In this context, for the analysis of the groups, the ‘state’ emphasised by Turner denotes the state of mind of the people involved as part of the Flaweds. While becoming such a single group or community that experiences and expresses the features of liminality, they can be collectively called *communitas*. The Flaweds are treated equally in the most sub-human manner as they are the group of people who are deformed due to mutation. Structure does not appear at places where *communitas* (96) is formed, as the presence of liminality is against the formation of structure. Anti-structure is employed wherever liminality and *communitas* are developed. The structural presentation of the Flaweds can be analysed through the insights of Turner.

Society is initially thought to be organised and differentiated. Later, in the second stage, it emerges from the liminal period, which is unstructured or rudimentarily structured, and somewhat unequally differentiated, to establish a community of equal members who obey their general authority (Turner, *The Ritual Process* 96). Likewise, the liminality experienced by the Flaweds can be recognised by considering their pre-liminal status as structural, normative, and differentiated compared to the unstructured, unusual, and relatively undifferentiated liminal phase. Based on the content described in the novella, the type of liminality experienced by the Flaweds can be identified as permanent in nature. It is thus due to the long-existing impact of the mutation and the resultant deformation caused to the Flaweds. As long as there exists any kind of differentiating factor between the Normals and the Flaweds, the process of domination and subjugation would also sustain. “Permanent (trickster) liminality: The reasons of the heart and the mind” (2017) defines permanent liminality as “situations in which the temporary suspension of normality becomes permanent” (Szokolczai 231). If the victimisation of the Flaweds continues for months, years, or even decades and centuries, the categorisation of the type of liminality falls under the permanent nature. These kinds of liminality turn out to be permanent when it gets stuck in any of the phases of the sequence where the individuals participating in an ‘initiation rite’ or the groups in a collective ritual or experience (Turner, *Reflexive Historical Sociology* 212) happen to be part of the never-ending process of the same liminality. These entrapments make them frustrated, tensed, anxious, and uncertain about their existence, which is referred to as the experience of liminality. It is this liminal experience that made Connie run-away with her master, Mr. Corbett hoping she could get a better life as he is a Normal. Connie’s thoughts and belief that there would be no escape for her have made her decide to leave the land with Mr. Corbett. Through her act, the realisation that the third stage would not occur in order to end the phase of in-betweenness for the Flaweds in the Bountyland is emphasised by Connie. She takes her way to escape the liminal status of being in “a no-man’s-land betwixt and between the structural past and the structural future” (Turner, *The Anthropology of Experience* 41) which helped her to be safe and happy thereafter.

In the second part of the analysis of the novella, the adventurous journey of Cole in search of his sister Connie can be considered as his transition from the pre-liminal phase to the post-liminal phase through the liminal phase. The experience of liminality by Cole during his journey is a reflection of the victimised condition of the Flaweds through their liminal status in the Bountyland. The status of being a Flawed haunts him throughout his journey. So far, he had not been on any such journey wherein he was submerged in anxiety and fear about the safety of Connie, the uncertainty of whether he could find her or not, and the extremities that he had to suffer from others. He could feel the difference between what society showed him and the way he unknowingly became a tool for them to harass and make do with everything they wanted him to do for them. Other than the liminal characteristics in his state of mind as part of the intention of his journey, he could also realise the disappearance of homogeneity and status (Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* 95), detachment from mundane life, humiliations and anonymity (Turner, *The Anthropology of Experience* 295) which were attributed to him by society. He was forced to be a slave by the masters who bought him and was also asked to be a male prostitute to please them. These were not with the total submission of Cole, but he had to move according to the flow of the fate that was waiting for him during his journey. One after the other, he slipped into moments and incidents that boosted the intensity of the liminal phase that he was going through.

While Connie embraced the post-liminal phase through her effort and intentional decision to escape with Mr. Corbett, the transition of Cole from his liminal phase to the post-liminal phase was achieved by accepting the gradual process of the different external factors that led him in and out of the intensity of his transition phase. Cole could enjoy the phase of the post-liminal phase when he met Connie who was leading a better life than before with the same Normal who had once made her his prostitute slave. The novella ends by informing the reader that Cole began to help the Flaweds revive their liminal status, which is a hopeful sign provided by the author to the reader that the ongoing permanent liminal status of the Flaweds would change, gaining them a non-liminal status, a definite identity, and equal treatment in their society.

The next among the works by George Saunders is the novella *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*, which is a criticism of the totalitarian structure of governments that enjoy their power and domination over the voiceless and subjugated. In most of the fictional works of Saunders, he points to the inhumane attitudes and activities of power structures in society that are based on certain ideologies such as capitalism, consumerism, and totalitarianism. This allegorical novella reminds about George Orwell's *Animal Farm* which satirised the political issues of the time. Likewise, Saunders' attempt through the novella is to expose the truth that power corrupts, leading some boundaries to shrink in order to widen certain other territories. In the essay "Why I wrote Phil", Saunders mentions the intention of writing the novella based on Phil's attitudes. He says, "... the story came to be about the human tendency to continuously divide the world into dualities and, soon after, cast one's lot in with one side of the duality and begin energetically trying to eliminate the other" (Saunders, *Amazon*). He adds the incidents from history which inspired him to frame such a plot against totalitarianism. Examples of such dualities created by humans are Rwanda, Bosnia, the Holocaust, Islamic fundamentalism, the invasion of Iraq, red states vs. blue states, Abu Ghraib, and Shia vs. Sunni. He even localises this tendency of humans by bringing it closer to an example – Us vs. them (Saunders, "Why I wrote Phil"). The tendency to divide into dualities is criticised in the previously discussed novella "Bounty" too where people are divided and given status according to the formation and deformation of their bodies due to natural mutation. Saunders' idea behind such a plot could be the increasing division among Americans in the name of race, class, and even based on the financial background. Dualities have always been the crucial element in deciding a binary – the dominant and the repressed. The gradual process of thought and practical aspects of the exercise of power and domination begins with this very idea of forming dualities in a society. Saunders states his views against such intolerant actions in a society supported or created by any form of power structure, especially the totalitarian model of governance.

The coping strategies (see Table 6) initiated by Cole and Connie were successful, which led them to escape their liminal phase. The escape achieved by Connie and Mr. Corbett was the coping strategy that helped her exit her liminal phase.

Mr. Corbett, who loved her, helped her to be safe in his protection, after being out from the Bountyland where she was considered a sub-human and a slave. She was trying to adapt to the situations in Bountyland and of being a Flawed in society, but when she got a chance to exit her liminal status, she successfully approached it with boldness and courage. Cole had no intention to free himself from the way he lived in the Bountyland but was forced to move out of the jurisdiction to find his sister Connie. His attempt to find out about Connie made him escape the confined boundary of his liminal status. Dr Nancy Schlossberg says, “Everyone uses coping strategies, everyone has some kind of support system, everyone has a personal way of being in the world, and everyone has a unique situation” (Goodman et al. 60).

4.2 The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil

The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil, as it says in its title, is about the totalitarian reign of Phil through manipulation and practising intolerance out of pseudo-patriotism. Saunders discusses the consequences that the Inner Hornites had to suffer during the brutal reign of Phil who had a revengeful attitude towards them. The landscape describes how the Inner Hornites have a congested land space where only one can be accommodated at a time, compared with the Outer Hornites who have a much wider area. The abstract-shaped creatures of both territories are divided by land and thereafter by their political agendas. Saunders’ criticism of duality is prominently applied to differentiate the formation of the members of both the Hornites. It resembles the difference in the physical formation visible in the previously discussed novella – the division of inhabitants as Normals and Flaweds. Here, Saunders describes the duality as “the Inner Hornerites frail and small, whereas the Outer Hornerites, with an entire huge country to roam around in, were stocky and hearty” (Saunders, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* 11). Inner Hornites were forced to wait in a Short-term residency when their land decreased in size, which allowed only one-fourth of a person to occupy the area. Phil grabs the President’s position with force and a cunning attitude. By manipulating the language that he uses to brainwash the Outer Hornites against the Inner Hornite in the name of patriotism, Phil emerges as a dominant political figure. Phil disassembles some of the Inner Hornites as they failed to pay their taxes for occupying the Outer Hornite area. Saunders depicts

oppression by the dominant and powerful territories over the subjugated and less powerful groups in the form of an allegory where abstract-shaped structures become the characters. As said in *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, “some animals are more equal than others”, in the context of *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*, the antagonistic character of Phil consciously tries to inject the ideology that some territories are more powerful than others when strong leaders take control of it.

Though Phil seemed to be humble at the time of his beginnings, his real intention was exposed when he was appointed as the Special Border Activities Coordinator of the President, who is an affable and senile old man. Phil turned out to behave as a morally corrupt leader of the Outer Hornite becoming a cruel tyrant and a personification of evil (Nayebpour and Varghaiyan 851). The adverse effects of his reign had to be suffered by the Inner Hornites in different ways of torture. The polarised mindset of Phil was against the well-wishes of the Inner Hornites which made them lose their land and even disembody their abstract figures under the guidance of Phil’s bodyguards. These forms of authoritarian and totalitarian ideology of Phil and his “highly subjective and subversive interpretation of the border” (853) create a change in normative situations by leading it to impose a sense of liminality on the Inner Hornites who are victimised due to the reign. From losing their land to becoming alienated and isolated in a restricted area, the Inner Hornites were gradually thrown into the intensities of liminality. The tension between Phil and the Inner Hornites leads the less populated and highly vulnerable group of Inner Hornites to experience uncertainty, anxiety, and loss. “Liminality is normally a transitory occasion and is characterised by uncertainty” (Laurie 56). It is evident in the words of Carol, a member of the Inner Hornite when she says, “But what will we eat? What will we drink? What do you expect us to do when it’s our turn to live in our country, stand in that hole?” (Saunders, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* 15). Their anxiety was even higher about losing all their hopes to stay in their land, which made them visit the President to complain about the illegal and immoral activities of Phil on the border.

The Inner Hornites were allowed to stay in a confined space called the Short-Term Residency Zone by providing tax to the Outer Hornites when their Inner Hornite territory suddenly reduced in area and they had to move to another for

survival. The Short-Term Residency Zone is a liminal space for the Inner Hornites as it is situated in-between the Inner and the Outer Hornite territories. The particular area is described as being so small that only one member of the Inner Hornite could fit inside. At the time when one gets in, the other six Inner Hornite members wait for their turn to live in their own territory (Saunders, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* 1). It is clearly defined as the liminal space of Inner Hornites as they stayed there during the liminal phase of their existence. During the particular period of the authoritarian and torturous reign of Phil, and that of their helpless situation of being neither-here-nor-there, the Short-Term Residency Zone became their temporary place of existence. In this novella, the Inner Hornites struggled with two distinct factors that occurred at the same time that led to liminality. It can be regarded as a natural flow of events which adversely affected the Inner Hornites and gave Phil the advantage of exercising forced liminality over them. The second factor that emphasised the intensity of liminality in the Inner Hornites is the previously mentioned forced liminality due to the oppression and subjugation from Phil. The members of the Inner Hornite were taken forcefully by natural transitions as well as Phil's deeds into their liminal phase.

In Van Gennep's view of liminal spaces, it is defined as thresholds, borders, or doorways in ritual. In such a context, it can also be regarded as a physical and spatial construct. He also identifies it as an experience of ritualistic passages – more specifically, a figurative space of transition from one state to another experienced as a moment or period by individuals, groups, or societies (Shortt 638). Liminal space in this novella, wherein the Inner Hornites are temporarily allowed to occupy the land, describes both the physical and mental state of mind of the occupants. This spatial area, having the characteristics of liminal space, denotes the intensity of liminality prevalent among the Inner Hornites.

The liminality experienced by the Inner Hornites is intensified by the gradually torturous attitude developed by Phil with the support of the Outer Hornites. He disguises the President of the Outer Hornite to gain ultimate power over the border issues, which makes situations worse for the Inner Hornites. These were achieved by taking advantage of the emotional affinity of the Outer Hornites towards their land. Patriotism and xenophobia (Nayebpour and Varghaiyan 652) were the major focus of

Phil, which he utilised perfectly to establish his unquestionable power to attack the Inner Hornites. These aspects were injected into the members of the Outer Hornite by Phil through the spread of emotionally sensitive and easily relatable biased speeches that would initiate hate towards the Inner Hornites. Those details provided at times by Phil had no ground in truth and authenticity. As in *Animal Farm*, the effective subversion of truth is utilised in fulfilling a dark vision that forms a totalitarian state through divisions. The words of Phil that he uses to divert the Outer Hornite hatred and emotion against the Inner Hornite members often resemble the subversive political culture called post-truth that is prevalent in twenty-first-century society. Post-truth can be defined as one which “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (“Post-truth”). The prefix ‘post’ is not in the sense as used in post-modern or post-war, but it denotes the irrelevance of truth or fact (McIntyre, *Post-truth* 5). Post-truth is practised to impose the supremacy of a biased ideology on a group with or without adequate evidence for it. Emotional feelings are taken advantage of at times when alternative facts are presented in place of objective facts. It appeals more to the receiver as it matches his emotional and personal beliefs. A post-truth occurs when the speaker/ writer would like to assert something more important to him than his moral obligation to the truth. The post-truth political culture believes in this concept while being outspoken with their self-made alternative truths. In describing post-truth, the “Guest Editor’s Introduction: Toward an Archaeogenealogy of Post-truth” published in the journal *Philosophy & Rhetoric* says it is “a circuitous slippage between facts or alt-facts, knowledge, opinion, belief, and truth” (Barbara 329).

By manipulating the language that he uses to brainwash the Outer Hornites against the Inner Hornite in the name of patriotism, Phil emerges as a dominant political figure. A post-truth political strategy to communicate on an emotional level is used throughout the novella by Phil. During the totalitarian reign of Phil, he distorts the truth to make others feel that what he does to the Inner Hornites is for noble reasons. He raises alternative truths with the intention of torturing them. Despite the fact that the Inner Hornites were refugees, Phil portrays them as invaders who come to destroy the peaceful atmosphere in the Outer Horner. Phil conducts his revenge

against the Inner Hornites by haunting them one after the other with measures of intolerance and violence. He wanted them to be wiped off from their territory. To slowly destroy the Inner Hornites, he turns their situations against them. As part of his post-truth speeches, he makes the Outer Hornites believe that the Inner Hornites will be a threat to their safe living and praises himself as their protector who acts for their benefit and a noble cause.

The first complaint against Phil from the Inner Hornites to the President was tactically neutralised by Phil and his group by saying that he had not killed Mona and had taken the apple tree and the stream to ensure that the President's decree was followed. He added that the Short-Term Residency Zone Tax Decree is a very good decree made by the President. When the President asked for a democratic poll from the members, the advisors managed to gather Freeda, Melvin, and Larry, Leon the Border Guard, and Phil, who are the representatives of the Outer Hornite. "When the votes were counted, it was determined that the people of Outer Horner were unanimous in their support of the Short-Term Residency Zone Tax" (Saunders, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* 18). The president was convinced as he was appreciated for the decree that he believed he had made for the betterment of the Hornites. The Presidential Appointment Medal was presented to Phil as a reward for enacting the will of the President, which he believed that the Hornites are also in support of. The president sternly tells the Inner Hornites to obey Phil, who does much for them. Though the Inner Hornites tried to tell the truth about their pathetic situation, Phil overcomes it by handling the President in a way he had to be handled. On an occasion when the Inner Hornites were

"heaped up in a tremendous teetering pile of grimaces and side-paddles and Thrumton Specialty Valves and cowlicks and rear ends and receding hairlines, a pile that began in the hole that was formerly Inner Horner and rose some thirty feet in the air, leaning precariously out over Outer Horner"

(Saunders, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* 19)

to avoid taxation, but tumbledown into Outer Horner, Phil used his strategic method to invoke hatred against them. He said, "This is an outrage! Halt! Advance no farther! Invade us no more! Do you surrender? Surrender at once! Drop your weapons! Does

everyone see how forceful I'm being? As Special Border Activities Coordinator, I command you!" (21). In reality, the Inner Hornites had no weapons and no desire to invade the Outer Horner.

To invoke the intolerance of duality, he further says that the Inner Hornites consider the Outer Hornites as less than them and as a subjugated class. It also helped him to raise their patriotic emotions, which would in turn help him to gain more support for the brutal activities that he was doing against the Inner Hornites. Phil kinks the truth by saying, "an arrogance that has as its seed the apparent belief that we are less than you and must be subjugated. But we will not be subjugated!" (Saunders, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* 23) even though the situation was worse on the side of the Inner Hornites. He tries to motivate the patriotic side of Outer Hornites by pointing to their identity. He continues to spread lies in his speech saying, "we are noble people, of ancient lineage, and have a right to live and thrive, whereas you, who would take away our right to live and thrive, I'm not sure about you, I'm not sure that you have not, over the long years of taking advantage of our simple and generous nature, forfeited certain rights having to do with your continued existence!" (23).

"I am not bad", said Phil. "I am totally good. What I do, benefits all". Phil then discovered a flaw in Gertrude and flung her against the wall, shattering her into a thousand pieces (Saunders, *The Brief and Frightening Regin of Phil* 35). Phil was committing violence against the Inner Hornites in the name of saving Outer Hornites from the Inner Hornites. He always ensures that the Outer Hornites are convinced by his words and actions. The speeches made by Phil after grabbing the position of the President, are those that appeal to the emotions and self-belief of the Outer Hornites about their territory. He uses the same word 'we' as same as many dictators and practitioners of post-truth have used and even continues to make feel that he/she is representing the entire people for a noble cause. He misrepresents facts by saying that the Inner Hornites invade to do violent activities against innocent babies and people of Outer Horner. He highlights the words 'our ancient noble stock', 'centuries of right living', 'highest and most advanced nation' etc. to make sure that it emotionally gets into the hearts of the listeners. Phil gets the attention of the media by saying,

"We've already accomplished a number of painful, difficult security-related tasks, but tomorrow we'll be attempting the most painful, difficult task of all.

It would be super to have some skillful truth-tellers out there, encouraging the nation in its critical hour of destiny. I'd be happy to pay your expenses and a small stipend.”

(Saunders, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* 45)

He tries to pay them to advocate for him by calling them ‘truth-tellers’ which happens in the post-truth era where there is a confusing scenario regarding what to believe as nothing is true. The media were convinced by Phil’s approach as the new President. The media takes the role of the propagators of post-truth as they, again and again, stress the news in favour of Phil. They were amazed and gratified that the new president understood the vital role of the media. The actual happenings at the border were masked intentionally by the media. Phil’s activities were supported by the media blindly without checking the facts. They reported that he eliminated the border threat to make peace in the nation. The media advocated Phil in several ways by saying that the President transforms a violent muddy hole into a pastoral paradise, peace is restored on the border, insurrection is nipped in the bud, and calls him a visionary leader who does the real duty of a President. All those against the truth were proclaimed as truth with no necessary evidence to prove it true. But he had great support from a majority of the population, including the media.

To experience a powerful authoritarian regime, Phil wanted to wipe out the Inner Hornites permanently. Therefore, he addresses Outer Hornites as ‘my people’ to tell them that if the Inner Hornites exist, they will rise against them. When Phil arranged barbed wire to the posts dropped around the Short-term Residency Zone in the name of Peace-Encouraging Enclosure, the Inner Hornites said that they were put in jail and questioned him. In a reaction to it, Phil criticised their mindset for being unable to distinguish a jail from a Peace-Encouraging Enclosure. He said both the territories would be protected from the innate violent tendencies of Inner Hornites due to his decision. He proclaimed it a real win-win occasion. Biased news was continuously informed by the media, giving the picture that there is a situation on the border being handled well by Phil for the benefit of the Outer Hornites.

In the essay, “The Brain-dead Megaphone” in the collection of essays, Saunders provides a symbolic representation of the media to a person holding a megaphone. The media, according to him, are run entirely for profit and, therefore,

the importance of truth decreases where titillation gains more space and audience. The media is an effective tool used in the contemporary post-truth era. May it be the new media, broadcast or print; there is a high chance of cultivated truths more favourable to the mass public than objective. When alternative truths are guiding a society that has limited access to verifying the truth, they are submerged in a liminal state where they can neither believe nor avoid what is heard through such megaphones. Phil uses the media as a tool for his interests, where news is manipulated in a way that favours him.

In the post-truth statements by Phil and the media that highlight it, there arises an interstitial state where alternative truths are used to cover up what exactly happens. When Phil and the media interpret the incidents, the truth is twisted to highlight their version of the truth. There is an uncertain identity between what is true and what is not. The more highlighted truth becomes the one that Phil and the media think that the Outer Hornites would appreciate.

Therefore, whoever listens to them is held in an intermediate phase between objective truth and what is not the truth. As quoted earlier, there is a circuitous slippage between them that itself is post-truth (Barbara 329). What Phil says cannot be said to be a lie when seen from the perspective of the Outer Hornites. Phil takes advantage of their personal and emotional stance while delivering his hate speech opposing the Inner Hornites. Phil's alternative truths help him to conquer one by one, experiencing his totalitarian regime one by one. He exercises it by evoking the patriotic emotions of the Outer Hornites.

The essence of the truth is being hidden purposefully to project an alternative truth that is subjective in nature to the listeners who rely more on their emotional and personal beliefs. As similar to the in-between situation faced by the Inner Hornites due to the rule of Phil, the Outer Hornites are shifted from what is said to be known as fact to a different aspect of the truth called the alternative fact. There is a tactical creation of post-truth liminality by Phil which is successfully employed to disguise the Outer Hornites. In the process of transition from knowing the facts to transitioning out, the Outer Hornites got suspended in between by the post-truth speeches by Phil. It gave them no chance to know the truth, as they were only able to know the perspective of Phil. As liminality can be positive and negative (Turner, *The Ritual*

Process: Structure and Anti-structure 201) according to its nature of existence, post-truth can also act as a tool for progress or destruction at the same time. Turner relates situations of outsiderhood and structural inferiority as a part of the between and betwixt state of liminality (Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* 231). Inner Hornites are, in a way, out of their territory and are considered inferior by the Outer Hornites, especially Phil who wants others to see them in such a condition.

Considering the concept of *communitas* by Victor Turner, in the context of the novella, the Inner Hornites and the Outer Hornites belong to different types of *communitas*. Due to the sudden changes that occurred to the Inner Hornites that made them spatially and mentally equate to each other, the existential or spontaneous *communitas* would be the most suitable tag matching the situation of the Inner Hornites. They had to be in such a situation during the period when Phil became the supreme power of the Outer Hornite. In the case of the Outer Hornites, they were gathered together as a group to imbibe the ideology of extremist patriotism and hate towards the Inner Hornites by Phil. It was essential for Phil to maintain his power by acting as if he was the only one who could save their territory from the Inner Hornites. Ideologically, the group of Outer Hornites was grouped for his vested interest. Therefore, they became equal in their thoughts, at least for a certain period, which makes them belong to the category of ideological *communitas*.

Both the Inner and Outer Hornites can be called liminal entities or liminal personae as they both experience liminality directly or indirectly. The experience of liminality for the Inner Hornites can be identified as direct, whereas the liminality as an effect of post-truth politics for the Outer Hornites is indirect in nature. Neither of these groups of *communitas* was led to permanent liminality as Phil could not maintain his power over the Inner Hornites for a long period. The liminality experienced by the Inner Hornites due to the forceful oppression and subjugation of Phil is temporary when considering its duration. The liminal personae, who are neither living nor dead, but both alive and dead, express the ambiguity of inter-structural time (Deflem 13). Thus, the Inner Hornites who produce the characteristics of liminality are therefore termed liminal personae or liminal entities. The Inner Hornites become the victims of such liminality due to natural changes and also due to Phil's activities against them, which make their title as a liminal entity a forced status

on them. Unlike them, the Outer Hornites are brainwashed to be in their liminal status as part of Phil's post-truth political techniques. They do not identify themselves as being in a liminal status created by post-truth liminality but get unknowingly absorbed in the process planned by Phil.

The Inner Hornite's liminality is unanticipated, and the Outer Hornite's is unknown to them. Liminality experienced by the Outer Hornites gives the notion that under certain circumstances, the victims of liminality are unaware of their liminal phase. It can be mainly because they are not directly affected by the consequences of liminality or because of the less intensity of the characteristics of such liminality. The transition (See Table 7) of the spatial and mental states of the Inner Hornites was not predictable or scheduled, which makes it an unanticipated transition. Schlossberg's first 'S' among the 4S – situation is how individuals consider their transition (Goodman et al. 60). While analysing the perspective of the Inner Hornites, the liminal phase of transition was set off by the natural disturbances in their territory. But it was multiplied with the intervention of Phil. They consider it as their worst time that could not be resisted by their force or power. They were transited from their previous status of being in an independent and free territory of their own to a taxed territory which was not even able to be accessed on their own. They were uncertain about their duration in the Short-Term Residency Zone allotted by Phil. The stress and tension that they experienced were high compared to their previous life status. They were not pre-equipped with prior experiences in such a liminal situation. Though they did not receive any support during most of their liminal phase, towards the end, they were blessed with intervention from another territory named the Nation of Great Keller. But all the efforts were in vain with the arrival of the Creator who disassembles both the Inner and the Outer Hornites to form new abstract structures. The Inner Hornites tried their own possible ways to get out of their liminal phase. They approached the President and also pleaded to Phil to let them live peacefully, which was all set without any hope.

4.3 Fox 8

The third text for analysis in this chapter is entirely different from what had been discussed earlier due to its characters involved in liminality. The previous texts

analysed for their liminal aspect showcased the characteristics of liminality expressed by either human characters or characters resembling the emotions and thoughts of humans. But, in this fictional work of George Saunders, it is not humans who experience liminality. Contrary to the usual style of representing contexts, Saunders has experimented with a new writing style in his writing through this short fiction which can also be called a fable. Saunders' *Fox 8* cannot be reduced to a normal animal fable that covers the incidents that took place among some foxes. It has greater dimensions beyond the first-hand reading focused on only its direct meanings. Through the lens of Turner's liminality, the analysis of the fable crosses the limits of what is traditionally accepted as a character in a literary text. Saunders tries to experiment with the fable through the first-person narrative of Fox 8 that highlights the perspective of a living creature other than that of human beings. Biologically, a fox belongs to the class of Mammalia having the family Canidae with a variety of species spread around different parts of the world. They are similar to humans in the sense that they too belong to the class of Mammalia and the Kingdom of Animalia. When humans call themselves social beings, animals do not have the privilege of attributing decorative titles to them.

Through *Fox 8*, Saunders tries to remind his readers to be kind to their environment and other living creatures in the world. This reminder is essential and timely while humans are on the brink of environmental issues that give rise to abnormalities in the smooth and peaceful existence of many living beings on earth. Hubert Reeves, a Canadian astronomer and science populariser, has said that man is the maddest of all the species because he worships an invisible God and destroys apparent nature. According to the ground-breaking assessment by *The Guardian*, humans comprise only 0.01% of the total population of all living forms on earth and have destroyed 83% of wild animals in the world (Carrington). Due to the increasing number of encroachments on natural habitats, displacement of animals for the vested interests of human beings and exploitation of natural resources, the stability and sustainability of nature are diminishing on a daily basis, giving rise to unexpected changes in climatic conditions around the world. *The Independent* calls it an allegory in the technique of the coming of age of a young fox amidst the greed, stupidity, and senselessness of Humans (Hayden). *The Guardian* highlights the environmental

concerns that the allegorical fable puts forward for discussion (Preston). Given the outer shell of the fable, the meaning deciphered is about the environmental concerns wherein humans become the antagonist. The victims of the atrocious deeds of humans are the foxes, other animals, and the environmental habitat of the inhabitants of the forest. Though the text consists of only 64 pages with many illustrations by Chelsea Cardinal, it is one of the most crucial works of Saunders where he incorporates different meanings into one single text. Other than the environmental concern that can be decoded from the fable, the interpretation of foxes as refugees, oppressed, working class, Afro-Americans, women, etc. also goes in line with the context. *The Independent's* review gives a hint to animals as powerful allegorical symbols, wherein it equates foxes to refugees who were forced to go into exile or immigrate in search of safe zones to live peacefully.

Fox 8 is very short in its word count but is powerful in its inner meanings and possibilities of interpretation. In most of his works, Saunders criticises the binary of dominant/repressed, and the same criterion applies to understanding this fable. This can be the nutshell of the theme of binary clash expressed in most stories of Saunders that criticise and satirise the capitalistic or authoritative domination of the dominant class over the repressed. If linked in a chain, the previously discussed novellas would join hands with this allegorical fable as they discuss the same theme in different contexts. *Fox 8* is all about the gradual change of impression towards humans for a young fox named Fox 8.

Though it had an appreciating voice for the species of humans, which it calls 'Yumans', later on, the perspective of Fox 8 towards humans changes. The major reason behind the shift in its impression is because of the unexpected displacement and inhuman actions of the human species towards other living creatures, especially foxes. The anthropomorphic character of Fox 8 speaks the language of humans without perfection. In the beginning, as an introduction to the story, Fox 8 asks for bail from his listeners, saying, "Deer Reeder: First may I say for any werds I spel rong. Because I am a fox! So don't rite or spel perfect" (Saunders, *Fox 8* 3). This deliberate use of imperfect human language gives a liminal status to the young fox. The spelling and grammatical correctness of sentences spoken by Fox 8 would create confusion in the reader at first reading. But, gradually, the intention of Saunders to get

the reader completely attached to the feelings and emotions of the fox turns out to be successful. The reader would be able to adapt to the style of the fox's first-person narrative style with a slight difference in how humans speak their language. The liminal status of Fox 8 in its linguistic ability gives the idea that the Fox can be described with the conjunctions "both/and", "neither/nor" (Koefoed and Stenner 169). These words can be attached to the context to understand that Fox 8 is both in the state of its primary character as different from humans and also has certain attributes of humans that it learned from them. It can also be interpreted that Fox 8 neither completely belongs to the species of fox nor humans. It stays in-between the two species. The list is long for the misspelt words, as it goes on from 'Yuman' for humans to 'eksplanashun' for explanation. Though these are written with spelling mistakes, when pronouncing them, it is easy for the reader to grasp the content. The pronunciation provided by Saunders from the perspective of the fox is correct even though the spelling is intentionally made wrong.

The tripartite structure related to Turner's liminality is identifiable in the life of Fox 8. The incidents that surround the young fox and his fellows can be classified as pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases. In the pre-liminal phase of Fox 8, the exemplariness of Fox 8's innocence is visible, which makes it regard humans as interesting. It says, humans "sound grate! ... like pretty music" (Saunders, *Fox 8* 3). Fox 8 wanted to explore more about humans' lifestyles, which made him learn their voice. Fox 8 listened to humans and discussed it with fellow foxes who were also interested in hearing tales reported by Fox 8. During that period in the fable, Fox 8 and fellow foxes were living a normative life in their own habitat, peacefully and happily. There was no anti-structural reversal until Fox 8, Fox 7, and Grate Leeder discovered a signboard that read 'FoxViewCommons'. According to the available details of the story, this point of discovery can be identified as the point of separation of the pre-liminal phase for the foxes. Though Saunders directs the plot of the fable through the opinions of foxes, they symbolise the whole of the living creatures affected by the activities of humans. Fox 8 becomes the representative victim who witnesses the cruelties by humans done to his fellow beings.

From the moment Fox 8, Fox 7, and Grete Leeder discover the signboard, the liminal phase of those creatures gets initiated. The normative structure of their lives

was about to change in the following days, which made them get immersed in the extreme intensities of their liminal phase. A shift from what was previously a normal life for the foxes happens from the moment they discover the signboard. “Those werd caused many suden questions in all out branes. Such as: What is a FoxViewCommons? Wud it chase us? Wud it eat us?” (Saunders, *Fox 8* 10). These words by Fox 8 express confusion, dilemma and uncertainty about their future. It was followed by the chain of events that hiked up the liminality in their state of mind. They saw trucks that dug up their soil, tore down the leaning tree, destroyed their shady drinking area, and flattened the hills. The beauty of the forest wherein the animals, including the foxes, had lived peacefully was turned into a flat surface of the soil with no sign of trees. No consideration was given to the inhabitants of the area while destroying the natural resources for the vested interests of humans. Saunders adds that – it was not just about the trees alone, but also the fish, bugs, mice, and everything else they could love to eat was destroyed all of a sudden with the help of huge machinery. What would be the situation of a group if it is overthrown from its natural habitat? They would definitely struggle to find their food and shelter. Getting displaced from one’s own habitat is the first step of the cruellest action done by a dominant force. Here, the foxes were not able to find a source for their food to survive. Day by day, the situation of not having enough food haunted them, causing the intensity of the incident to double. The foxes were affected physically and mentally by the new ground of liminality. They were completely absorbed by the forced liminality on them due to the dominating attitude of humans. Fox 8 says, “Soon sevrul of our Extreme Lee Old Foxes become sik, and ded, because: no fud. These ded frends were: Fox 24, Fox 10 and Fox 111” (Saunders, *Fox 8* 12) to reveal the extremity of liminality that is suffered by them. The physical condition that surrounds them, which is contrary to their expectations in the pre-liminal phase, affects their state of mind too. It is in this situation that Fox 8 asks the reader to experience the suffering that they are forced to experience. Fox 8 asks if they would like to experience the feeling of the foxes by barely eating for weeks, getting thinner every day and watching others who are with them get skinny. Through all these expressions of feelings, Fox 8 tries to explain the negative effects of liminality experienced by the foxes. These struggles and sufferings are due to the cruel invasion

by humans into the natural habitat of the foxes. The pre-liminal phase of the foxes was harmonious and safe from the intervention of humans. The intention of Saunders in describing these events through Fox 8 is to expose how brutal humans exploit and destroy someone else's habitat and resources for their own selfish greed as an excuse for development. In *Fox 8*, the intervention and encroachment by humans on the natural habitat of the foxes were to build a mall that would provide happiness and enjoyment for the human community. Though known, humans advantageously forget the fact that they are building each block on land that does not belong to them, as it has its natural and traditional inhabitants. Being the victims of forced liminality by humans, the foxes can be termed liminal entities as they are directly affected by the characteristics of liminality.

As part of the coping strategy (See Table 8), the foxes suggested a method to escape their present crisis, i.e., their liminal phase. They enquired about the possibility of moving out of the boundaries of their habitat in search of a better place to live where they would get access to food. At this point in the fable, it is essential to identify the spatial importance of the habitat in which the foxes exist. While analysing the fable through the lens of liminality, this particular viewpoint would help in leading to further steps of analysis. Spatially, the existing area in which the foxes belong at that particular time is their liminal space. It is a liminal space as the foxes, who were the actual inhabitants, were separated from their actual habitat through force and power. By achieving such a displacement of the inhabitants of the area, humans were able to build their mall without any issues. After converting the natural habitat of the original inhabitants of the area to a man-made habitat, the inhabitants were not allowed to access their habitat with the freedom and safety that they had enjoyed previously. Spatially, they are in-between the two ends as they neither have access to their original land nor do they have access to the new surroundings created by humans. Therefore, the only way to escape their spatial liminality, i.e., the liminal space that is directly connected with the liminality of the state of mind, is to move somewhere else other than their own habitat. As a different way to cope with the situation, the foxes have another method too. They have to accept the crisis that has happened to them, leaving behind the pre-liminal phase of their life to embrace their liminal phase as it is. But, as the physical conditions of the area are contrary to their

expectations, this would be difficult to execute. They are adversely affected by the severe shortage of food and water. Therefore, the only way is to move out of the jurisdiction of the mall built by humans. While the suggestion from some foxes reached the Great Leader, he had no interest in leaving the habitat and called it dangerous.

The gradual discovery of the mall and the people surrounding it took Fox 8 and Fox 7 into the depths of their liminal state. They were subjected to humiliation and torture by two humans when they were discovering the newly built mall. In their pre-liminal phase, they were free to wander over the same place. But, during their liminal phase, the place became strange to them and they were restricted from being like before by the humans. Fox 7 was hit with their hats and was kicked and stumped by making harassing noises that Fox 8 had never heard before from any human. Fox 8, while being nearer to the dealings of humans, discovers the paradox between what it had thought about humans and what it witnesses at the moment. It says that even the foxes who got hit by cars had a better look than the Fox 7 who was beaten to death by humans.

The attempt by Fox 8 to deliberately forget the incidents that happened to Fox 7 while they visited the mall premises can be regarded as the effort taken to get into the post-liminal phase. Though Fox 8 tried, it could not make it successful. It discovered many more things, such as a road can pass over a river, there is more than one mall, and a tree can float in a lake. These discoveries made it lost and took it more into a state of liminality than before. Fox 8 testifies that the situation is the worst of all times, which puts its heart in bad condition. These words point directly to the liminal phase of Fox 8. The symbolic figure of Fox 8 is used effectively by Saunders to equate similar conditions faced by the repressed and oppressed classes of human beings all around the world who are under the dominating power of the dominant class.

The liminal phase of Fox 8 comes to an end when it meets Fox SmallNose/Alert + Funy. Fox 8 is moved to a forest where it has never been before and becomes friends with the inmates of that forest. Turner's anthropological theory based on comparative symbology explains the situation of such ambiguous transitions as spatial transference. It results in "a geographical movement from one place to another. This

may take the form of the mere opening of doors or the literal crossing of a threshold which separates two distinct areas” (Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, Ritual” 25). In the story, Fox 8 travels from its innate habitat to distinct forest habitat, denoting a transit from the known to the unknown spheres of life. Such descriptions of Saunders point to the woeful expatriation of people from their lands, where they originally belonged, to distant, unknown lands as refugees. The situational experience of an unfortunate refugee is backdropped while considering the transition of the fox due to the unexpected situations. Fox 8 finds it comfortable to lead its life peacefully, even though it does not find its fox friends. As to how Arpad Szakolczai writes in his essay “Permanent (trickster) liminality: The reasons of the heart and the mind” by giving reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s *Pascalian Meditations* (2000), reason cannot guide one out of liminality until the crisis is sensed and resolved by the heart. In a conversation, Fox SmallNose/Alert + Funy asks Fox 8 not to be a sad and dull dad to their children. Fox 8 decides to be what Fox SmallNose/Alert + Funy wants it to be by accepting by heart what had happened previously. Towards the end of the story, Fox 8 requires some answers to retrieve its old and hopeful character. In the further description, Fox 8 indirectly says that humans want them to always be seen as being low, fearful, and oppressed. This discovery by Fox 8 explains the true nature of invading, conquering, and exploiting the tendency of humans without a second thought about the future consequences it will have on them. It is the advice that Fox 8 gives to humans at the end of its letter, which it plans to hand over to a good human named P. Melonsky. It says to try being nicer if the entire human race wants a happy ending.

Towards the end of the fable, the message Saunders gives to the entire humanity through the perspective of Fox 8 is crucial. The words, “If you want your Storys to end happy, try being niser” (Saunders, *Fox 8* 49) give a hint about the consequences that have to be suffered by the whole of humanity if they do not restrict themselves from not being respectful to the environment and other beings. As the ecosystem sustains with the help of chained cooperation, the authoritative domination of one species would create a critical imbalance in the smooth functioning of its sustainability. If the natural habitats of other beings, including animals and birds, were destroyed continuously by human beings for their own interests, it would result

in the sudden vanishing of different living creatures connected to the natural chain of the ecosystem, resulting in long-term consequences for the environment and ecosystem. Though the fable discusses only the direct consequences of the forced liminality exerted on the foxes and their habitats, possibilities for a counter-liminality are high as the long-term results of human activities like encroachment, displacement, and exploitation indirectly affect the dominant race of humans. Therefore, Fox 8's warning hides the clue to nearly awaiting liminality that would affect all of humanity. Analysing the same with the help of Schlossberg's transition model of the four S, it reveals that Fox 8 experienced a "moving in, moving through, and moving out" (Goodman et al. 50) process. The forest habitat where the animals had lived peacefully became an area of encroachment by humans, leading to a complete change in its setting to a man-made habitat. The sudden shift is unanticipated and out of their control to resist. Though the change in the habitat was permanent, the liminal phase of the major character is temporary as it moves to another forest, having a status equal to that of a refugee. The role change for Fox 8 and other fellow animals is that they had to be refugees to other places, and some had to die of starvation. The idea of a human being that they had in mind had completely changed in the process of their transition from inhabitants to refugees. As mentioned earlier, they had to suffer from the psychological states of anxiety, uncertainty, ambiguity, fear, and loss of their stable normative structure. They did not receive any support other than Fox 8, who was welcomed to the nearby forest habitat. It was its coping strategy for the transition that happened to it.

In *Fox 8*, the group of foxes, animals, and the environment collectively can be considered the direct victims of the forced liminality by the humans who built their mall by displacing and exploiting the environment. They were all chained to a single liminal event as victims, having liminal status in their liminal phase. Therefore, they belong to the theoretical concept of *communitas* by Victor Turner. They have turned out to be normative *communitas*. It is because of their gradual formation of the liminality of the group "which attempts to foster and maintain relationships of spontaneous *communitas* on a more or less permanent basis" (Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual" 80). The environment and the habitat of the foxes continue in their permanent state of liminality as they exist in a different spatial form

compared to their natural formation. Due to the dominating tendency of humans, they converted the entire structure of the land they encroached on to build the mall. Therefore, the environment has been in its transition state from its pre-liminal phase to its post-liminal phase but is stuck in its liminal phase after the exploitation done by humans. It lost its natural inhabitants that were a part of its ecological sustenance. While considering the environment as a character in the fable, it would definitely be a direct victim of the actions of humans that led them to its liminal phase. The habitat of the foxes, where they lived their lives for some time till the encroachment of humans suddenly changed it to be an alien space to them. The changes that happened to their habitat made it feel strange to them compared to what they had been used to for the previous years of their lives. These foxes also became strange to the habitat as it was transformed into a mall where luxury and leisure combined to serve only human beings. This change in the habitat was profound in the discovery made by Fox 8 and Fox 7, in which Fox 7 was beaten to death by humans.

The emotion of suddenly becoming a stranger to space, which had been one's habitat, is portrayed by Saunders through the situation of the Foxes. In such situations of being and becoming strangers, the identity of a person is also questioned. These incidents point to the loss of identity of refugees, repressed and oppressed people by different forms of domination. For refugees and exiled people, their land is lost and they are displaced to a different land where they are completely anonymous and alienated. The dominance of a group of people forces the subjugated class to be in the same condition as the foxes had to suffer in the fable. In the case of Fox 8, the liminality was temporary. It is because of the coping measures adopted by Fox 8 that it landed in its post-liminal phase. Fox 8's moving-away process can be considered a strategic measure to escape its spatial phase. The gradual relationship with Fox SmallNose/Alert + Funy and her group of foxes made Fox 8 deliberately forget the struggles and incidents of its liminal phase, thereby adapting to the new situations with the group, which helped it to get out of its liminal state of mind.

4.4 *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip*

George Saunders' third independent publication in the category of fiction stories is *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* published in 2000 by Bloomsbury publications.

The fifty-two marvellous illustrations provided by Lane Smith help the fictional story to get independently published as a single book rather than being included in any of the short story anthologies by the author. Lane Smith is an American illustrator known for his eclectic visuals who also writes children's books. His illustrations, such as *The Stinky Cheese Man*, *Grandpa Green*, *James and the Giant Beast*, and several other independent and collaborative works, are well-acclaimed with awards and recognition. Smith's illustrations go in pace with the perusing tone of the story which is primarily focused on attracting children's attention to the moral values of sharing and kindness while living as part of a community. In Saunders' fictional story, Smith uses humourous and earnest illustrations which match the events and incidents described in the story. The attractive layouts and illustrations give the reader a hint as to the tone and concept of the work produced by Saunders, which has definitely been unique from the usual track followed by the author. The illustrative portrayal of characters in Saunders' story has given the story an extra advantage in producing a direct influence in the minds of the readers on the characteristic features of the characters, helping to recognise the humour behind the descriptions effectively and elegantly.

In the view of *The Guardian* in 2001, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* is an "enjoyable morality tale for everyone aged seven to adult" (Gardner, "Off the Shelf"). It is suggested with the same viewpoint and remarks it as "a zany, wild book - as its title suggests and although a picture book, it is for older children" (Kellaway, *The Guardian*). It is the story of three families in a village called Frip whose goats were attacked by gappers from the sea, forcing them to sell them to get rid of their crisis. They were in such a critical period due to the lack of unity and kindness towards each other. Capable, the girl whose goats were attacked first by the gappers did not get any support from her neighbouring families whose goats were not targeted at that time by the gappers. She was forced to sell her goats to get rid of her crisis and had to divert her attention towards fishing, which was considered something one did if they could not manage to acquire a goat of their own (Saunders, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* 42).

As Saunders would always wish to have in his stories, the conclusion leads to the message of moral values of "kindness, generosity, compassion, and community"

(Saunders, “The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip”) when Capable forgives her neighbours for what they had done to her at the time of crisis and helps them to learn to fish, a skill at which she had become an expert by then. Being a children’s book with illustrations, the message provided by Saunders to his readers is still very relevant even after a span of twenty long years since its first publication.

Though the story is considered a morality tale created for children, interpretation of the characters and incidents would help to identify the parallel meaning that it has a higher tone and meaning than that of a moral story. Saunders leaves the space for the reader to understand the inner meaning, which points to an even harsher reality in society. Considering the overall tone of his novellas and stories, the direction of his story would similarly be a criticism of the power structure that tends to dominate over the subjugated or the repressed. Viewing the incidents in *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* in a wider space of interpretation, the intention of Saunders was also to criticise and advise the encroachment of capitalism on the working class. It is evident in the words of the less-stupid gapper with the sticking-out brain who says that they loved goats who did not recognise their love. Saunders writes, “... he proposed that they stop loving goats. The goats had never returned their affection. The goats had taken them for granted. Goats stunk, actually” (Saunders, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* 79). In reality, the gappers attacked the goats for their own benefit and returned nothing to the benefit of the goats. As the gappers attack, the goats get skinny and stop giving milk, resulting in a great loss for their owner. The version of the gappers resembles the tone of capitalists who prefer to entitle them as people who care for the working class, but who in reality exploit them to the maximum to increase production in their industry for their profit.

This moralist tale can be explored for the presence of Turner’s liminality by dividing it into pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases. As the pre-liminal and post-liminal phases are comparatively normative in their characteristics, the point at which the unusualness begins and ends can be identified as the liminal phase. Here, liminality is affected by the members of the three families described in the tale and also by the goats that suffer from the attack of the gappers. The first family includes Capable and his father, the second is Mr. and Mrs. Bea Romo, their children, Robert

and Gilbert, and the third family includes Sid Ronsen, his wife, Carol Ronsen, and their two daughters.

The beginning of the tale introduces brushing the gappers and emptying the gapper-sacks into the sea as a daily routine for the children of Friip. They continue to do the same eight times a day. This activity of the children in Friip, which is done on a daily basis, can be identified as a liminal activity performed by the children in order to avoid further consequences. The gappers come back to attack the goats within three hours, forcing the children to continue their routine process again and again. The gappers usually “split into three groups, one per goat yard, only to be brushed off again by the same weary and discouraged children” (Saunders, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Friip* 6). These are temporary in nature, but continue to produce the same liminality in the goats as well as the children. From his short description of what happens in Friip every day, Saunders gives a hint to the idea of the tale. The period when the gappers are thrown to the sea and the time it takes to climb up to their targeted goats can be regarded as a blend of the pre-liminal and post-liminal phases of the goats and the children. While the gappers begin to attack the goats after successfully getting on their bodies, the liminal phase of the goats begins as it gradually begins to disturb and trouble the health of the goats. The point at which the children start to brush the gappers, collect them in gapper-sacks, and throw them to the sea is the liminal phase of the children. As it does not extend for a long period, it can be called temporary liminality that continues to appear eight times a day in the same form with a gap of three hours.

With an introduction to the tale describing the temporarily recurring liminal phases, Saunders prepares his readers to witness many more liminal statuses in the tale. When the less-stupid sticking-out brain gapper ordered fellow gappers to concentrate on attacking the goats in the more closely situated house in Friip, a much more serious liminal phase of Capable began to affect and haunt her. Capable was unable to brush the gappers away from the goats as there were approximately fifteen hundred gappers that attacked as a single group. When she came to brush the gappers, she saw “every single one of her goats lying on its side with a mortified look on its face, completely covered with shrieking orange gappers” (Saunders, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Friip* 13). Though she had to face temporarily recurring liminal

phases along with the other two families in Fripp, this combined attack of gappers went her into more trouble and thus into the depth of a new liminal phase that she had not ever experienced. The unexpected liminal event in her life has evoked the characteristic features of liminality such as uncertainty, ambiguity and anxiety about the unusual happenings around her. She tried to escape the liminal phase of her life by asking for help from her neighbours. Their unexpected rejection of her request for help intensified the effect of the liminality experienced by Capable.

The reason why the other two families rejected her request was that they did not identify any of their goats affected by the gappers. They were lucky enough not to be targeted by the gappers, which made them believe they were in their safe zone, indicating the pre-liminal status of the other two families. Being helpless and without any help from neighbours, Capable had to find alternative methods to find a way out of her liminal phase, which if extended beyond a particular time would permanently affect the goat, leading to its death. She tried “hiding the goats under blankets, setting the goats on tables, building fences around the goats and shaving the goats” (28-29) as her steps to overcome her liminal phase. The extremity of the liminal phase of Capable can be identified when she accepts her failure in saving the goats from the gappers. She says to her father, “I can’t keep up. Our goats are dying. We’re going to have to ask the neighbours for help” (30). She filled her gapper-sack twenty times to throw it into the sea, which made her tired and even worse. In the last attempt to get rid of the gappers and escape the liminal phase, Capable sold the goats by taking them to Fritch. This act of Capable helped her to end her troubles due to gappers. It also saved her from being stuck in liminality permanently. The solution that she found to escape her liminal phase was to get out of her helpless condition. The indecisiveness in taking action to permanently get rid of the gappers ended when she firmly decided to sell her goats. From then on, Capable had no trouble with the gappers as she did not have any more goats of Capable to attack.

Though this was a suicidal act on the part of Capable, as she could not get any external support from her neighbours, she had no other option other than to sell her goats. Though she sold her goats and was out of the liminal phases that arose due to the attack of the gappers on the goats, Capable cannot be said to be completely relieved from the intermediate phase of her tripartite structure. Saunders informs at

the very beginning of the tale that the families in Frip were entirely dependent on the milk produced by their goats. Saunders writes, "... if there's no goat milk, there's no money, and if there's no money, there's no food or housing or clothing" (2). Capable is without any source of income as she had already sold her entire goats at Fritch. Therefore, her liminal period does not get over by the act of selling the goats, even though it helped her get rid of the attack of gappers. When she decided to overcome the situation by going fishing, which had been stopped long ago in Frip when they diverted to get the advantage of the goat's milk, it was unusual and not recommended by anyone. She could gradually overcome her liminal phase and transit to the post-liminal phase even though she had initial trouble with the fishing.

Capable discovered the real cause of her liminal phase and acted accordingly to escape the suspended phase of liminality. Though the neighbours expected her to be affected with permanent liminality, with timely action and wise decision, she could overcome her liminal phase and move on to the post-liminal phase. Compared to the previously experienced short durations of liminality, this is prolonged in its duration and impact.

The same liminal situation was experienced by the family of Mr. and Mrs. Bea Romo. It led them to the same liminal phase, experiencing the features of liminality. They too did not get the help of their neighbours, Sid Ronsen and Carol Ronsen as they said the same excuse that they had said to Capable. While Mr. and Mrs. Bea Romo were going through their liminal phase, their neighbours, Sid and Carol Ronsen, were having issues with the gappers on their goats. Saunders highlights the lack of cooperation and consideration for each other that made the three families in the struggle that lead to the depths of their liminal phase. The clash between Mr. and Mrs. Bea Romo's family and Sid Ronsen and Carol Ronsen's family led them to spend all their wealth on very strong men from Fritch to carry their house into the swamp which is actually past the house of the other family. Both the families focused their effort and wealth to keep their house away from being closer to the sea rather than helping each other to overcome the situation with a combined effort. The intensity of their liminal phase made them make unnecessary and stupid decisions out of rivalry with the neighbouring family. Though they conducted such useless and wealth-consuming efforts at a high cost, they could not get rid of the gappers and

remained in the same liminal phase. When Sid Ronsen sees Capable who came up with her big gapper-sack full of fish, he asks, “And maybe you could also teach us to fish. And maybe also we could live with you awhile” (Saunders, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* 69). Though the two families did not support Capable in her difficult period, Saunders uses the character of Capable to express the moral value of caring and cooperation. Saunders includes in his narrative, “And soon she found it was not all that much fun being the sort of person who eats a big dinner in a warm house while others shiver on their roofs in the dark” (70). This positive attitude from Capable welcomed the two families into her house and also helped them learn how to fish. The act of compassion and kindness from Capable’s side helped the other two families get rid of their liminal phase. They sold their goats at Fritch as they were confident in their ability to survive with the help of fishing.

The story by Saunders has a positive conclusion where the three families manage to survive their liminal phase and move on to their post-liminal phase. According to the transition model of Schlossberg, though the coping strategy seems to be similar for the three neighbours, the support that was available for Capable and the other two neighbours was different. While Capable had no positive support from any of her two neighbouring families during her transition period, the two families were supported by Capable in surviving in their critical situation and in escaping from their liminal period to their post-liminal phase. Agnes Horvath states that “a proper solution to the liminal crisis would indeed require a certain possibility of distancing oneself from the existential anxiety and emotional turbulence that encompass everyone and thus provide a way out” (Horvath 109). It can also be interpreted on the basis of Schlossberg’s insight that the families had their own transition where they moved in from their previously normal situation to a transition phase and succeeded in moving out of it to the phase of the new normal by accepting to go fishing, which was their previous mode of living before when they managed to get an income from their goats.

Analysing through the perspective of the 4S by Schlossberg (See Table 9), the situation in Frip is triggered by the gappers that attacked the goats of the three neighbouring families. The transition can be considered as off-time as it was sudden and unanticipated by the families. It was out of control for the families as they could

not brush off the huge number of gappers that attacked their goats. The duration seemed to be uncertain as they feared it would kill their goats and permanently make them in their liminal status. Though they had previous experience of brushing the gappers and throwing them to the sea, they did not have any experience of gapper attacks in a huge number. The attack of the gappers created a liminal phase in the three neighbouring families, as they were not supportive of each other. Capable overcame the situation with her own efforts, whereas the other two families had the support of Capable in moving out of their liminal phase.

The demographic characteristics of the area had a substantial influence on the continuously recurring liminal phase and also the major liminal phase of the neighbouring families. Their houses were near the sea. Frip is mentioned as three tiny goat-yards that were three leaning shacks by the sea (Saunders, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* 6). Gapper could easily come back to attack the goats even though they are thrown to the sea from the cliff by the children. The families depended entirely on the milk produced by their goats. Therefore, any attack on the goats by the gappers for a prolonged time would reduce the amount of milk and gradually put them in trouble. The two neighbours of Capable were not supportive of anyone. They did not cooperate with each other and also with Capable. It led them to struggle individually when they were pointed out by the gappers. It was only due to the moral values of compassion and kindness shown by Capable that helped the families of Mr. and Mrs. Bea Romo and the families of Sid Ronsen and Carol Ronsen overcome their critical struggling period. They did not know if they could survive by fishing or any other job, if they had sold their goats. It was Capable who welcomed them to her house and also helped them learn to fish.

The three families conducted different strategies to overcome their liminality. Though much of it seemed to be useless and irrelevant, they had no other option. The strategies by Capable that she used in her attempt to get rid of the gapper attack on her goats were comparatively unworthy of her sincere effort to escape the liminal period. On the other hand, the other two neighbouring families maintained their egoistic mentality and competitiveness without making sufficient efforts to reduce the effect of the gapper attack. As part of the strategy, Capable tried covering her goats under a blanket, setting the goats on a table, building fences around the goats, and even

shaving the goats to reduce the attack of the gappers. She also tries to ask for help to brush the gappers from the goats but does not find any of her neighbours ready to help her. At last, she was forced to sell her goats as the final strategy to move out of her liminal phase. Mr. and Mrs. Bea Romo tried brushing the gappers like they do when the goats are affected. But they could not control the gappers and were forced to ask for help from Sid Ronsen and Carol Ronsen. They were not ready to help them in any way. As a measure to get rid of the gappers, both the neighbours called very strong men for help from Fritch. They moved the houses of the neighbours, one after the other, closer to the swamp. When the neighbours lost all their wealth in such useless attempts, they decided to approach Capable to learn fishing as they were about to sell their goats at Fritch.

4. 5. Conclusion

Through the tale, Saunders tries to explain that the various strategic methods used by the three neighbouring families could have been avoided if they had helped each other. Though Capable had the idea of unity, her request for help was not accepted by the other two neighbouring families, which gradually led them to sell her goats and turn her concentration to fishing. If they had come together to save the goats of Capable, there would have been no such attacks on the goats of the other two neighbours too. Analysing the tale through the perspective of liminality reveals that several kinds of liminal phases in life can be avoided if immediate and proper measures are taken with the rendering of compassion and kindness towards each other. Though Saunders presents his work as a moralist tale suitable to be presented as children's fiction, there exists an underlying satirical criticism of the attack of capitalist power structures on working-class people who are least united with compassion and kindness.

According to the tale, selfishness and individualism made the neighbouring families content with thinking that they are safe and will be safe forever even if the other person struggles with the attack of the gappers. If the attack of the gappers is considered to be the attack and exploitation conducted by the capitalist power structures, then the liminal phase of the neighbours who struggle with the act of the gappers on the goats can be identified as the working class who have no other means

to live their lives other than from the milk produced by these goats. Without adequate unity and care for other people who struggles in their life due to the exploitation of power structures like the capitalist forces, the working class would lead themselves to trouble. It is evident from the description given by Saunders of the situation faced by the three neighbouring families. They could not fight back against the increased power of the attack from the gappers without unity and cooperation. It was due to the thought that they wanted themselves to be safe from troubles that were only the matter of another person at that particular time. Sid Ronsen talks about their luck in not being attacked by the gappers saying, “I feel praying. I feel like thanking God for giving us whatever trait we have that keeps us so free of gappers” (Saunders, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* 49). He does not think that the same struggle can affect them at any time, as they are also directly prone to the attack of the gappers. This attitude of the working class is criticised by Saunders in that they are confined to their own world without bothering about what happens around them. Though Saunders criticises the inactivity of the working class in creating unity among them, he aims at the crooked mindset of the capitalist forces that exploit everything of the working class through their tactical moves. Goats represent the resource availability and manpower of the working class. Due to the inactivity and careless attitude of the working class, the resources and manpower that belong to them are exploited to the maximum by the attack of the capitalist forces, same as how the goats are attacked by the gappers until they turn skinny, mortified and without milk.

Through the above-mentioned two novellas, one fable, and a tale, Saunders tries to explore and portray the hidden agendas of the power structures, such as capitalist forces, authoritarian regimes, and dominant groups who subjugate, repress, and exhibit their power over the powerless groups and working-class people in society. This domination can be achieved through various tools and methods that are entirely applied for the benefit of the dominant class and not the repressed groups. Therefore, “Bounty”, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*, *Fox 8*, and *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* seem to be written in different contexts of fictional backgrounds, and even though they are based on inanimate characters or animals, the indirect message that Saunders tries to provide to his readers is beyond the expectation of such direct themes and settings. Saunders’ fiction are widely acclaimed

by academic critics as well as common readers because of this very quality of Saunders to develop different layers of meaning. The quirk and quiddity in the plots as well as the resultant liminality experienced by the characters point to the importance of identifying liminality and its effects on the victims so as to find a suitable strategy to overcome it. The next two chapters layer more in-depth identification and discussion on the same track of the fiction discussed in this chapter.

The next chapter is about the liminal aspects of the short stories by George Saunders, such as *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, *Pastoralia*, *In Persuasion Nation*, and *Tenth of December*. The above-discussed aspects of liminality continue to express their characteristics in the analysis of certain short stories that criticise the role of power structures in creating domination and forced liminality in the repressed groups in society.

4. 6. Analysis at a Glance

Table 6)

BOUNTY			
Names	Flawed	Cole	Connie
Pre-liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Before mutation ❖ Before environmental poisoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Had his sister in and around him ❖ Before mutation ❖ Before environmental poisoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Before mutation ❖ Before environmental poisoning
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Discrimination ❖ Considered slaves regarded expendable ❖ mutated/malformed body parts ❖ considered subhuman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Discrimination ❖ Considered slaves regarded expendable ❖ mutated/malformed body parts ❖ considered subhuman ❖ Searches for sister ❖ forced slavery and prostitution ❖ harassment and ignorance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Discrimination ❖ Considered slaves regarded expendable ❖ mutated/malformed body parts ❖ considered subhuman ❖ prostitute ❖ starving
Post-liminal	Nil	Finds Connie, Happy	Stays happily out of Bountyland with Mr. Corbett
Type of Liminality	Natural & Coercive	Coercive	Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	Negative	Negative	Negative
Triggering Factor	Environmental poisoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Environmental poisoning ❖ Connie leaves with Mr. Corbett 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Environmental poisoning ❖ Prostitution and starvation
Setting	Bountyland	Bountyland	Bountyland
Anticipated or Unanticipated	Unanticipated	Unanticipated	Unanticipated
Control/Uncontrolled	Uncontrollable	Uncontrollable	Controllable
Duration	Permanent	Temporary	Temporary
Previous experience	Nil	Nil	Nil
Role change	From Normal to Mutated	From Normal to Mutated and then to where there is no discrimination	From Normal to Mutated and then lives with a Normal who cares and loves her
Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Low status ❖ Subhuman ❖ Expendable ❖ slaves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Low status ❖ Subhuman ❖ Expendable ❖ slave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Low status ❖ Subhuman ❖ Expendable ❖ Slave and Prostitute

Psychological Status during the transition	❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ identity crisis ❖ ambiguous ❖ fear	❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Loss ❖ Alienation ❖ Ambiguous	❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Loss ❖ Alienation ❖ Ambiguous
Support	Nil	Nil	Mr. Corbett
Coping strategy	Nil	Starts journey to find sister Connie	Moves out of Bountyland with Mr. Corbett
Transition	Suspended	Yes	Yes

Table 7)

THE BRIEF AND FRIGHTENING REIGN OF PHIL	
Names	Inner Hornites
Pre-liminal	❖ Before the natural shrinking of land ❖ Before the totalitarian rule of Phil
Liminal	❖ Inner Hornite shrunk ❖ Moved to Short-Term Residency Zone ❖ Tax payable to Outer Hornites ❖ Phil tortures the Inner Hornites and establishes a totalitarian regime ❖ Disassembled
Post-liminal	❖ Disassembled by God
Type of Liminality	Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	Negative
Triggering Factor	Inner Hornite land began shrinking
Setting	Inner Hornite – Short-term Residency Zone – Outer Hornite
Anticipated or Unanticipated	Unanticipated
Control/Uncontrolled	Uncontrollable
Duration	Temporary
Previous experience	No
Role change	❖ Loss of Inner Hornite ❖ Became refugees
Status	❖ Alienated – Isolated – No land – No identity

Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ ambiguous ❖ fear ❖ Identity crisis
Support	The Nation of Great Keller
Coping strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Asked help ❖ Requested to reduce tax ❖ Requested not to disassemble them ❖ Protested ❖ Complained to President
Transition	Yes

Table 8)

FOX 8			
Names	Fox 8	Fellow Foxes	Environment
Pre-liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Listening to stories by humans ❖ Socialising with foxes ❖ Meeting Great Leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Listening to Fox 8's stories ❖ Socialising with foxes ❖ Meeting Great Leader 	Natural habitat with enough resources
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Discovers signboard FoxViewCommons ❖ Habitat is converted to mal premises ❖ No food and water ❖ Gets skinny ❖ Fox 7 beaten to death by humans ❖ Forced displacement from its habitat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Discovers signboard FoxViewCommons ❖ Habitat is converted to mal premises ❖ No food and water ❖ Gets skinny ❖ Fox 7 beaten to death by humans ❖ Forced displacement from its habitat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Trees cut down ❖ Drinking water sources destroyed ❖ Hills flattened ❖ Natural resources destroyed ❖ Construction of mall
Post-liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Moves to a new habitat ❖ meets new friends ❖ a new decision in life 	Stays there.	Man-made habitat
Type of Liminality	Coercive	Coercive	Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	Negative	Negative	Negative
Triggering Factor	Human encroachment	Human encroachment	Human encroachment and construction of the mall
Setting	Forest habitat	Forest habitat	Forest habitat
Anticipated/Unanticipated	Unanticipated	Unanticipated	Unanticipated

Control/Uncontrolled	Uncontrollable	Uncontrollable	Uncontrollable
Duration	Temporary	Permanent/Temporary	Temporary
Previous experience	Nil	Nil	Nil
Role change	Regarded Humans as good people before they displaced Fox 8 and killed Fox 7 From inhabitant to a refugee	Happy to a permanently sad situation whereas some were killed/dead.	Natural to Man-made habitat
Status	❖ Anthropomorphic ❖ An inhabitant of the forest habitat	Inhabitants of forest habitat	Setting
Psychological Status during the transition	❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ loss	❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ loss	Nil
Support	Foxes in the new habitat	Nil	Nil
Coping strategy	Decided to move away to a new habitat and not to think about the past.	Nil/Death	Nil
Transition	Yes	Suspended	Yes

Table 9)

THE VERY PERSISTENT GAPPERS OF FRIP			
Names	Capable	Mr. and Mrs. Bea Romo	Sid Ronsen and Carol Ronsen
Pre-liminal	❖ Before gappers decided to attack one yard at a time	❖ Before gappers decided to attack one yard at a time ❖ Saw gappers attack Capable's goats	❖ Before gappers decided to attack one yard at a time ❖ Saw gappers attack neighbour's goats
Liminal	❖ Gappers attack as a group ❖ Goats stop producing milk ❖ Goats seen mortified	❖ Gappers attack as a group ❖ Goats stop producing milk ❖ Goats seen mortified	❖ Gappers attack as a group ❖ Goats stop producing milk ❖ Goats seen mortified
Post-liminal	❖ Sold goats ❖ Learned Fishing	❖ Sold goats ❖ Moved to Capable's house ❖ Asked Capable to teach Fishing	❖ Sold goats ❖ Moved to Capable's house ❖ Asked Capable to teach fishing
Type of Liminality	Coercive	Coercive	Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	Negative	Negative	Negative

Triggering Factor	The combined attack of Gappers	The combined attack of Gappers	The combined attack of Gappers
Setting	Frip	Frip	Frip
Anticipated or Unanticipated	Unanticipated	Unanticipated	Unanticipated
Control/ Uncontrolled	Uncontrollable	Uncontrollable	Uncontrollable
Duration	Temporary	Temporary	Temporary
Previous experience	Yes	Yes	Yes
Role change	From depending on goats to fishing	From depending on goats to fishing	From depending on goats to fishing
Status	❖ Economically weak without goats	❖ Economically weak without goats	❖ Economically weak without goats
Psychological Status during the transition	❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ ambiguous ❖ fear	❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ ambiguous ❖ fear	❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ ambiguous ❖ fear
Support	Nil	Capable	Capable
Coping strategy	❖ Asked for help ❖ Brushed the gappers ❖ Covered goats under a blanket ❖ Set the goats on tables ❖ Built fences around the goats ❖ Shaved the goats ❖ Sold the goats ❖ Learned Fishing	❖ Asked for help ❖ Brushed the gappers ❖ Called very strong men from Fritch to move their house ❖ Decided to learn fishing	❖ Asked for help ❖ Brushed the gappers ❖ Called very strong men from Fritch to move their house ❖ Decided to learn fishing
Transition	Yes	Yes	Yes

Coercive Liminality, Vulnerability, and Victimisation

Having unusual and unexpected characteristics similar to the novellas and short fictions analysed in the previous chapter, the quintessence of liminality in George Saunders' short stories directs the readers to understand the significance of the author's perspective on certain social issues and concerns. Exploring the existence of such specific in-between situations in the characters developed by the author provides lucidity to the scope of interpretation of the short stories. The author's attempt to portray relatable fictional situations in the stories with that of the reality of the world opens the leeway for further discussions on the topic. Saunders' ideological standpoint supports the vulnerable groups of society by allowing them to perceive the intended meaning of the expression of liminality that affects them. He satirically and with the employment of dark humour in his writing, criticises the exploitive activities of dominant power structures in the society that represses directly and indirectly to subjugate the powerless group of people. Though the stories do not attempt a direct attack on any particular agency of dominion, Saunders expects readers to decipher the intended meaning of his text with the rightful interpretation and relation to such existing idols in society. The power structures of society, in various forms, are found at fault with their attitude and actions towards the less powerful or vulnerable sections of society. Saunders' unsatisfactory attitudes towards such ruling factors in society are hinted at in the previous chapter while discussing authoritarianism in *Fox 8, The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* and "Bounty", and capitalism in *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip*. The short stories highlighted in this chapter would be a continuation of the previous insights, extending the possibilities of the presence of liminality prevalent in the stories to relate them with the social implications of the domination of the ideologies of power structures such as capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism. This chapter would go into greater and more in-depth detail using interpretive analysis. It aims to discover how the effects of capitalist, consumerist, and

authoritarian domination affect the situations of the victims, leading to instabilities in their state of mind. Understanding the stories in which any of the three ideologies with a dominant attitude in society are a factor in exerting or influencing the characters to be in their liminal situation aids in identifying the tripartite structure, leading to the major argument of the presence of coercive liminality as part of their victimization.

The impact of power structures and their ideologies on the weaker sections can vary in a society along with the factors that establish the link between the two. Whether the dominant has a direct or indirect influence in producing the authority over the victims, the insights based on the liminal effects in the characters of the stories demonstrate the idea that it is the victimised individual or group's key role to decide on existing in their liminal state. The particular state of liminality provides different ways of exit from the liminal phase to the post-liminal phase, with or without the effect of sacrifice. A general model of overcoming the effect of liminality is to submit oneself to one or the other position rather than being in any of the stable positions of the situation. In the same way, Saunders describes the escape of bardodwellers from their state of bardo that the probability of overcoming the liminal phase of a situation requires the acceptance of the reality of the particular situation faced by the individual who gets involved as the liminal personae.

In the stories of George Saunders, the experience of the characters being in their liminal phase is mainly traceable through the description provided by the author about the plot structure. The direction of the plot of the story gives hints about the transitional points at which the characters face their shift from usualness to unusual instances of life. Liminality, being an "interstructural situation" (Turner, "Betwixt and between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage" 46), Victor Turner's perspective on the rites of passage is expressed as the person who goes through the rites of passage is a liminal being who takes on a new identity and is identified by a whole new set of symbols as a result. All of the traditional classifications are ambiguous, paradoxical, and confusing in this situation (Carson, *Neither Here nor There* 4).

Unlike the expected flow, the story may begin abruptly, giving prominence to the unusualness of the character. It would be difficult to trace the pre-liminal phase due to the lack of a broad description of the situation of the character before their

encounter with an unusual situation in their life. If the major part of the story deals with the prime motive intended by Saunders, he provides hints about the pre-liminal phase of the character while discussing the character's situation in their liminal phase. The most advantageous quality about Saunders is that he tries to narrate stories from different points of view, which is why he gives prominence to the third-person narrative. Such a transition in narration helps to showcase the characters from more than one perspective, thus giving more credibility and reliability to the presentation of the story. The first-person narrative provides an inside-head description of the situation faced by the character where the reader is able to acquire the complete spirit of what the author intends the reader to understand from the story. The omniscient third-person narrative of the story informs a wider sketch of the plot and events related to the existence of the characters. For example, in the short story "Victory Lap", where Saunders was appreciated for his excellent use of different narratives with quick and vibrant transitions, the inside-the-head thoughts, feelings and emotions of Alison, Kyle and the abductor is equally highlighted through the use of third-person narrative that describes a different angle of the situation faced by the characters. The story has been intermixed with subjective as well as objective standpoints providing an opportunity for the reader to be acquainted with the character's experience of their liminality. The thoughts that develop the in-between situation of Kyle in "Victory Lap" are represented by Saunders as,

"The geode was beautiful. What a beautiful geode. What made it beautiful? What were the principal characteristics of a beautiful geode? Come on, think. Come on, concentrate.
She'll recover in time, Beloved Only.
None of our affair, Scout.
We're amazed by your good judgment, Beloved Only.
Dimly he noted that Alison had been punched. Eyes on the geode, he heard the little oof."

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 21)

In the above extract from the short story, though the perspective is through Kyle's thoughts in his head, Saunders has amalgamated it with the voice of his

parents as if he heard it from them. There is a sudden shift from those subjective descriptions to an objective detailing of Alison’s situation as well as Kyle’s.

“Access to these characters’ honest inner voices — at times painful or embarrassing — is made possible through the distinctive narrative style. Saunders has developed this point of view into something of a tool, one that lets us hear the characters’ thoughts in their purest form while simultaneously giving the third-person narrator a voice, too.”

(Fish, “Book Review: Tenth of December by George Saunders”)

In discussing the liminal status of the characters in the short stories of George Saunders, the major part of this chapter deciphers the intended meaning of the stories in connection with the themes of capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism. The situation of the liminal status of the characters due to the domination of power structures leads to the coinage of a new term called ‘coercive liminality’. The specificity of the term distinguishes the characteristics expressed by the characters in such liminal status from that of the other forms of liminality. Donelda Cooke (1994) in her speech at the University of Maryland says that “by looking at various groups’ experiences regarding domination, oppression, and co-existence, you can begin to understand the amount of control individuals have over the circumstances in their lives, or the limited choices they may have in their assets, liabilities, and resources”. This gives hint to the coercive circumstances experienced by vulnerable and victimised sections in society who neither have the freedom to choose their stand nor to completely adjust to the inequality enforced by the dominant forces. The following pages would discuss background details of the terms – capitalism, consumerism and authoritarianism expressed by the author in his selected short stories. The short stories included for analysis in this chapter cover the anthologies titled *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, *Pastoralia*, *In Persuasion Nation* and *Tenth of December*.

The short stories discussed in the chapter are selected based on their inclination towards the commonality of the specific themes of capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism, where the expression of domination and subjugation is perceptible. As the short stories appropriate to the theme are scattered in the four anthologies, selection of the most suitable for analysis of liminality via the

discussion of the themes is conducted. Six short stories, namely, “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline” and “400-Pound CEO” from *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, “Pastoralia” from the anthology *Pastoralia*, “In Persuasion Nation” from *In Persuasion Nation* and “Exhortation” and “My Chivalric Fiasco” from *Tenth of December*, discusses the themes of capitalism and the exertion of its influence on groups that transit from their normative status to be in their liminality. The appropriate analysis of the instances provided by Saunders about the influence of capitalist forces on its victims would help to interpret the presence of liminality in the vulnerable groups. Two stories namely, “I CAN SPEAK!TM”, and “My Flamboyant Grandson” help to understand how the pressure and persuasion from corporate companies tend to dwell customers in a state of liminality. The persuasive attempt of corporate policies on the customers who do not appreciate it persuades them to alter their mindsets, thus leading them to an ambiguous state of liminality.

As the notion of self is more focused in this chapter to explore the impact of coercive liminality, it is important to note that normality relies more on the autonomy of a person. According to Schlossberg, “Autonomy is defined as independence or self-directed freedom. A great deal of research substantiates the fact that life satisfaction depends on the perception of autonomy. Whether you believe the autonomy is real or an illusion may not matter” (Goodman et al. 99). When people are able to control the track of their life, they seem to be more into the normative trajectory of life. Whereas, when they lose control of their autonomy, they get controlled by someone/something that tends to exert their domination and power over them. Autonomy of a person lies in choice but not in compulsion (100). In such loss of autonomy, people get into the liminal phase expressing uncertainty about the situations, anxiety about the surrounding matters, and ambiguity about what happens around them. This confused state of a person/character leads us to the scope of explaining coercive liminality in this chapter.

The notion of liminality from Turner’s anthropological theory based on comparative symbology is referred to in the book *Liminality in the Fantastic Fiction: A Poststructuralist Approach* on the grounds of his essays “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, Ritual” as a period of social transition either based on the tribal subject or that of the community with the expression of ambiguity, which is a kind of social

limbo (Klapcsik 7-8). The presence of coercive liminality is most evident in the section that discusses Saunders' portrayal of authoritarian and totalitarian structures in society that subjugate the group of people vulnerable to the repression and exertion of power. Similar to that of the analysis conducted in *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* in the previous chapter, the expression of power and resultant domination over the less powerful are visible. A selected number of five short stories namely, "93990", "Red Bow" and "Adams" from *In Persuasion Nation*, and "Escape from Spiderhead", "The Semplica Girl Diaries" from *Tenth of December* detail the theme of authoritarianism and its effects on the victims, leading them to their liminal phase to experience a forced or coercive form of liminality. Kenelm Burridge identifies these marginal individuals as those whose minds and emotions are confused in a way, they belong to two different worlds in the same person (160). The three themes presented by Saunders and interpreted through the analysis of the texts are in close relation with each other, which helps to explore the presence of liminality in the characters in similar analogous conditions.

Considering the percentage of input in developing and shaping modern societies, capitalism asserts equal or more involvement in threatening the very existence of different societies. The concentration of power and money in the hands of a very small percentage of people creates a greater range of inequality among people in society. Capitalism refers to a system in which all means of production are privately owned and operated for profit by the capitalist class, with the majority of the population working for a salary or wage (Zimbalist et al., *Comparing Economic Systems* 5). From the perspective of Karl Marx who was totally against the capitalist system, the accumulation of wealth by a privileged few creates poverty on the other side for the majority. Because of the clear distinction between the capitalist class and the working-class sections of society, the probability of a higher rate of inequality is definite. "Inequality is an inevitable product of the capitalist activity, and expanding equality of opportunity only increases it—because some individuals and communities are simply better able than others to exploit the opportunities for development and advancement that capitalism affords" (Muller, "Capitalism and Inequality").

George Saunders, in his stories, has related the political, economic, and social scenarios for developing his viewpoints on the capitalist system's influence on the

working class, especially in the particular context of the American culture of living. In *The Half has Never Been Told*, the historian Edward E. Baptist writes about the essential part of slavery that has helped America grow into a modern, industrial, and capitalist economy. When the working classes are forced to work according to the requirements of the capitalist system beyond the humanitarian level, it becomes a form of modern slavery. According to Banerjee (2000), wage differentials, a lack of worker negotiating power, poor labour protection legislation, and the market strength of global brands are sources of competitive advantage that allow firms to profit from global labour arbitrage. The vulnerable and weaker sections of society lacking power and wealth are subject to the risk of losing their jobs. The probability of being voiceless and subjugated due to the direct or indirect domination of the capitalist system by the authorities is higher in such circumstances. The working classes are exploited by the capitalist power structures without being able to get relief from the tensions or become completely acquainted with the system. Katherine Christ et al. (2020) write on the view that illegitimate practises and unsatisfactory working conditions are forms of exploitation. George Saunders' short stories highlight these exploitations by the capitalist power systems from the perspective of the victimised sections of society. The characters that represent these powerless classes of people are more relatable to the existence of such realities in society. In an interview published in *The New Yorker*, Saunders gives his opposition to the negative impact of the rising power of capitalism on society, saying: "I stand by the notion that capitalism can be an aggressive and brutal machine, rolling over everything in its path" (Treisman, "On "Tenth of December": An Interview with George Saunders"). The brutality and aggressiveness of the capitalist power system are depicted in the stories with accuracy and reliability, even though most of the settings do not directly fit real-world contexts. The unsatisfactory living of the characters with the system, being shrunken and narrowed in the option for freedom, continues to provide a hint to the reader about their unfortunate and pathetic situation.

The criticism towards the capitalist form of the environment does not confine itself to the economic system with social and economic inequality; it extends to the short-term and long-term implications regarding the repression of the working class, social alienation, threat to employment and weaker economic stability in society. The

characters representing the working class in the stories are repressed by the capitalist forces through the imposition of their inhumane and exploitive treatment. It is done as part of deteriorating the existing freedom, thereby increasing their contribution to the enhancement of production or service to the capitalist companies. Such pressure from the capitalist system creates a space for social alienation. The idea reflects the greater distance or isolation felt by an individual from another person or group of people in a society. From the psychological perspective, “Alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself” (Fromm, *The Sane Society* 120). The perspective of Erich Fromm is more applicable to the situation faced by the characters in the stories, where capitalism produces a feeling of not being stable in the ideological standpoint of self, but also unsatisfied and opposed to the imposed identity.

According to Karl Marx, the workers experience three forms of alienation due to the inequality in the labour process. They are:

- (1) The product of the labour which they produced gets alienated when the capitalist owner possesses it,
- (2) the workers get alienated and separated from their true selves with the existence of only extrinsic meaning at work, and
- (3) the workers get alienated from others as the unique qualities of mankind get tarnished, resulting in estrangement from both their own humanity and others

(Corlett 700; Deery and Plowman, *Australian Industrial Relations*)

From the above-stated points regarding the forms of alienation experienced by workers, the second point that refers to the separation of workers from their self is important in the contexts portrayed by George Saunders in his stories. The extremities developed from the interaction and work with the capitalist power structures lead to such a situation of dissatisfaction and instability in being under the dominant ideology which acts against their interests. The liminal aspect of an individual is more projected in such circumstances of neither being able to stick to one’s self nor the imposed identity by an external dominant force. Self-estrangement and inability to adapt to the identity of the other provided by the capitalist forces that expect the

working class to be inclined to their norms and policies lead to self-denial, unhappiness, and mortification of the body and mind.

“The worker, therefore, only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working, he is not at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. External labor, labor in which man alienates himself, is a labor of self-sacrifice, or mortification.”

(Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844” 30)

If an individual victimised by the inhumane domination of the capitalist power system decides to leave his or her current job, the unfavourable social and economic conditions make it difficult to deal with the situation. An attempt to oppose the ideologies of dominant traits to move against the flow would end up in a critical state of unemployment and poverty, which are also related in some respects as the resultant products of the endeavours to be stable in one’s own standpoint and identity. The ultimate definition of alienation, according to Hegel, is the separation of the object of cognition from the philosopher, the man of consciousness. As a result, for Hegel, philosophical comprehension, an embracing of the rational world, is the primary means of overcoming alienation; as if to know the world is to be at one with it, to become identified with it (Horowitz 230).

This incapability of the working class is exploited by the capitalists even by restricting their human rights and freedom for the ultimate benefit of better production and service. These factors give rise to weak economic stability for the vulnerable group of working-class people in society. Powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement are identified as five types of alienation (Seeman, “On the Meaning of Alienation” 783). The short stories illustrate capitalism’s implications by generating various forms of alienation, such as helplessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, loneliness, and self-estrangement, which lead to the presence of successive in-between circumstances in the characters that experience it.

The accentuated factor in the first section of short stories covering the theme of capitalism is the domineering facet of power structures that have immense influence and impact on the working-class force. The capitalist power structure makes money at the expense of the worker's ability to work, which is entirely credited to the proletariat. The capitalists lack the ability to work, and therefore, they efficiently use the worker's ability to work for the capitalists. This exploitation conducted on the victimised and vulnerable section of the society is often regarded as 'precarity'. The precariat class

“consists of a multitude of insecure people, living bits-and-pieces lives, in and out of short-term jobs, without a narrative of occupational development, including millions of frustrated educated youth who do not like what they see before them, millions of women abused in oppressive labour, growing numbers of criminalised tagged for life, millions being categorised as ‘disabled’ and migrants in their hundreds of millions around the world”

(Standling, *The Precariat – The New Dangerous Class*)

While reading Saunders' stories about the problems faced by the vulnerable class due to the dominant attitude of the power structures related to capitalism, the more relatable people who are projected through the representation of the characters point to the precariat class with the above characteristics. The protagonist characters in “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline” and “The 400-Pound CEO” in *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, “Pastoralia” in the anthology *Pastoralia*, “In Persuasion Nation” in *In Persuasion Nation* and “Exhortation” in *Tenth of December* resemble a class that has been frustrated by the coercive form of liminality excreted on them. The different circumstances of the characters highlight the struggles and suffering that result in their uncertainties and meaningless entrapments. Precarious work is generally connected with the exhibition of “anxiety, anger, anomie, and alienation produced by the spread of uncertainty, insecurity, and inequality” (Kalleberg and Vallas 2). These limited social benefits and increased instability would create a liminal status in the people associated with the term as they try to adjust and adapt to the surrounding situations that are not satisfactory to them with regard to their physical and mental existence.

As a result of the former's dominance and exploitation of the latter, the theme of capitalism and working-class struggle draws certain conclusions that aid in analysing the presence of liminality in the characters discussed by the author. The knowledge about unsatisfactory circumstances that create precariousness in the working environment of the working class helps to divide the existing information about the characters into the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases. The liminal phase of the specific characters expressing the features of liminality in relation to the context and plot of the story is considered the result of the direct or indirect influence or impact of the dominant and exploitive actions of the capitalist power structures of the society. The various concepts discussed by Victor Turner as part of the insights related to the theory of liminality such as liminal space, liminal personae, communitas, permanent or temporary liminality, etc. are explored for their presence in the short stories. These findings assist in understanding the circumstances that have led the characters to face victimisation and the resultant coercive liminality in their lives. The application of Schlossberg's 4S as part of the transition model provides an in-depth analysis of the situation in which the character is involved, the psychological feelings, regarding support from internal or external sources, and the coping strategies exercised by the character to overcome the existing liminal entrapment without allowing transition from the liminal phase to the post-liminal phase of the normative structure.

Each short story is linked with each other using the single theme of capitalist domination and exploitation that creates uncertainty, anxiety and ambiguity in the vulnerable group of characters, termed as the victims who exhibit the features of liminality.

5.1 "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline"

The first short story with the same title as that of the anthology, "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline" gives the reader a hint about the inclination of the ideology that Saunders produces in his writing. From the perspective of the victimised individuals in society, Saunders invites readers to understand the modern-day culture of the world, especially that of the American context. The reality of the messed-up world is narrated through the depiction of a downtrodden individual who tries to cope with the

unusualness affecting his peaceful life. The severity of the unjust world is presented through the short story in which the author focuses on presenting corporate greed beyond humanitarian concerns, inequality produced as part of the dominant-repressive relationship between the capitalists and the working class, insecurity and lack of job satisfaction, the authority exercised by capitalist systems, the resultant poverty, unemployment, and economic struggle prevalent in society.

The use of the title “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline” purposefully refers to life in America. When divided, the title denotes the land where the famous Civil War of the period 1861-1865 occurred. Saunders has the opinion that the social and economic situation that controls life in America is in a declining state. Therefore, the Civil War-themed amusement park mentioned in the story represents the life of an individual in America. The unnamed narrator of the short story is represented to symbolise the reality of the individual who is exploited by the capitalist forces in America. The struggle of the unnamed narrator in the amusement park can be explored from

“his hatred for his job, his commitment to his children, his desire to please his dissatisfied wife and the desire to do good, and the actual requirements of his job as Verisimilitude Inspector, which necessitates firing subordinates, hiring war criminals, and covering for said war criminals’ bloody crimes.”

(Jansen and Adams 4)

The pressures from the capitalist system of the corporates in the amusement park force him to do according to the wish of the authorities. His interests are not a factor in such circumstances. For the sake of surviving the unsuitable situation and avoiding unemployment, he adjusts to the flow of the system even when he has very little delight in the working pattern of his job. The helpless condition of the unnamed protagonist is evident when his wife criticises him for his subordination to the authorities and the less pay that he gets from his job. “Evelyn called me a bootlicker, but I attended. She called me a bootlicker, and I told her she’d better bear in mind which side of the bread her butter was on” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 3). The existence of the narrator in the amusement park is dependent on how he successfully encounters the problem of continuous gang fights on the premises. He says,

“I think about quitting. Then I think about my last degrading batch of resumes. Two hundred send-outs and no nibbles. My feeling is that prospective employers are put off by the fact that I was a lowly Verisimilitude Inspector for nine years with no promotion. I think of my car payment. I think of how much Marcus and Howie love the little playhouse I’m still paying off. Once again I decide to eat my pride and sit tight.”

(Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 2)

The above description from the first-person narrative of the protagonist character gives a hint of the uncertain and ambiguous situation that he faces as part of his personal life and job. Though he wishes to leave his current job, which does not provide him with any dignity or a better salary, he is unable to do so due to the instability of his financial condition. Saunders informs the reader that his character is in-between the two extremities of life, which are necessary for his existence and survival. He does not stick to any one of the extremities. If he decides to situate himself with his wish to be free from the burdens of his hectic workloads and the anxieties related to the job, he is not in a position to move further due to his personal and professional liabilities. On the other hand, the atmosphere of the working place and the pressure of doing the job do not impress him, as he is victimised by the authoritarian domination and subjugation of the capitalist amusement park.

The narrator’s struggle with the complicity of the war criminal named Samuel transforms him into a person equal to the status of a slave. The narrator is forced to behave according to the interests of Samuel. The hierarchy of power and authority in corporate capitalism is symbolised through the introduction of Samuel, who comes to control the gang fights in the amusement park. Samuel, who was brought by the management authorities to settle the problems in the amusement park, turns out to be another issue for the narrator as he kills a teenager for stealing some penny candy and injures several park attendees. The narrator had approached Samuel to settle the issues at the amusement park. However, the involvement of Samuel has taken the narrator to more serious problems that were uncontrollable for him.

“Toward the end of the story, he is killed by Sam because he was unable to speak bluntly about violence. Yet he continues to narrate his story from

beyond the grave, as if to suggest that violence and lies are so pervasive in today's society that being murdered shouldn't interfere with his ongoing conversation."

(Pogell 466)

According to Schlossberg, transition in a person is influenced by the 4S introduced as part of the transition model. They are the situation, self, support, and strategies. As to how it is applied in the analysis of the texts in the previous chapters, the exploration of the 4S would help in providing a better sketch of how liminality is applicable from the perspective of the narrator in "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline".

The setting of the short story happens in a CivilWarLand amusement theme park that is in search of potential investors to develop the infrastructure and facilities. The triggering factor that leads the narrator to his liminal phase is the pressure from the theme park head to stop the illegal entry and disturbances created by the gangs in the amusement park. It was a problem as it gave a negative remark to the investors who visited the theme park to check their service. The lack of a potential investor was necessary to the narrator, as otherwise; it would lead to unemployment. Mr. Alsuga had given a hint of such a critical situation to the narrator. The narrator says, "He asks if I've seen the droves of unemployed huddled in front of Personnel every morning. I ask if that's a threat and he says no, it's a reasonable future prognostication" (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 15). The uncertainties and anxieties regarding losing the job and becoming unemployed haunted the narrator throughout the play until the point reached when Mr. Alsuga informed "we're unemployed" (20). The problems regarding the threat from the gangs were anticipated and uncontrollable for the narrator to oppose, even though he tried several ways to stop their attack. The narrator's status in the story is described as "a lowly Verisimilitude Inspector" (2) who tries to overcome the liminal situation that has occurred to him, posing a threat to his employment in the amusement theme park. The psychological status of the narrator who passes through his liminal phase can be delineated from the anxieties shared through the first-person narrative. The narrator shares his worries by saying,

"Is this the life I envisioned for myself? My God, no. I wanted to be a high jumper. But I have two of the sweetest children ever born. I go in at night and

look at them in their fairly expensive sleepers and think: There are a couple of kids who don't need to worry about freezing to death or being cast out to the wolves. You should see their little eyes light up when I bring home a treat. They may not know the value of a dollar, but it's my intention to see that they never need to."

(Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 6)

The pressure that the theme park would be at an extreme loss if there were no investors interested in it makes the narrator feel uncertain about the situation, expressing the anxiety by hiring different people to end the gang attack on the theme park. He had to even be part of the cruelty of burying the hand of a high-school kid killed by Samuel in the marsh behind Refreshments (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 14). He is alienated from his self to the forced other due to the fear of losing his job. He does everything to support the theme park, which indirectly benefits him. Regarding support, the narrator gets help from Quinn and Samuel to get rid of the gangs. At first, Quinn was hired, and later, Samuel came. While recruiting Quinn, the exchange of conversation between the narrator and Mr. Alsuga gives a hint to the interest in hiring people who tend to be under the influence of liminality. The narrator says, "Quinn's dirt-poor with six kids, and Mr. A says that's a plus, as we'll need someone between a rock and a hard place" (4). Role change and transition are happening to the protagonist narrator in the story as he moves from his liminal phase to the post-liminal phase. It occurs with his death when Samuel kills him towards the conclusion of the story.

To divide the passage of the narrator as per the theoretical discussions of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases of the narrator (See Table 10) have to be explored. The story begins by providing a hint about the attack of the gangs on the amusement park, in which the narrator is frustrated due to the pressure from his superiors to find a better solution to the issue. Therefore, the description of the story does not provide any details about the pre-liminal status of the narrator. Throughout the story, the liminal phase of the narrator is described as having certain peak moments and downfalls. His major dilemma is whether to continue or quit his job, as he feels dissatisfied with it. The

liminal phase of unusualness in the life of the narrator reaches its peak when he gets confused about whether to be a part of hiding the murder committed by Samuel. He says,

“I sit down by our subdivision’s fake creek and think. First of all, burying a hand is not murder. It doesn’t say anywhere thou shalt not bury some guy’s hand. By the time I got involved the kid was dead. Where his hand ended up is inconsequential.

Then I think: What am I saying? I did a horrible thing. Even as I sit here I’m an accomplice and an obstructor of justice.”

(Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 16)

His tensions and ambiguity about what would happen at the next moment in his job at the amusement theme park ended when Mr. Alsuga informed him, “we’re unemployed. The investors have gotten wind of the bird-watcher shootings and withdrawn all support. The Park is no more” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 20). Mr. Alsuga also says to the narrator, “Look, get your ass out, I’m torching this shithole for insurance purpose” (20). While Mr. Alsuga burns the CivilWarLand amusement theme park, the narrator gets close to his escape from the liminal phase as he sees Samuel with a hunting knife. The point at which Samuel kills the narrator allows him to find his way out of his liminal status, as he is no more attached to the polluting thoughts of the world. This act of Samuel helps the narrator move to the post-liminal phase even without resolving the concerns of the liminal phase. The major part of the story about the narrator’s pathetic situation describes the in-between threshold condition that determines the separation from the previous condition, which has not yet been reintegrated with the post-situations (Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* 94).

From the analysis of “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline” through the perspective of the narrator, who suffers from the pressure and threat of losing his job, it is evident that Saunders’s narrators and subjects are usually “stranded in the ideologically mixed and confusing middle zones of the conventional conversion narrative” (McClure 4).

5. 2. “The 400-Pound CEO”

George Saunders’ “The 400-Pound CEO” takes the same path of expressing the negative experiences of a workplace that does not find it interesting to satisfy the protagonist character. In the short story, the character of Jeffrey goes through three different issues that continuously haunt him to be in his liminality. First, he is frustrated due to a lack of love life. Second, he is made fun of for his overweight, and third, he is equally unsatisfied, like his other colleagues, with the working atmosphere and humiliations that are part of their job. Saunders’ intention, as in most of his similar themed stories, is to project the situation of workers who are highly dissatisfied with the capitalist system that controls them. Jeffrey’s act of killing his boss Tom is due to a lack of control and an outburst of frustrated reactions. Jeffrey had to complete all the tasks assigned to him at a specific time, even though he did not wish to get overloaded. Jeffrey says, “He asks can I work late and in spite of myself I fawningly say sure. I hate him. I hate myself. Everybody else goes home. Big clouds roll in. I invoice like mad” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 51). When there were any silly mistakes by Jeffrey, he was shouted at and fired without mercy. It made him feel bad about Tim who represents the authority. Saunders symbolises the role of Tim in the power structure of the capitalist system. He is a representative of the corporate capitalist culture that does not have empathy for anything, but only the mentality to torture. Jeffrey says,

“That hurts, Why I continue to expect decent treatment from someone who’s installed a torture chamber in the corporate basement is beyond me. Down there he’s got a Hide-A-Bed and a whip collection and an executioner’s mask with a built in Walkman. Sometimes when I’m invoicing late he’ll bring in one of his willing victims.”

(Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 49)

Saunders gives a hint to his readers about the pathetic situation of the workers under the capitalist system followed by the corporates that are represented by Tim. He harms others, and it is reflected when Jeffrey writes a letter from the perspective of Tim after the murder of Tim happens. He tells about how he wrote as,

“My friends, I invite through tears in his childish scrawl, ‘you slave away for minimal rewards! Freedom can be yours if you open yourself to the eternal! Good health and happiness to you all. I’m truly sorry for any offense I may have given. Especially to you, Freeda, who deserves a better man than the swine I was. I am a new man now, and Freeda dear, I suggest counseling. Also: I have thought long and hard on this, and have decided to turn over the reins of Jeffrey, whom I have always wrongly maligned.”

(Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 53)

From the above description, Saunders tries to depict the situation faced by the workers in the corporate dominance over their rights, dignity, and freedom that were hindered during their work for the authorities. The letter written in the name of Tim had the tone of his regret and confession for treating his employees with no empathy and kindness. Jeffrey’s says “The company will be owned by us, the employees, who will come and go as we please. Beverages and snacks will be continually on hand. Insurance will be gratis. Day care will be available on-site” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 55). These words denote how suffocating their situation was under the rule of Tim. It shows the difference in how the working class experiences their work atmosphere in the presence and without the presence of the subjugation and dominance of the capitalist authorities who work as per the guidance of the corporate system.

Saunders criticises the capitalist ideology as a sub-God who does not have the qualities of the real God. It does not possess the essential qualities of empathy, compassion and kindness that have to be the prime factor in treating the weaker forces of the society. He says from the perspective of the God who says to the sub-God,

“Now look. Look at that fat man. What did he ever do to you? Wasn’t he humble enough? Didn’t he endure enough abuse for a thousand men? Weren’t the simplest tasks hard? Didn’t you sense him craving affection? Were you unaware that his days unraveled as one long bad dream?”

(Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 57-58)

These intolerant attitudes and a lack of the ability to understand the situation of another person creates problems in the working atmosphere, making it the worst place for the working class. They are treated badly and tortured without humanity throughout their unsatisfied cooperation with the corporate companies that give priority to materialistic needs. In such situations, the working classes are alienated from their self but are also not able to accept the attitude of the capitalist corporation towards them. Such neither one nor the other situation arises in the working atmosphere, leading the workers to their liminality.

Apart from the liminality (See Table 11) faced by the employees as the effect of the attitude of the dominant corporates controlled by their authoritarian behaviour and treatment of the working class, the short story has three phases of the rites of passage through which the protagonist character passes through. It is not connected with the previous observation, as the focus of the point of division does not relate to the previously described expression of liminality. While analysing the short story for its prominently featured liminal phase, it comes to the understanding that the period before Jeffrey has his clash with Tim to save the animal rights girl is his pre-liminal phase, even though he suffers from the liminality based on the comments about his fat, his unsuccessful love life and the problems associated with the capitalist-working class conflicts. In his liminal phase, Jeffrey decides to cover up the murder of Tim. He says, “I CPR like anything. I beg him to rise and thrash me. I do a crazy little dance of grief. But it’s no good I’ve killed Tim” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 52). It was his coping strategy that he thought would help him get out of his liminal phase. But unfortunately, he was caught by the cops and was transferred to prison. The confusion about the murder of Tim related to Jeffrey are resolved when he hides by trying to create evidence.

He says, “What’s done is done. My peace of mind is gone forever. Why spend the remainder of my life in jail for the crime of eliminating a piece of filth?” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 53). He also finds a reason for his actions to get out of his liminal phase by saying “when push comes to shove, I could care less about lofty ideals. It’s me I love. It’s me I want to protect.” (53).

The situation that triggered the major liminal phase in the short story (See Table 11) from the perspective of Jeffrey is his conflict with Tim who harmed the

animal rights girl. Jeffrey had a role change from his identity of an employee to that of an accused murderer and also to that of a murderer. Transition is evident in the short story where the liminal phase of Jeffrey was unanticipated and controllable.

5. 3. “Pastoralia”

The anthology titled *Pastoralia* includes a short story with the same title as the first of the six short stories. George Saunders depicts the reality of working under capitalist power structures in society as being monotonous and tedious due to the meaninglessness of the job. As in the setting of “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline”, the short story “Pastoralia” also happens in an amusement park. The story explains the bizarre world inhabited by the characters and their alienated interaction with each other. The unnamed narrator of the story impersonates a caveman that suits the theme of the amusement park by trying to be as authentic as possible to present himself pleasantly to the guests. Richard Schechner, an experimental director and theorist in Performance Studies who collaborated with Victor Turner, writes about the relationship between theatre performance and liminality that “performing is a paradigm of liminality. And what is liminality but literally the ‘threshold’, the space that both separates and joins spaces: the essence of in-betweenness” (Schechner 295). He claims that the performer known to be a ‘limen’ is situated between “life” and “art,” as well as “chance” and “fixed” structures (302). The first-person narration used in the story by the author helps to equate the dry sense of humour and also the situation of losing self for the exhibition of another identity which is forced on the individual working in such an atmosphere. He who acts like a caveman is expected to roast goats, squat or pretend to eat bugs in front of the guests (Saunders, *Pastoralia* 4). The unnamed narrator has a colleague who plays the role of a cavewoman. They are not allowed to speak English as they imitate the characteristics of cavemen and cavewomen. Saunders provides the name of the female character as Janet. He gives contrasting characters as pairs in the story. The caveman tries to follow all the rules prescribed by the authorities, whereas Janet does not do a good job of playing the role of the cavewoman. She speaks English while being in the cave and possesses much less passion for her job compared to the narrator.

Saunders highlights this contrasting aspect of the story to represent two types of people working under the same capitalist system. The caveman who is the narrator of the story obeys the instructions even though he does not find himself happy at his job. He says, “I have to admit I’m not feeling my best. Not that I’m doing so bad. Not that I really have anything to complain about. Not that I would actually verbally complain if I did have something to complain about. No. Because I’m Thinking Positive/ Saying Positive” (Saunders, *Pastoralia* 1). These words of the caveman indicate his attitude towards his job even though he does not find it satisfactory. He adjusts to the situation of being in the amusement park by adopting a different identity apart from the identity that is innate to him. He is also subjugated to the interests of his authorities when he supports the report against Jane’s misbehaviour at the cave by violating the rules provided by the authorities to them.

While analysing the continuous submission of the narrator to the rules of the cave in the light of the introductory expression of dissatisfaction, it is clear that the unfortunate situation of the necessity to be employed makes the narrator support whatever restrictions are enforced on him. When Janet goes beyond her Separate Area in the cave, he pushes her back to her area to avoid further action from the authorities. He says,

“I guide her back to her Separate Area and push her sternly in.

‘Come on in!’ she says. ‘Have a BallBuster. You want one? I’m lonely in here. You want a BallBuster, Senor Tightass?’

I do not want a BallBuster.

What I want is for her to stay in her Separate Area keeping very quiet until she sobers up.

All day I sit alone in the cave. When the quality of light changes I go into my Separate Area and take out a Daily Partner Performance Evaluation Form.”

(Saunders, *Pastoralia* 45)

The personal problems of the caveman make him stick to the amusement park in the role of a caveman. He adapts to the situations as he finds it insecure to quit his existing job. He is aware of his responsibilities which do not allow him to be free

from the in-between situation of neither being in his innate identity as himself nor being able to completely adapt to the identity of the caveman. He says,

“I smile in the dark and sort of nod confidently. I try to positively and creatively imagine surprising and innovative solutions to my problems, like winning the Lotto, like the Remixing being discontinued, like Nelson suddenly one morning waking up completely cured.”

(Saunders, *Pastoralia* 35-36)

The narrator and Janet are under continuous surveillance of the authority named Nordstrom who sends notes regarding their performance and changes in the system. Fear and anxiety in the narrator are evident in the letter that the narrator writes to Janet. The letter reads as,

“Nordstrom is unhappy with you, it says. And unhappy with me because I have been lying for you on my DPPEFs. So I am going to start telling the truth. And as you know, if I tell the truth about you, you will be a goner, unless you start acting better. Therefore, please start acting better.”

(Saunders, *Pastoralia* 23)

More than the narrator's concern for Janet's carelessness in her job, he fears the impression that the authorities have on him. This fear and subjugation to the capitalist structures make him write against Janet's performance and behaviour in the cave. He had to support his authorities by dismissing the service of Janet from the cave. While being in the intermediate state, the narrator continues to be in his liminal state, giving it a chance for permanence in him, as he does not wish to get fired as Janet was terminated from her post. He is concerned about Nelson's medical condition even at the conclusion of the story, which makes him continue in his other identity provided by the capitalist power structures. He says in his anxiety to read the fax that came for him as, “Has something changed? What did Dr Evans say about Nelson's complete loss of mobility?” (Saunders, *Pastoralia* 65).

From the perspective of Schlossberg (See Table 12), the situation that triggers liminality in the caveman and Janet is their need for employment at the cost of submitting their self to be adapted to the new identity forced by the capitalist authorities of the amusement park. The situation that triggers the liminal phase of the

caveman is the social and economic instability that makes him work under capitalist rules and regulations. Though the liminal situation is anticipated throughout the story, it is uncontrollable as the capitalists continue to exploit the workers by making them victims of liminality. There is no role change for the caveman, but the role of Janet changes from the identity of being a cavewoman to the liberty of being into her innate identity and self. The psychological status of the characters in the story is similar while they are in their liminal phase. He could experience a form of uncertainty in their work, anxiety and fear of being fired and later terminated from their job. Though she was a part of the liminal phase, being in the status of *communitas*, her attitude and behaviour towards the capitalist enforcement made her closer to her innate identity than that of the role provided by the authorities. She could not accept the strictness and exploitative mentality of the capitalist forces, which made her rebel against their viewpoints and imposed restrictions. The form of liminality prevalent in the caveman is permanent in nature, whereas in Janet, it was temporary as she was terminated for her misbehaviour and breaking of rules.

The narrator tells about his and the new colleague's situation towards the conclusion to inform about his expression of permanent liminality as,

“All afternoon we pretend to catch and eat small bugs. We pretend to catch and eat more pretend bugs than could ever actually live in one cave. The number of pretend bugs we pretend to catch and eat would in reality basically fill the cave the size of our cave.”

(Saunders, *Pastoralia* 66)

Regarding the aspect of support, Janet receives the negative viewpoint shared by the narrator because of his subjugation to the authorities in the capitalist system. It helps her to exit her liminal situation. The narrator does not produce any coping strategy that helps him get relieved from his liminal phase. The intermediate phase of liminality experienced by the narrator makes him neither aware of his innate identity as a human being nor completely satisfied with his role as a caveman under the capitalist form of governance.

5. 4. “In Persuasion Nation”

The anthology *In Persuasion Nation* is a book with great insight into the world, especially about the terrifying world of victims who suffer from the direct and indirect repression caused by the power structures of society. As with the general aspect of the book, the short story with the same title, “In Persuasion Nation” symbolises the unfortunate situation of people under the humiliating hegemony of corporates based on the ideology of capitalism and the doomed rebellion against the advertising techniques (Begley, “Market Tested”). The characters that act in the repetitive cycle of television commercial advertisements are portrayed in the short story as the victims of the inhumane and immoral attitude of the corporate culture towards its working class. The characters can be symbolised as the vulnerable groups that suffer under the dominating rule of capitalists.

The continuous discrimination and suffering of the lowly characters are represented by the Orange, Grammy, man-briefly involved with a Ding-Dong, piles of mush, and Jim, the penniless man. They all, who were subjected to humiliation and torture by the dominant characters such as the Ding-Dong, Doritos, Timmy, grandparents who love Doritos, Kevin, the Slap-of-Wack formed a coalition to fight against the pathetic situation of subjugation and repression. Though Saunders’ fiction depicts a dystopian model, the characters are very relatable to how a capitalist power structure operates in society. He has incorporated television commercials as the major characters in the short story to show the liminal perspective of the characters as being part of the persuasive action of consumerism. The exaggerations provided are a mock at the unreliable and untrustworthy presentation of the corporate products. Saunders informs,

“The orange, the man briefly involved with the Ding-Dong, Jim the penniless man, Grammy, and the piles of mush, frustrated beyond reason by years of repetitively enduring the same physical/psychological humiliations in replay after replay of their respective vignettes, attack.”

(Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 186)

The members of the orange/ Grammy/ man-briefly involved with a Ding-Dong/ piles of mush/ penisless-man coalition can be regarded as the subjugated group

who are victimised by the acts of the corporate authorities. At the same time, Ding-Dong/Doritos/ Timmy/ grandparents who love Doritos/ Kevin/ Slap-of-Wack coalition that supports the humiliation represents the group that is a part of the corporate capitalism that encourages consumerism. The former group elaborate on the reason behind their protest as they were harmed during the process of the advertisement. The conversation is noted below:

“We don’t get it,” says the grandmother who loves Doritos. “What’s your problem?”

“You took our dignity,” says the orange.

“You took my fiancée,” says the man briefly involved with the Ding-Dong.

“You took my penis,” says Jim.

“You split my head half, then reduced both halves to piles of mush, completely betraying the grandchild/ grandparent relationship,” says one pile of mush.

(Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 186)

The explanation provided by the Ding-Dong/Doritos/ Timmy/ grandparents who love Doritos/ Kevin/ Slap-of-Wack coalition for their deeds on others resembled the domination exhibited by the capitalist system over the vulnerable groups. The explanation provided was that ““We just want to express ourselves the way we want to express ourselves,” says the giant Ding-Dong. “We find that fun.”” (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 186). Saunders criticises such immoral and inhumane fun exercised by the powerful system in society on the helpless class of people. His indirect plot, though seems confusing in its relation to reality, functions well similar to the behaviour and attitude of the dominant authorities. Their conflict where the orange/ Grammy/ man-briefly involved with a Ding-Dong/ piles of mush/ penisless-man coalition successfully wins over the other resembles the revolutions conducted by the gathering of the victimised groups to overturn the powerful structures of society.

In Bjørn Thomassen’s viewpoint, revolutions are considered as a liminoid phenomenon where a transition occurs in society. He writes that “natural disasters, carnival, revolutions, wars, periods of war (such as the Thirty Years’ War), events

that somehow affect larger groups and not just single individuals or cohorts moving from one life-stage through to another” (Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern* 92)

The question asked by Jim the penisless man to the huge oblong green triangular symbol can be considered the most significant point that Saunders presents in writing this short story. He says, “Couldn’t we all, working together, devise a more humane approach? An approach in which no one is humiliated, or hurt, or maimed, an approach in which the sacred things in life are no longer appropriated in the service of selling what are, after all, merely –” (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 195). Saunders’ idea behind the list of short stories is to project the sufferings and instabilities affected by the repressed group of people who are treated badly by their authorities. It can be within or beyond the context of capitalism and authoritarianism. The liminal situation of those particular characters gives the hint of such actions as part of the capitalistic attitude of the corporates, which creates a form of forced liminality in whoever becomes the victim.

Though the polar bear that had an axe on its head believed the green symbol to be the God, later it corrected its perspective. Here, the reference to a false God has to be interpreted as the ultimate authority of the corporate system or can be regarded as the capitalist system itself. The polar bear shouts the reason why such entities cannot be considered the real God. It says,

“The green symbol is a false GOD! A false GOD, obsessed with violence and domination! Reject him! Let us begin anew! Free your minds! Free your minds and live! There is a gentler and more generous GOD within us, if only we will look!”

(Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 204)

“In Persuasion Nation” presents the liminal phase of the orange/ Grammy/ man-briefly involved with a Ding-Dong/ piles of mush/ penisless-man coalition in their specific situations for which the fight that they conducted till the end is their coping strategy to get rid of their liminal phase. Revolutions can be considered as a mode of strategy for the transition from a liminal phase to the post-liminal phase (See Table 13). The coalition goes through many such liminal moments that ultimately had them to their post-liminal phase. The realisation of the polar bear that the green

symbol representing the capitalists is not the real GOD is another form of exiting its liminal phase to wisdom and acceptance of reality. Acceptance of reality and the realisation of the reasons for subjugation and repression are the basis for finding a way out of the sufferings and tortures.

5. 5. Exhortation

In the anthology *Tenth of December*, George Saunders' short tale "Exhortation" highlights the fact that, in the eyes of a capitalist, there are no humans, only machines that are intended to be emotionless, without morals, negativity, or the ability to choose for themselves. "Exhortation" is one of them, with a razor-sharp critique of persuasion tactics used on the defenceless and powerless working class. The dominant capitalist system requires employees that completely agree with their policies and rules without any opposing questions about the morality of the task. The employees are threatened with insecurity concerns for their job if they do not comply with the desires of the hierarchy of authorities controlling the capitalist system. "Exhortation" is written in the form of a memorandum from a higher authority in a corporate company who himself would be in trouble if he did not act in accordance with the rules and priorities of the system. Todd Birnie, a Divisional Director at the company where he works, writes a memorandum to the workers on April 6 detailing the state of performance in March. This is common in private sector organisations that focus on its employees' performance levels to keep them from relaxing from the tensions and uncertainties of the jobs they are assigned. Additional tasks can be attached as an extra duty and can be satisfactory, unpleasant, or neutral. It is not surprising to receive a note from senior officials to employees on their performance and future suggestions for improving the situation in a capitalist society. In a more psychological sense, "Exhortation" deals with the same issue. In "Exhortation," Todd is given the duty of instilling in his staff a capitalist mindset of "do everything with a good attitude" by threatening them with termination if they fail to do their allotted assignment. Despite the fact that Todd is aware that it is a difficult undertaking, he advises them to complete it in exchange for an unlocked payment. Through Todd, George Saunders intends to criticise the capitalist model followed by the corporation in treating their people as mere robots

assigned to perform whatever is requested from higher authorities, and thus uses the perspective of the management to persuade the employees.

The letter serves as a warning and a threat to employees who intend to oppose capitalist management's interests. He does not want them to get into a pickle, so he asks that they keep the complaining and self-doubt about the tasks to a minimum (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 85). According to Karl Marx, capitalism is founded on commodities rather than values, Todd asks them "not to dissect every single thing we do in terms of ultimate good/bad/indifferent in terms of morals" (Saunders 85). He also gives the example of Andy, a labourer, and says, "Remember that record-breaking week Andy had back in October when he doubled his usual number of units?... Forgetting namby-pamby thoughts of right/wrong?" (Saunders 86).

Todd is a member of the working class who is forced to adapt to the dominant structure's ideology, despite the fact that he represents the capitalist management of the corporation. This is highlighted in his letter, where he lists himself among the same personnel.

"And I was asked to remind you—to remind us, all of us, myself included — that if we are unable to clean our assigned 'shelf,' not only will someone else be brought in to clean that 'shelf,' but we ourselves may find ourselves on that 'shelf,' being that 'shelf,' with someone else exerting themselves with good positive energy all over us."

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 89)

The in-between and unusual states of the employees are also expressed through the anxieties that Todd shares in his letter to his subordinates. The reader is expected to understand the problematic situation that the letter has brought the employees that conduct a transition from their usual state of living to an unusual period where they are in a dilemma whether to be on the track designed by the authorities or to oppose their instruction. From Todd's perspective, the reader is provided with the opportunity to realise that the employees are not happy with their work atmosphere within the suffocating control of the dominant capitalist corporate structure, but are also not in a suitable social and economic position to quit their job. The initiation of the liminal position of the employees is highlighted through the

threats and advice provided by Todd to his subordinates. As for how the characteristics of liminality explain the situation, the employees are neither able to stick to their desire to quit their current job and find another one nor satisfied with the orders and instructions produced by the authorities.

Capitalism is only concerned with profit and the value of the product, not with human values. Material fetishism, according to Marx, arises between the boss and the employee, in which everything is based on production and profit. However, because the common working class does not own any large-scale production, they are forced to rely on the power structures by being in a liminal position. They are at risk of being replaced because capitalists regard labour as a commodity. Even if they do not want to be what their boss wants them to be, warning memos or threats of job loss eventually persuade them to change the way Todd writes to the company's employees.

Todd also claims that Andy's performance was not up to par and that he became depressed in the months that followed, particularly during his time in Room 6. Andy might have accepted the requirements of the corporate capitalist system that made him tired "both physically and psychologically" (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 88). In "Exhortation", the most prevalent phase is the liminal phase of the employees who were informed by the memorandum prepared from the side of the corporate authorities. The situation that triggered the liminal phase of the employees was the advice to obey the instruction from the corporate company. It was unexpected and unanticipated for the employees, as they did not expect such instructions that would invoke uncertainty and ambiguity in them. From the aspect of the uncontrollable or uncontrollable nature of the liminality, it turns out to be uncontrollable as the employees are threatened that they will be replaced by someone to do the same job. They do not have any other suitable option than to be submissive to the corporate culture of domination. There is an unelaborated transition from the pre-liminal phase to the liminal phase (See Table 14). Their exit or permanence in the liminal phase depends on their decision to quit or continue with the capitalist system. The post-liminal phase of the employees cannot be deciphered from the available description in the story and is left for them to decide by Todd. He talks about two approaches to the job that has to be done. To begin with, in an unfavourable way that may make the task

more difficult. Second, in a favourable way that would assist in completing the task more quickly than intended in exchange for a reward. He concludes the two approaches to the same activity by stating that if the task is negative, it will be completed by any other individual who replaces the person who has the negative attitude.

5. 6. “My Chivalric Fiasco”

George Saunders’ “My Chivalric Fiasco” published in *Tenth of December*, unlike other stories in the row, is a simple story but has complex connotations similar to those of other stories with hidden meanings and connotations. For the reward of a promotion, Ted, an employee at a Medieval theme park, who witnesses a rape, is asked to be silent. Ted gets promoted from the position of a janitor to a pacing guard and receives a drug called KnightLyfe that causes him to act like a Medieval Knight. Being chivalrous due to the effect of the drug, he could not resist holding the secret as he found it was not right from his side. He was fired for his act of revealing the secret to others.

Saunders writes the plot of the story in a lighter mode but gives hints to the indirectly expressed theme of capitalist dominance over the working class that makes the vulnerable and powerless group silent to any illegal or immoral activities conducted by the authorities. Ted and Martha were forced to be silent about the rape conducted by Don Murray and were offered a promotion as he had the authority and power to make it possible. The unfortunate situation of the working class to be indirectly supportive of the mischiefs of a higher authority is well presented towards the beginning of the short story. Don Murray makes Martha repeat what he wishes her to say about the rape incident.

“Martha: We got carried away. Had a fling.

Don: Voluntary fling.

Martha: Voluntary fling.

Don: And not only that, Ted. Martha here is moving up, From Scullery. To Floater Thespian. But let’s underscore; you are not moving up, Martha, because of our voluntary fling. It’s coincidental. Why are you moving up?

Martha: It’s coincidental.

Don: Coincidental, plus always had a killer work ethic. Ted, you're also moving up. Out of Janitorial. To Pacing Guard."

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 204-205)

Ted was also happy about his promotion to Pacing Guard because he had economic instability at his home. He finds the offer good for his benefit. Ted says,

"I was currently the only working person in our family. Mom being sick, Beth being shy, Dad having sadly cracked his spine recently when a car he was fixing fell on him. We also had some windows that needed replacing. All winter Beth would go around shyly vacuuming up snow."

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 206)

Such a condition and the necessity for promotion made Ted accept the offer and hide the secret that Don Murray raped Martha. Though he was satisfied with the promotions that he received, he was confused in his mind and weighed the burden of not being able to reveal what he witnessed. It is evident from the conversation with Kyle.

"Me: His Majesty is weighed down with thought.

Kyle: With many burdens of thought?

Me: Right. Many burdens of thought."

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 208-209)

He had been in confusion about whether to reveal the secret or not. The intake of KnightLyfe drug that induced chivalry in him gave him the strength to speak the truth. He says to Martha, "Verily, I have not been Well, but Distracted & Remiss; but presently am Restored unto Myself, and hereby do make Copious Apology for my earlier Neglect with respect to Thee, dear Lady" (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 210). Ted had confused thoughts in mind, whether to be with Don Murray's wish of not revealing his inhumane act of raping Martha or to be in the position of respecting his moral beliefs, sticking to his self-respect and self-esteem. The attitudes of capitalist corporate authorities towards their employees are described in the story by the author. The idea put forth by Saunders is the necessity to be on the side of truth by speaking against the tortures and unlawful domination conducted by such capitalist

forces. Saunders describes the in-between state experienced by Ted through the words of Ted himself. He says,

“For, as I looked upon Don Murray, many Thoughts did assemble in my Mind, like unto Thunderclouds: Of what Use is Life, if the Living Man doth not pursue Righteousness & enforce Justice, as God granteth him the Power to do so? Was it a Happy thing, that my Friend went about Unhindered? Must the Weak forever wander this goodly Orb unprotected?”

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 211)

The intake of the drug KnightLyfe made him feel chivalrous to speak against the insecurity and threat felt due to the domination of power excreted by Don Murray, who is hierarchically higher than Ted’s and Martha’s positions at the theme park. He was ready to reveal that “Don Murray had taken Foul advantage of Martha, placing, against her Will, his Rod into her Womanhood on TorchLightNight” (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 211). Ted knew that his act of courage to disrespect the instruction of his superior officer would only give him a loss in his career as an employee in the theme park, still, he found it right to be himself rather than submit to the unethical rules of Don Murray. He says, “I must endeavour to dampen these Feelings, lest I commit some Rash Act, converting my Good Fortune into Woe” (211). Here, Ted’s coping strategy is revealed as he decides to find a way to get out of his liminal phase. He accepted the challenges that would follow as a result of his decision to expose the cruelty of his authority. He knows it would put his “Family into a most dire Position, whereupon our Poverty ... wouldst be many times Multiplied” (212). Ted makes it clear that he would wish to find a way out of his liminal situation.

He says about the dominating attitude of Don Murray “that he had similarly attempted to Purchase my Silence; but that I would be SILENT NO MORE, for was a Man withal, if nothing ELSE, and would SERVE Righteousness, Regarding NOT the Cost” (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 212). The revolutionary attempts of the working class against the authoritarian and capitalist characteristics of the corporate culture are well reflected in the action taken by Ted to disobey the instructions and speak against the will of his authority, who represents the similar attitudes of the corporate culture.

The liminal phase (See Table 15) of Ted starts when he finds Martha being molested by Don Murray. Though he ended it with his firm decision, as he knew, it only resulted in his loss. He says, “I attempted to Comfort myself, saying I had done Right, and served Truth, and shewn good Courage. But ‘twas no Comfort in it. It was so wired” (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 214). The change that happened to Ted was a loss to him. He, who was offered a promotion for keeping the secret of what he witnessed, was probably to face firing and further torture. Ted says, “This was going to be Hard to live down” (214). He could transit from the pre-liminal phase to the liminal and then to the post-liminal phase, but not in the sense that he could be out of his liminality with respect to his identity as a repressed working class.

In the story, Saunders explains an act of moving out of the liminal phase where the working class speaks against the unbearable domination and excretion of force on them by the capitalist corporate system. The liminality that arises due to being in between personal stress and the pressure from the working atmosphere is escaped by admitting to sticking to the ideology of one’s rights and freedom. Saunders advocates such a reaction against the dominating forces in society, especially in the working atmospheres of the corporate system.

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The pressure and persuasion conducted by the corporate companies based on their capitalist ideologies are elaborately defined by the author in his further short stories, discussing the same with the help of the effect of consumerism on the characters. Through the short stories, Saunders exhibits his idea of consumerism and corporate control of the desires and happiness of people through an indirect subjugation where products serve as their tool to dominate the interests of a greater majority. Packard (1957) presents a definition of consumerism, saying it refers to the manipulative marketing practices and advertising that encourage consumers to consume more products. It has a coercive effect as it suggests manipulation of consumer demand against free-market capitalism. In defining consumerism, the article “Motivating Sustainable Consumption” comments that

“historical and contemporary literature suggests a huge variety of different roles for consumption in modern society. These include its functional role in

satisfying needs for food, housing, transport, recreation, leisure, and so on. But consumption is also implicated in processes of identity formation, social distinction and identification, meaning creation and hedonic ‘dreaming’”

(Jackson 7)

As is prominent in the selected stories of George Saunders, the act of persuading consumers is projected as a part of dominating their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Hard-selling practices and manipulative advertising conduct exploitation of society. It encourages people to over-consume even if they do not require it, increases insecurities and suffering, and exaggerates the product’s content (Lambin 20). Consumerism relies on persuading people to become interested in the products and services of a corporate company that will later decide their desires and interests. It is, in a way, the self-submission of an individual to corporate capitalism that projects the idea of consumerism. It creates a dilemma for consumers that helps to change their reaction towards the product or service, making it completely acceptable to them.

5. 7. “I Can Speak!™”

Same as that of “Exhortation”, the short story “I Can Speak!™” published in *In Persuasion Nation* is also in the form of a letter written by Rick Sminks, the Product Service Representative of Kidluv Inc. to a consumer named Mrs. Ruth Faniglia. The letter informs the reader that the consumer is not happy with the product that the company provided with their purchase. It says, “First, may I be bold as to suggest that some of your disappointment may stem from your own, perhaps unreasonable, expectations?” (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 3-4). The product service professional says that the I Can Speak!™ can recognise and respond to known aural patterns in a way that makes the baby appear older. Let’s say your baby sees a peach. If you or Mr. Faniglia were to say something like this:

“What a delicious peach! the I Can Speak!™, hearing this, through that hole, that little slotted hole near the neck, might respond by saying something like: I LIKE PEACH. Or I WANT PEACH. Or if you can chose the ICS 1900, the I

CAN SPEAK!TM might even respond by saying something like FRUIT, ISN'T THAT ONE OF THE MAJOR FOOD GROUPS?"

(Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 4)

The expression of desires, thoughts, and feelings that are controlled by an external agency that dominates an individual is very much related to the theme of dominance exerted by capitalism and the corporates that run based on that particular ideology. The product defended by the representative provides a hint to the author's interest in focusing on the ultimate intention of criticising the domination acquired by the power structures that, in one or the other way, subjugate and rule over the powerless class in society. Through the representation of the qualities of the product, I CAN SPEAK!TM, Saunders gives a hint about such domination over the interests of an individual. It says,

"That would not in reality be Derek speaking. Derek would not in reality know that a peach is fruit, or that fruit is a major food group. The I CAN SPEAK!TM knows it, however, from its position on Derek's face, gives the illusion that Derek knows it, by giving the illusion that Derek is speaking out of its twin moving SimuLips!TM. But that is it. That is all we claim."

(Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 5)

The explanation of the product service representative gives the idea that the product has its in-built voice that would speak for the child. Though the thoughts, feelings, and desires would be of an individual, the voice of expressing it in the word form is controlled by the product that symbolises the corporates working under the guidance of the ideology of capitalism. The difference in being submissive to the capitalist rules and products that have the same ideological standpoint as that of its producers is evident from the explanation saying "To be frank, Mrs. Faniglia, many of you, our customers, have found it disconcerting that their baby looks different with the I CAN SPEAK!TM on, than with the I CAN SPEAK!TM off" (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 5). The products of the corporate company control the expression of babies in the same way the capitalist forces make their dominating voice over the

helpless situation faced by individuals. As an example of this idea, Saunders invites attention to the letter. It says,

“My point is, with the ICS2100, Billy is much, much cleverer than he ever was with the ICS1900. He has recently learned, for example, that if he dribbles a little milk out his mouth, down his chin, his SimuLips™ will issue a MOO sound. Which he really seems to get a kick out of!”

(Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 8)

The natural identity of the baby is exploited to imbibe external assistance that acts beyond the limits of the baby. Similarly, the individualism of a person is restricted by the capitalist forces where they speak for the powerless groups who are vulnerable to the domination of their authorities.

Saunders not only criticises the dominating tendency of the capitalist forces but also points to the persuasion of the corporate companies, leaving consumers in their anxious and ambiguous state of liminality. The product, which had been sent back due to their disappointment, was persuaded by the company representative to be purchased. It is done to produce a rethink in the consumer who would get confused to get stable in any of the possible decisions. The pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases can only be denoted through an indirect explanation of the possible reaction from the consumer based on reading the letter. The plot of the short story does not provide the scope for an analysis based on the pure division of the instances. Therefore, the division based on the tripartite structure cannot be applied in the short story “I CAN SPEAK!™”.

5. 8. “My Flamboyant Grandson”

In the short story “My Flamboyant Grandson”, the setting represents a futuristic, commercial-saturated world where a grandfather, Leonard Petrillo takes his grandson, Teddy, to see a musical. The semi-absurd dystopia of an ultra-consumerist America presented in the short story indirectly criticises the persuasive subjugation of individuals by the corporate capitalists who decide and control the preferences of anyone who gets into their jurisdiction.

“Saunders’ stories – nearly all of them – are about people trying to make ends meet in harsh but ridiculous circumstances. Humiliated by bosses, brutalised by corporations, often at the mercy of friendly fascists, most of them do somehow move towards redemption instead of defeat.”

(Mannheim, “George Saunders: ‘My Flamboyant Grandson’”)

The setting (See Table 16) created by Saunders portends a near future wherein everyone is expected to be obligated to endure the advertising the corporates have customised for them. Persuasion is defended by a Citizen Helper, a corporate representative, saying “Isn’t that amazing, Mr. Petrillo, that we can do that, that we can know you so well, that we can help you identify the things you want and need?” (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 22-23). The intensity of persuasion, similar to the cookies of the internet in the new technological advancements, is traceable from the description when Mr. Petrillo is informed by saying, “Mr. Petrillo, you chose Burger King eight times last fiscal year but only two times thus far this fiscal year, please do not forsake us now, there is a store one block north!” (16) and a Gene Kelly hologram saying “Leonard, my data indicates you’re a bit of an old-timer like myself! Gosh, in our day, life was simpler, wasn’t it, Leonard? Why not come in and let Frankie Z. explain the latest gizmos!” (16). Throughout their walk through the streets, they were continuously persuaded by the advertisements that tried to invoke an interest in them to buy the product.

The rejection and opposition to the system in Mr. Petrillo can be identified when he says

“This, to me, is not America. What America is, to me, is a guy who doesn’t want to buy, you let him not buy, you respect his not buying. A guy has a crazy notion different from your crazy notion, you pat him on the back and say, Hey Pal, nice crazy notion, let’s go have a beer. America, to me, should be shouting all the time, a bunch of shouting voices, most of them wrong, some of them nuts, but please, not just one droning glamorous reasonable voice.”

(Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 22)

This viewpoint of Mr. Petrillo emerged as he was continuously persuaded to buy products that he did not want at a particular time. The evils of consumer culture, encouraged by capitalist corporations, are portrayed as the core of the short story. The liminal phase of Mr. Petrillo and his grandson began when they were not allowed to enter the Eisner Theatre as they did not possess a Promissory Voucher which would be available if they purchase at least six of the Major Artistic Sponsors. They are bombarded with advertisements customised for their needs as they are given an electric shoe equipped with the facility. As they had to find the original ticket other than the voucher for purchases, the old man is tired and removes the shoes. He broke the law and is given the option of whether to pay the fine of a thousand dollars or walk the same distance to view the missed advertisements.

“Here, totalitarian excess—the going beyond insults to intelligence—comes in the form of the command ‘shop til you drop’ becoming literal. A most beloved American activity is shaded sinister as the product of totalitarian choreography: Leonard’s feet become bloodied because, in spite of his gout, he must walk the Everly Readers—sidewalk technology that receives information from the Everly Strips in pedestrians’ shoes and tailors advertising holograms accordingly.”

(Cesaratto 81)

The grandfather was not allowed to quit by removing the shoes, which would get him a heavy fine for violating the rule. The corporate dominance in humiliating the consumers which ultimately makes them move in accordance with the capitalist norms is shown in the short story from the perspective of Mr. Petrillo. Their liminal phase of being in the helpless condition of not being able to quit and also not being in a position to move forward troubles the entire trip to watch the Broadway musical, *Babar Sings!*

There occurs a transition in the grandfather and his grandson as they witnessed the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal stages of the rites of passage of their lives with regard to the particular incident. The pre-liminal position of the protagonist character can be identified as the phase before they get confused with the rules and priorities of entering the Eisner Theatre to watch the show. From that point onwards, the liminal phase of the characters begins as they witness the harshest situation

without any kindness from the side of the corporate representatives. They could only escape their liminal phase by using any of the options provided by the authorities. Due to the high amount of the fine that he had to pay for violating the instructions, he chose to go back to the original position and retrace the steps with the supervision of the Citizen Helper. The unfortunate phase of liminality was unanticipated for them and it was uncontrollable as they were not able to overrule the power possessed by the capitalist corporates. They were helpless and were only able to suffer the situation by being submissive to the rules of the authorities.

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The next set of short stories discusses the theme of authoritarianism satirised by George Saunders through his indirect mocking of such power structures in society. He depicts different ways of conducting rule over the weaker groups through stories that do not have the direct and literal meaning that would point to such a theme. As Saunders' writing takes the position of the subjugated, repressed, vulnerable and weaker sections of society, these stories are analysed on how they are related to the ways liminality is affected or enforced on the victimised people in the rule of authoritarian or totalitarian rule. The non-acceptance of conflict and plurality in order to maintain the status quo, as well as the non-exhibition of the rule of law, the division of powers, and democratic voting procedures, are all examples of authoritarianism (Cerutti 17). Political repression and the exclusion of possible competitors are carried out via an authoritative form of rule. The working method of an "authoritarian equilibrium rests mainly on lies, fear, and economic prosperity" (Przeworski 58). Through his short stories, Saunders tries to explore such features of the dominator as well. The exhibitions of domination by authoritarian power structures are interpreted through the lens of liminality so that it gives information on what effects it has on the victims. The interpretation through liminality informs the possible effect of such a situation on both the victims and the dominator. The humiliations, inequality, injustice, tortures, and murders of vulnerable groups give the idea that the powerless group is subjugated to the extent that they are not even able to have a stable identity of their own. Being victimised by the cruelties of such dominant forms of the expression of power, the characters that symbolise the vulnerable groups are neither able to find a fixed position of their self nor that of the forced identity provided by the

authoritarian system. Individual and gathered opposition to the state are restricted where the extreme form of authoritarianism is exercised in society, often called as totalitarianism. It exhibits political repression, lack of democracy, censorship, mass surveillance, and limitations on the expression of freedom. Such systems highlight the need for one single ideology that has to be respected and followed by everyone under them. Saunders' short stories draw criticism to the emergence of similar domination in the society where the significance of empathy, compassion and kindness are never expressed in the weaker sections of the society.

When a particular group gains power over others and begins to get intolerant towards the opposition voices against the injustices done by the powerful against vulnerable groups, there is an inequality in freedom and rights. The victimised individuals or groups will be forced to support or at least be silent about the inhumane deeds of the authoritarian regime and are restricted to following their perspectives and freedom. In short, the domination of authoritarian governments or groups restricts the free expression of one's own self and is forced to be adjusted to the 'other' identity enforced through subjugation and repression. The victimised people experience the situation described by Victor Turner – the liminal phase, where they are uncertain about their current position, anxious about the unusualness happening around them, and ambiguous about the transition that has happened to them.

5. 9. “93990”

Saunders' short story “93990” published in the anthology *In Persuasion Nation* looks into the authoritarian domination possessed by individuals, agencies, or governments and the resultant victimisation of a vulnerable group of people who are forcefully subjugated without following proper ethical criteria. Biomedical research and clinical trials have been a base for the context in which the short story is discussed by the author. Though it takes the route of unethical and antipathic behaviour during a scientific trial process, Saunders aims to highlight the discrimination, helplessness, and the lack of kindness towards people who suffer from the cruelties and tortures from the side of the powerful groups.

“93990” refers to a relatable issue of the unethical means of experimentation using research objects. The human subjects used for research purposes in the real

world are represented through the test monkeys. They are vulnerable to the coercion of dominant power structures. The issue of unethical experimentation was not the primary concern of Saunders when he wrote the short story in 2006. His concern was to criticise the governments by showcasing how they treat human beings for their interests and purposes without consent, through illegal means. “93990” is written in the form of a scientific report about the experiments conducted on various testing monkeys by a group of scientists. The acute toxicity study was conducted for a period of ten days “using twenty male cynomolgous monkeys ranging in weight from 25 to 40 kg” (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 123). The monkeys were placed into four groups, each of which comprised five monkeys. As part of the toxicity study, these four groups of five monkeys each were applied “a daily intravenous dose of Borazidine” (123) in the dosages of 100, 250, 500, 10000 mg/kg/day for the first, second, third, and fourth groups, respectively. Saunders writes that he “came across a memo detailing the over drugging and destruction of a monkey, a la 93990. I carried that memo around for years and finally decided to make something of it that became that little story.” (Lee 83). The article quotes Saunders’ intention behind the story as his criticism of American totalitarianism and genocide (83). The monkeys applied with the lesser dosage of 500, 250 and 100 mg/kg/day exhibited mixed symptoms like increased aggression, extreme writhing, biting and pinching, playing with the resulting hair bundles, anxiety, disinterest, self-scratching, aggression, vomiting, rolling on the floor, self-hitting, self-hair pulling, distress, refusal to take food, brightly coloured stools, intermittent shrieking, lurching, confusion, scratching at the eyes, blindness or partial blindness, nausea, retching and quiet heaving breathing while squatting (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 125-132).

The treatment of the monkeys in the research centre was conducted in the cruellest and most inhumane way. The symptoms shown by the test monkeys closely resemble those of human research subjects that suffer the same pain and distress while being forcefully made to be part of the unscrupulous methods of domination. The voiceless situations are a trap created by the power structures where the subjugated fall in as they have no other option. “People who are powerless are especially vulnerable to neglect and abuse, exploitation and violence” (French et al., *Witness to the Young Republic*). In such a situation, the autonomy and continuity of life of a

person are disturbed, leading the individual to a limbo state caught in an ambiguous and transitional phase that is not under their own volition or control (Hammell 120).

From the short story, the evidence for their liminal situation can only be traced to how the test monkeys were selected and what effects they had during the research. There are no dialogues or conversations included in the particular short story. The pre-liminal phase of the test monkeys is not described in the story but can be identified from the procedures followed for the research that they were not in their liminal phase until they were forcefully taken as the test subjects. In the case of test monkey 93990, an extra high dosage of 1 lakh mg/kg/day was injected which did not affect it. Even though it did not exhibit any negative symptoms of the high dosages, at “0100 hrs of Day 11, monkey 93900 was tranquillised via dart, removed from the enclosure, sacrificed, and necropsied” (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 133). Such an act by the authorities shows the depth of cruelty that Saunders wants to highlight through his short story. It had no renal damage like the other monkeys and no negative effects from the high dosage. The liminal phase of the test monkeys as part of the experiment is explained throughout the story where it informs the reader about the resultant death and killing results at the end of the experiments to the conclusion of the torture and suffering of the test monkeys. Though not explained, it can be understood that the death of the test monkeys helped them move out of their liminal phase and to the post-liminal phase.

The situation that triggered (See Table 17) the liminal phase in the test monkeys is the experiment that also is the reason for their transition from their pre-liminal to the post-liminal phase. The situations of liminality in the test monkeys are unanticipated and uncontrollable due to their helpless situation and powerlessness. They are being alienated from their innate identity of having autonomy within themselves and being provided with another identity provided by the authoritarian and dominant groups that have subjugated them. The situation in the short story reveals that the test monkeys are helpless and are neither in a position to stick to their identity nor to cooperate with the inhumane behaviour of the authorities. Such is the situation in the case of people who are forcefully captured or dominated to be exploited without their consent. They are subject to a role change, either by their complete knowledge or through manipulation. Here, the monkeys with independent identities are brought

together to be the test monkeys. Even the victimised monkeys are unaware of the role change that has happened to them. In certain situations, the vulnerable groups are not aware of the transition that they are going through unless and until they begin to suffer from the unusual changes in their lives.

Similar to the situations of unethical experiments explained in “93900” by George Saunders, the participants involved in the various unethical experiments conducted by different organisations and governments for their hidden agendas in the history of the world have experienced a similar state of liminality expressing the various states during their liminal phase of experimentation. The identity of the testing subjects may have been selected by the victims without the proper knowledge or with the proper situational force without having any other options.

5. 10. “Adams”

Unlike the previously analysed short stories of George Saunders, the short story “Adams” is different in the perspective taken by the author to describe the situation. Though he narrates from the point of view of Roger, the interpretational reading of the story would stand with Frank Adams, whom Roger projects as the accused. As the readers know that all the stories written by George Saunders raise criticism against the powerful groups in society, it is well understood that “Adams” invites a read from the opposite aspect of what Roger informs them through his narration. “Adams” is a story about the conflict between two neighbours. Roger blames Adams for standing in his underwear, facing his children’s room, for which he beats him up and kicks him out. He also attacks him by being at his home. The story ends with Roger lighting up Adam’s house.

Reading the short story based on the themes of authoritarianism or totalitarianism and the context of the 9/11 attack in America, the criticism that Saunders raises against the Bush government in victimising Saddam Hussain as the accused can be well deciphered from the story. “Adams” can be read as satire from the perspective of the dominator who speaks against the revolutions from the side of the victimised groups of people or nations under the threat of totalitarian rule. From such an analysis of the story, it reads as the attempt of the victimised to escape the liminality exerted by the dominator through the form of revolution.

“revolutions, whether successful or not, become the limina, with all their initiatory overtones, between major distinctive structural forms or orderings of society.... Revolutions, whether violent or non-violent, may be the totalising liminal phases for which the limina of tribal rites de passage were merely foreshadowings or premonitions.”

(Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, In Play, Flow, And Ritual” 78)

As revolution is not supported or considered in a positive sense by any of the authoritarian groups or totalitarian governments, the narration of Roger has to be read as his version of the incident. Saunders intelligently inverts the point of view of the story to criticise the versions told by the Bush government for its attitude towards Iraq.

From the point of view of the victimised, the act of standing in underwear facing in the direction of Adam’s kid’s room can be considered a means of protest against the atrocities and humiliations of authoritarian and totalitarian groups or governments. The unusual act by the repressed groups would only be regarded as vulgar by the dominator as it directly mocks their existing pride and autonomy. Roger’s words, “And then he rises up. Which killed me! Him rising up? Against me? And I’m about to wonk him again” (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 114) gives a hint of his attitude toward domination and his requirement to see the other subjugated to him. The hatred of the victimised is also depicted by Saunders through the narration of Roger saying, “Never have I received such a hateful look. And flips me the bird! As if he is the one who is right!” (117). While emphasising the words “as if he is the one who is right!”, Saunders gives the hint that Adams had some justifiable reason for behaving in such a manner against Roger. The liminal situation of Roger, due to the unusual act of Adams, making him anxious and ambiguous in his behaviour, is revealed by saying “All the day that look was in my mind, that look of hate” (117).

From the point of view of the protests and attempts at revolution conducted by Adams, it was continuously being repressed by Roger. Adams was beaten by Roger, and the rifles, steak knives, butter knives, knife sharpeners, and even the two-letter openers were taken away by Roger for making Adams weak in his attack. Such similar acts of destroying the capability of revolutions have been conducted by the

dominant groups against the protesters. It points out that Roger was also in trouble and anxious about what would happen to him if Adams gets even stronger in his hatred and protest against him.

Saunders tries to project Adams' actions as unjustifiable saying, "Adams over there all pissed off, saying false things about me to those kids, which, due to what they had seen (the wonking) and what they had not seen (him in his underwear, facing my kid's room) they were probably swallowing every mistruth, and I was like, Great, now they hate me, like I'm the bad guy in this" (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 115-116). Through such an explanation from the perspective of Roger, Saunders allows the reader to realise the way he has framed the story for the readers. In this instance, Roger was tensed by the unusualness around him in the same way Adams could have been forced to be in a similar situation of liminality.

In a way, the two people representing the opposite ideologies and situated in the opposite positions are equal in their attempt to overcome the usual situation that has happened to them. Though Saunders does not reveal the liminal condition of Adams, it can be understood from this particular context that the deeds of Adams are his way of overcoming the liminal phase of being subjugated by the dominant attitude of Roger. On the contrary, Roger is also in a liminal state as the surrounding incidents are very unusual to his normative living by enjoying freedom and rights over others. Saunders intentionally leaves a gap in his story for his readers to fill in the blank spaces. The story "Adams" can only be understood by interpreting the narrator's words to fill in our descriptions by the author.

From the literal perspective of the story, the introduction itself gives a hint to the liminal phase of Roger as he is disturbed by the vulgar show of Adams. It is liminal for Rogers, as he has never witnessed a similar situation ever before. His words, "Never have I received such a hateful look" (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 117) reveal the same idea that he had not been through such an unusual situation. The acts of beating Adams, capturing his knives and rifle, and even trying to get support from neighbours are attempts to overcome the liminal situation (See Table 18). Saunders ends the story by informing the readers that Roger lit the house of Adams as an act of self-protection against further attacks by Adams. He says, "I took out my lighter and fired up the bag of toxins, and made for the light at the top of the stairs,

where I knew the door was, and the night was, and my freedom, and my home” (119). Roger believes he would be safe if he did so, and Saunders does not give a further description of what happened to Adams. The ultimate act of Roger resembles the inhumane activities and destruction conducted by totalitarian governments in repressing voices that rise against their rule.

5. 11. “Red Bow”

Similar to the previously discussed short story, “Adams”, George Saunders writes another in the same row, which is titled “Red Bow”. It is published in the anthology *In Persuasion Nation* and is included in the same section of “Adams”. The plot revolves around a gang of people attempting to track down and kill the dogs that killed the narrator’s daughter, Emily. The intensity of the hunting increases to the point where all the animals in the town are killed. Saunders writes the story as a criticism of totalitarianism and highlights the irrationality and injustice prevalent in totalitarian rule. The egocentric attitude of the group resembles the way totalitarian regimes behave towards people who are treated without respect and empathy. The killing of animals shows the cruelty of totalitarian regimes that torture and kill their opposing voices and others associated with them without any compassion or kindness.

The decision to kill all the dogs and other animals because of an incident where a dog’s bite killed a girl child also leads to the thought of a dystopian world where a small group of people dominates everyone else without a mere chance of any democratic solution. If the child is considered for its symbolisation of the dominance of a particular totalitarian ideology that had been loved and taken care of by these small groups of people representing the totalitarian regime, the concern shared by Uncle Matt takes the tone of the short story. He asks, “Not knowing how it spreads and all, could it be we are in a better-safe-tan-sorry type of situation? I don’t know, I truly don’t know” (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 85). The question of what spreads is important in analysing the story in this particular context of the totalitarian regime. As same as discussed in the previous short story, “Adams”, the possible interpretation of the spread can be the opposition to the domination of totalitarianism that subjugates the majority group by making them weaker and vulnerable in society. Saunders, through the short story, reveals how the totalitarian regime takes its actions to repress

the rising voices against them. They fear the spread of such opposing ideologies, which may later be a problem for their existence. They share their concern about the spread of what resembles the concern of the totalitarian regime about the possible ways that the opposing ideology and hatred towards the rule would spread. The narrator says, “we did not even know the precise method of infection – was it bites, spit blood, was something leaping from coat to coat? We knew it could happen to dogs, it appeared it could happen to cats – what I’m saying is, it was just a very confusing and frightening time” (91). The anxiety and uncertainty of the small group of people are reflected through their words and give the idea that they are in their liminal phase, experiencing the negative characteristics of liminality.

Considering the literal aspect of the short story, the liminal phase (See Table 19) of the people involved in searching for the suspected dogs begins when they are saddened by the demise of a girl bitten by a dog. Their intensity of anxiety and tension increased with time and exploring more and more dogs made them suggest the illogical idea of killing not only dogs but also other animals. The narrator’s wife says, “Kill every dog, every cat. Kill every mouse, every bird. Kill every fish. Anyone objects, kill them too” (Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 95). It is at this point that the reader finds a close relationship between the small group of people who decided to kill dogs for their own safety and the authorities exercising totalitarian rule over others. The absurd idea points to how illogical the working pattern of a totalitarian regime could be and their expected behaviour towards others who oppose their beliefs and actions. They even think “I mean, if you did that, say, killed every dog and cat, regardless of where they Infected or not, you could thereby guarantee, to 100 percent...” (95). The totalitarian mindset expects, “with no dogs and no cats, the chance of that happening to someone else (or to us again) goes down to that very beautiful number of Zero” (96). The autonomy experienced by the totalitarian regime over the vulnerable is due to their power and influence to manipulate the truth, even if it is tried to be exposed during a possible revolutionary attempt against them. A T-shirt with Emily’s smiling face was worn by the people gathered under the instruction of Uncle Matt. They also had a fake colour-enhanced red bow, a photo of Emily as a baby, and a superimposed photo of Emily’s first communion (91). To gain support for

their mischievous deeds, they try to project reasons with no base on truth. Saunders highlights their motto – FIGHT THE OUTRAGE has underneath letters saying,

“Why do we live in this world but to love what is ours, and when one of us has cruelly lost what we loved, it is the time to band together to stand up to that which threatens that which we love, so that no one else ever has to experience this outrage again.”

(Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 92)

They call it outrage – exactly what a revolution would be defined by a totalitarian regime. They introduced a Three-point Emergency Plan in the same way a totalitarian regime would produce instructions that have to be obeyed under any circumstances. The instructions provided by the group are a threat to people who may have objections to their domination. Saunders informs about the dominating and ordering attitude of the group by providing the points of their Three-point Emergency Plan.

“[1] All Village animals must immediately undergo an Evaluation, to determine the animal infected,

[2] All Infected or Suspected Infected animals must be destroyed at once, and

[3] All Infected or Suspected Infected animals, once destroyed, must be burned at once to minimise the possibility of Second-Hand Infection.”

(Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 93)

The possible effects of such similar orders on the victimised groups would be the expression of uncertainty, anxiety, and ambiguity. Jean Paul Sartre writes, “Anguish is precisely my consciousness of being my own future, in the mode of not-being” (Sartre 32). The not-being is the denial of the existence in the future and the presence in the present. To him, anxiety makes no ground for stability. They would be transited from their normality to a situation in-between their wish to go forward with their opposing views on totalitarian regimes and the fear of being tortured and killed. Such situations and possible effects on the victims give rise to their alienation from self and also from the identity preferred by the powerful and dominant system that controls them. They say,

“Specific penalties should these people, for example, assault one of the Animal Removal Officers, as a few of them did, and finally also had to issue some guidelines on how to handle individuals who, for whatever reason, felt it useful to undercut our efforts by, you know, obsessively and publically criticising the Five- and Six- Point Plans, just very unhappy people.”

(Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 97)

Therefore, the story “Red Bow” expresses a direct involvement and expression of liminality in the people who represent the totalitarian regime and also indirect liminality experienced by the victimised group. They are linked with each other as both induce the other liminal phase.

5. 12. “Escape from Spiderhead”

Same as the theme discussed in “93990”, George Saunders explores the unethical acts conducted by dominant people over the powerless and repressed. “Escape from Spiderhead” is also set in a pharmacological environment where humans become the direct test subjects of cruelty. The dominant nature of the test administrator, Abnesti towards the humans selected as test subjects is depicted in the short story to highlight the influence that such domination and subjugation can have on the expression of liminality (See Table 20) in the victims. Through domination over the victims, the freedom to have their own rights and voice are hindered which makes them helpless to oppose the injustices done to them. The powerlessness of the victims makes them feel alienated from their true selves and also from the other identity enforced by the dominator.

The test subjects were imprisoned for their crime which made them voiceless to the decision taken by the authorities. Jeff says that Abnesti responded, “irritated, as if trying to remind me that I was not here by choice but because I had done my crime and was in the process of doing my time” (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 54). It reveals his acceptance of the pathetic situation of not being able to decide on his own. The prison-like research facility testing powerful drugs acts as a liminal space for the victimised characters who were forced to participate due to the fact that they were prisoners under the control of their authorities. The dissatisfaction and disinterest of being the test subjects are reflected in the words of the prisoners and it reflects their

incapability to escape from such a trapped situation. When the co-worker asks, “Odd job of work, isn’t it?” the reply is “but it is worse than that” (62).

Saunders emphasises the conversation between Abnesti and his human test subjects to inform the readers about their obedience to higher authorities. He writes,

Abnesti said, “Jeff, drip on?”

“Acknowledge,” I said.

“Heather, drip on?” he said.

“Acknowledge,” Heather said.

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 48)

The submissiveness of the test subjects, mainly Jeff, Heather and Rachel, is revealed in the short story through the repeated expression of the same conversations. These acknowledgements lead to suffering and torture in human research subjects. Jeff gives a hint about the suffering in the research facility by saying,

“As I watched Heather suffer, a great tenderness suffused my body, a tenderness hard to distinguish from a sort of vast existential nausea; to wit, why are such beautiful beloved vessels made slaves to so much pain? Heather presented as a bundle of pain receptors. Heather’s mind was fluid, and could be ruined (by pain, by sadness). Why? Why was she made this way? Why so fragile?”

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 69-70)

The perspective of Abnesti who represents the dominant system that represses the freedom and rights of others, is represented in the lines saying, “Fuck it, enough,” Abnesti said. “Verlaine, what’s the name of that one? The one where I give him an order and he obeys it?” (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 75). Abnesti controls the feelings and emotions of the test subjects with the dosage of drugs. It resembles how dominant forces try to subjugate others, especially the vulnerable, making them victims of the exercise of power. Being criminals with a background of crime, they are put in prison where they have no other way to be submissive to the acts of the authorities. Jeff says, “But, having once been Darkenfloxxed TM, I just didn’t want to do that to anyone. Even if I didn’t like the person very much, even if I hated the

person, I still wouldn't want to do it" (57). This particular mentality of the test subject is overruled by the authoritarian domination of the power system, which makes him part of the injustice and unethical crime of testing drugs on women. The feelings and expressions of love for others had also been controlled by the authorities based on the drugs, which leads to the idea that the test subjects are neither able to be themselves in their liminal situation nor be completely adjusted to the cruelties of the authorities. Jeff says,

“Still, honestly, I felt sadder than sad.

I guess I was sad that love was not real? Or not all that real, anyway? I guess I was sad that love could feel so real and the next minute be gone, and all because of something Abnesti was doing.”

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 54-55)

The process of controlling an individual's emotions, feelings, and thoughts is conducted through the means of injecting drugs that serve as tools to subjugate the voice and even ideological beliefs of others. The dominator takes advantage of the helpless situation of the victimised people, who otherwise could have escaped their inhumane situation without being entrapped in the liminal phase.

5. 13. “The Semplica Girl Diaries”

In a world where the wealthier groups have dominating power to exploit the weaker and poorer sections of society, George Saunders' “The Semplica Girl Diaries” published in *Tenth of December* is significant in highlighting the situation faced by a weaker section that is expected to be silent and unresponsive to the cruel fancies of their dominator. The short story can be read in the context of immigrant issues, racist policies, sex trafficking, slavery, and the exploitation done on smaller countries by the wealthier and dominant countries that have the power to suppress the other. The distinction between the haves and the have-nots is reflected in the way Saunders describes the Semplica Girls and their owners. The Semplica Girls are imported girls in undesirable situations from third world countries, presented in front yards of wealthy people by hanging them by their heads with unseen threads to connect one with the other. Saunders gives an idea about their origin by noting,

“SGs up now, approx. three feet off ground, smiling, swaying in slight breeze. Order, left to right: Tami (Laos), Gwen (Moldova), Lisa (Somalia), Betty (Philippines). Effect amazing. Having so often seen similar configuration in yards of others more affluent, makes own yard seen suddenly affluent, you feel different about self, as if at last you are in step with peers and time in which living.”

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 133)

Saunders describes them as a symbol used to show the wealth of a family. The gruesome image of the suffering experienced by the Semplica Girls projects the cruelties exhibited on them for materialistic enthusiasm by society. The Semplica Girls are in their in-between situation as they cannot go back to their native place due to their poverty and the pathetic situation there, and they are also not satisfied with their role in the yards of wealthier families as they are not treated equally as human beings. These helpless situations of the Semplica Girls are taken as an advantage to subjugate them and repress them like slaves. Saunders informs that the owners of the Semplica Girls think the recruitment helps them as the conditions of being a Semplica Girl on the lawn are much better than in their home country. The narrator tries to convince his daughter Eva who was not interested in treating the Semplica Girls in the way others treat them for their pride and luxury.

“Last night, after party, found her sad in her room. Asked why. She said no reason. But in sketchpad: crayon pic of row of sad SGs. Could tell were meant to be sad due to frowns went down off faces like Fu Manchus and tears were dropping in arcs, flowers springing up where tears hit ground. Not to self: talk to her, explain it does not hurt, they are not sad, but actually happy, given that their prior conditions were like: they chose, are glad, etc.”

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 119)

The above perspective shared by the narrator about the Semplica Girls shows that the narrator believes the Semplica Girls are more comfortable being on their lawns connected by micro lines. People like the narrator do not think that the Semplica Girls are forced to act according to the wishes of their owners only because of their liminal condition. They are neither treated well as human beings when they

are with their owner nor able to lead a better life if they are in their home country. The condition of the Semplica Girls selected by the narrator is described as,

“Worse than I thought: Laotian (Tami) applied due to two sisters already in brothels. Moldovan (Gwen) has cousin who thought was becoming window washer in Germany, buy no: sex slave in Kuwait (!). Somali (Lisa) watched father + little sister die of AIDs, same tiny thatch hut, same year. Filipina (Betty) has little brother ‘very skilled for computer’, parents cannot afford high school, have lived in tiny lean-to with three other families since their own tiny lean-to slid down hillside in earthquake.”

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 135)

These in-between states (See Table 21) of the Semplica Girls are taken as a chance to make them slaves. Through the depiction of Semplica Girls in his short story, Saunders focuses on the pathetic situation of slaves who have no voice against the atrocities done to them. As same as the slaves who are not able to speak against the deeds of their owners on them, the Semplica Girls in the short story are not provided with a chance to express their voice against the situation that they suffer. Saunders mocks the upper-class dominant groups for their inhumane treatment of human beings as showcase models for projecting their social status and luxurious living.

*

It is significant to determine the application and existence of the concepts connected to Victor Turner’s liminality while interpreting the above-mentioned analysis of the short stories through the lens of Victor Turner’s liminality. Same as how the analysis is conducted in the previous chapters three and four, the identification of liminality is also related to the closely connected concepts such as liminal space, liminal entity, permanent or temporary liminality, and *communitas*. This categorisation gives a clear sketch of the liminal status of the characters involved in the short stories. In the category of short stories included in this particular chapter that deals with the themes of capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarian or dominance of power structures in society, the presence of liminal space, liminal entities, permanent or temporary

liminality, and the formation of *communitas* are significant in understanding the in-between state of the victimised groups or individuals. Identification of such an experience of an in-between state in the victims helps to trace the path of liminality, particularly the liminal phase of such characters.

Liminal spaces can be identified as separate areas or places that remain different from the usual and normative structure of life. “The ‘place’ has neither quality, nor reality, nor even meaning; it is neutral, a peculiar kind of ‘clotting factor’, which is capriciously fixing, setting, blocking, or releasing features or images from reality” (Horvath, *Modernism and Charisma* 57). The state of liminality is often connected with ambiguity, as people in liminal space “slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in a cultural space” (Garsten 606).

Victor Turner explains the importance of liminal spaces by providing examples of rituals, carnivals, dramas and films saying,

“liminal areas of time and space – rituals, carnivals, dramas, and latterly films – are open to the play of thought, feelings and will; in them are generated new models, often fantastic, some of which may have sufficient power and plausibility to replace eventually the force-backed political and jural models that control the centres of a society’s on-going life”

(Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* vii)

From the analysis of the short stories of George Saunders in this chapter, certain spaces, places, or settings used by the author to plot the characters to their perfection can be identified as having the essential qualities of a liminal space that provides the characters with the quality of a liminal entity as they become entrapped in their liminal phase, producing the qualities of liminality. The setting of the theme park in the short story “Pastoralia” is a space different from the outside world for the employees who work within the limits of the theme park. It separates their identity from other people and forces them to act like a caveman and a cavewoman with all the essentialities required for expressing the role. The theme park is the workplace for the employees working there, and it separates their self to provide an identity suitable for the capitalist forces. The characters involved in such liminal spaces are

“temporarily undefined, beyond the normative social structure. This weakens them since they have no rights over others. But it also liberates them from structural obligations” (Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* 27).

Likewise, the CivilWarLand theme park in the short story “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline” where the protagonist, Samuel, goes through his liminal situation in life, can also be considered a liminal space due to its distinguishing features of an amusement theme park that is different from the normal reality of life. A theme park or an amusement park is where people come to relax or enjoy their time away from the stressful situations of life. Theme parks represent postmodern architecture, which in the statement of Jameson is “bewildering”. In his view, “Postmodern architecture does not wish to be part of the city but rather its equivalent and replacement or substitute” (Jameson 81). In such a sense, the theme park described in the short story becomes a liminal space for Samuel, as he needs to resolve the conflicts and issues on the premises of the theme park.

“In Persuasion Nation” provides the sketches of characters that are continuously being used for advertising purposes. The liminal space in which they are involved has made them frustrated and irritated with being the liminal subjects. As same as the short stories that come under the theme of capitalism, “Exhortation” gives a hint to a workplace which becomes the liminal space for the employees who work under the capitalist ideology. The liminality that they go through is also a product of the liminal space in which they are present. If they move out of the corporate space that acts as their liminal space, they will also be relieved of the liminality that they experience as a result of their affiliation. In the short story “My Chivalric Fiasco”, the Medieval theme park acts as the liminal space where the narrator works with his boss, Don Murray, and other fellow workers. The situations that happen to the narrator that force him to be in his liminal space are also connected to the liminal space with which he was affiliated. “My Flamboyant Grandson” expresses the corporate-influenced advertisement-led consumerist liminal space where the protagonist character and his grandson are forced to follow the corporate rules. They were forced to be part of the liminal space controlled by corporate capitalism.

In “93990” and “Escape from Spiderhead”, Saunders tries to give an idea of certain spaces that act as places of torture, hatred, and massacres. In “93990”, the

scientific lab denotes the place of torture and inhumane behaviour of authoritarian or dominant groups in society. The specific space is highlighted as the setting, as it is different from that of the outside world. In “Escape from Spiderhead”, the pharmacological environment where humans are tortured as research subjects for the experiment is shown by the author. “Those who work in these places have strict feelings and rules to follow, for it is negative attitudes (rather than low productivity) that threaten their jobs” (Boddy 5). The environment in which the victims are entrapped is also a factor in deciding the intensity of liminality experienced by the victimised individuals that represent the voiceless and powerless group of people under the influence of dominant power structures in society. They are also referred to as liminoid. “Experimental and theoretical science itself is ‘liminoid’ – it takes place in neutral spaces or privileged areas (laboratories and studies) set aside from the mainstream of productive events” (Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, In Play, Flow, and Ritual” 65).

The next concept related to Victor Turner’s liminality is the liminal entity or liminal personae or liminar. The participants in a ritual process that moves through the liminal phase are called by such a name. As per Turner’s view, from the perspective of ritual processes, “liminal entities, such as neophytes in initiation or puberty rites, may be represented as possessing nothing” (Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* 95). Turner explains that a set of essentially religious definitions co-exist with these which do set out to define the structurally indefinable “transitional-being”. The transitional being or “liminal persona” is defined by a name and by a set of symbols. The same name is very frequently employed to designate those who are being initiated into very different states of life” (Turner, “Betwixt and between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage” 47)

In the short stories, the characters that are subjugated and are victimised to experience their liminal phase of liminality are similar participants in a liminal process of transition. They are forced from their pre-liminal phase to the liminal phase by the exercise of power or hegemonic subjugation by the capitalist corporate forces or the authoritarian and dominant power structures in society. During the liminal phase of their transition, the victimised people or the characters in the short stories experience the liminal attributes of a liminal persona. “The attributes of liminality or

of liminal personae/threshold people are necessarily ambiguous since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space” (Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* 95). They are considered to have no status, property and are secular in their role (95). Samuel in “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline”, Jeffrey in “The 400-Pound CEO”, the caveman narrator and the cavewoman in “Pastoralia”, The members of the orange/ Grammy/ man-briefly involved with a Ding-Dong/ piles of mush/ penisless-man coalition in “In Persuasion Nation”, the employees in “Exhortation”, Ted in “My Chivalric Fiasco”, Mrs. Ruth Faniglia in “I CAN SPEAK!™”, Leonard Petrillo and his grandson in “My Flamboyant Grandson”, the test monkeys in “93990”, Frank Adams in “Adams”, the dogs and animals in “Red Bow”, the human subjects in “The Escape from Spiderhead” and the Semplica Girls in “The Semplica Girl Diaries” are the “liminal entities” (Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* 95) or “liminal personae” (95) or liminaries who become the part of liminal phase by experiencing liminality.

Another question related to the concept put forth by Victor Turner in his various writings is about the duration of liminality experienced by the liminal entities. On some occasions, the participants in a liminal process may experience a short duration that makes them temporary, and in other cases, it can lead to a longer duration that forms permanent liminality. Though the term was introduced by Victor Turner, an extensive study on the topic was conducted by Arpad Szokolczai. With the help of Arnold van Gennep’s tripartite structure, he tries to explain the occurrence of liminality in its permanent condition. He says “Liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases in this sequence becomes frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame” (Szokolczai, *Reflexive Historical Sociology* 220). As introduced in chapter 2 of this thesis, the different dimensions of liminality help to differentiate it into permanent and temporary liminality. With reference to the examples of a pilgrim, a traveller, or a monk, Victor Turner tries to explain the permanence of liminality that they experience in their lives. He says, “transitions have here become a permanent condition” (Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* 107). In such examples, Turner observed how a liminal state might become

‘fixed’, referring to a scenario in which social life’s suspended quality takes on a more permanent quality (Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern* 82).

In the above-analysed short stories of George Saunders, there are a few characters that possess permanent liminality. Though in many short stories, the situations help to understand the transition in the character from their pre-liminal to the liminal and post-liminal phases, certain short stories do not clearly depict the transition path of the character, which makes it difficult to trace whether the character that is the liminal personae possesses a permanent or temporary liminal status in the story. The term’s explanation is straightforward, which makes it useful for explaining situations that are otherwise difficult to comprehend. It occurs when a short suspension of the normal, everyday, taken-for-granted condition of affairs becomes permanent, resulting in a loss of reality, if not outright unreality, in everyday life. The issue is not deviating from the norm in a universalistic sense; rather, it’s diverging from whatever individuals in a certain period and location took for granted as normal and usual in their lives (Szakolczai, “Permanent (trickster) liminality” 233).

In “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline”, Samuel is at last killed, which denotes his moving out of the liminal phase. In the short story “Pastoralia”, Janet is fired and terminated from her job, which makes her relieved from the liminal phase, whereas the narrator, who enacts the role of the caveman, continues to adjust in the liminal space of the theme park, which makes him permanent in the status. In “400-Pound CEO”, Jeffery manages to overcome his liminal phase by reacting against Tim, but again ends up in another liminal situation. The members of the orange/ Grammy/ man-briefly involved with a Ding-Dong/ piles of mush/ penisless-man coalition in “In Persuasion Nation” do react to the exploitation done against them, and Ted in “My Chivalric Fiasco” reacts to the rape conducted by his boss to end their liminal entrapments. Leonard Petrillo in “My Flamboyant Grandson” decided to walk the steps again as per the rule of the capitalist corporates. He admits to the enforcement of liminality on him and thus continues to be in his liminality even though he wishes to move out of the entrapment. The test monkeys in “93990”, the dogs and animals in “Red Bow” and the human subjects in “Escape from Spiderhead” are exploited and tortured, which puts them in their liminal state. In “93990”, the test monkeys either die or are killed at the end, which helps to end their liminal phase. The dogs and other

animals are haunted and killed by a group of dominant people representing the authoritarian regime. They too end up exiting their liminal phase through death. In “Escape from Spiderhead”, the human subjects, including Jeff, escape their liminality either by death or suicide. In “The Semplica Girl Diaries”, the Semplica Girls are relieved by the empathetic character Eva, the younger daughter of the narrator. It helps them to find their own way out of the enslavement conducted by their owner. Turner discusses the state of outsiderhood by pointing to either permanent, situational, or temporary set apart, or voluntary setting oneself apart as “marginal who are simultaneously members of two or more groups whose social definitions and cultural norms are distinct from, and often even opposed to, one another” (Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* 233). In these short stories, the characters do not prolong their enslavement, exploitation, or subjugation to their authorities or the capitalist system. They are either, in one or the other way, able to exit their liminal phase, which makes their liminality temporary in nature.

The major characters that represent the victimised group can also be identified in the category of *communitas*, as classified by Victor Turner. *Communitas*, as already explained in the previous chapters, “tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism. Secular distinctions of rank and status disappear or are homogenised” (Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* 95). It is the binary opposite of what is called a structure by Turner. The presence of *communitas* “emerges recognisably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders” (96). The characters that experience relatively the same kind of exploitation and victimisation from the different forms of power structures in society tend to possess the qualities of submission and comradeship in their behaviour. Samuel in “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline”, Jeffrey in “The 400-Pound CEO”, the caveman narrator and the cavewoman in “Pastoralia”, The members of the orange/Grammy/ man-briefly involved with a Ding-Dong/ piles of mush/ penisless-man coalition in “In Persuasion Nation”, the employees in “Exhortation”, Ted in “My Chivalric Fiasco”, Mrs. Ruth Faniglia in “I CAN SPEAK!TM”, Leonard Petrillo and his grandson in “My Flamboyant Grandson”, the test monkeys in “93990”, Frank

Adams in “Adams”, the dogs and animals in “Red Bow”, the human subjects in “The Escape from Spiderhead” and the Semplica Girls in “The Semplica Girl Diaries” are subject to become victims of the cruelties and domination of the power structures that make them exhibit the same comradeship of *communitas* emerged out of the liminality experienced by them. They tend to possess the qualities of existential or spontaneous *communitas* as their liminality is mostly temporary in nature rather than permanent.

5. 14. Conclusion

Liminal situations or instances in the short stories related to the major protagonist characters have been traced in the previous pages of the chapter through textual analysis and interpretation of situations. It has been identified that the liminal entities or characters in the short stories are in a way “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned” (Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* 95) in the same way Victor Turner explains about the participants taking part in the liminal stage of the ritual processes. The situation experienced by the characters in the liminal phase is neither able to stick to their self nor is willing to completely accept the other identity provided to them by force. They stay in-between these two positions, often transiting from one to the other. The instability in their position gives rise to the situation of liminality, thus making them liminal entities. The paradox of liminality, like Victor Turner, is explained by Bjørn Thomassen as,

“at one and the same time unstructured and highly structuring: the most basic rules of behaviour are questioned, doubt and skepticism as to the existence of the world are radicalised, but the problematisations, the formative experiences and the reformulations of being during the liminality period proper, will feed the individual (and his/her cohort) with a new structure and set of rules that, once established, will glide back to the level of the taken-for-granted.”

(Thomassen, “The uses and meanings of liminality” 20)

These forms of producing liminality in liminal entities are conducted through direct or indirect force on them or their situations by the power structures of society that tend to control and influence their decisions. As to what the themes of the short

stories denote, they highlight the enforcement of power over others, making them subjugated and repressed, thus exploited and victimised. Such pressure on the powerless and vulnerable group of people, directly or indirectly, would make them experience a kind of liminality that is enforced on them. It can be called ‘coercive liminality’. When liminality is experienced by an individual or group as an effect of force or pressure from a dominant factor, it produces coercive liminality in the victims. In the short stories discussed in this chapter, the forms of liminality produced in the victimised group of characters are coercive in nature. It is either forced on them by exerting power or is taken voluntarily by them out of their helpless situation. In any case, they are subject to the atrocities of the power structures, such as capitalism, corporate consumerism, and authoritarianism. These dominant power structures in society act as the factors that exercise coercive liminality on the victimised groups. The ambiguity, neutrality, and structural invisibility of the liminal entities that are subject to coercive liminality are made to experience these attributes of liminality as part of the pressure or force from the dominant groups. Such a form of liminality is mostly evident in the victimised groups, as they do not possess the power to stick to either self or the other identity enforced by the power structures.

This chapter specifically focused on George Saunders’ short stories from the point of view of the themes of capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism to explore the presence of liminality in the characters. The liminality that was explored through textual analysis and interpretation was identified as coercive liminality due to the peculiar feature of the use of force and power by the dominant groups. Thus, the contents justify the title “Coercive Liminality, Vulnerability, and Victimisation” used for the chapter. The next chapter would trace the different spheres of liminality that are spread out in the other selected short stories of George Saunders, focusing mainly on the overcoming measures conducted by the characters to escape the entrapment of liminality.

5. 15. Analysis at a Glance

Table 10)

CIVILWARLAND IN BAD DECLINE	
Names	Narrator
Pre-liminal	❖ The period before the gang attacks took place.
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Gang attacks ❖ Simon executes a teenage boy ❖ Simon nearly shoots the narrator's son ❖ Park is forced to close ❖ Revenues come down ❖ Pressure from corporate capitalist amusement park ❖ Uncertainties and anxieties about the job, and the future of the park. ❖ Tensions due to Simon ❖ Fear of being attacked ❖ Guilt for the death of the teenage boy ❖ Loss of family happiness ❖ Tensions about the car payment, housing loan ❖ Personal and professional liabilities
Post-liminal	❖ Death
Type of Liminality	❖ Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Attack of Gangs ❖ Simon's arrival
Setting	❖ Amusement Park
Anticipated/ Unanticipated	❖ Unanticipated
Control/ Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ Nil
Role change	❖ Narrator gets killed by Simon
Status	❖ Employee at the amusement park
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Loss ❖ Alienated ❖ Ambiguity
Support	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	❖ Decided to suicide; but killed by Simon
Transition	❖ Yes

Table 11)

THE 400-POUND CEO	
Name	Jeffrey
Pre-liminal	❖ Period before the clash with Tim
Liminal	❖ Frustrations and dissatisfaction due to the capitalist pressure. ❖ conflict with Tim who harmed the animal rights girl ❖ Murder of Tim ❖ Attempts to hide the murder
Post-liminal	❖ Prison
Type of Liminality	❖ Self-paced, Coercive, and Layered (Overlapping)
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Conflict with Tim who harmed the animal rights girl
Setting	❖ Corporate Firm
Anticipated/Unanticipated	❖ Anticipated
Control/Uncontrolled	❖ Controllable
Duration	❖ Permanent
Previous experience	❖ Frustrated due to lack of love life ❖ Made fun of overweight ❖ Unsatisfied with the working conditions
Role change	❖ Identity of an employee to an accused and also to the identity of a murderer.
Status	❖ Employee in a corporate firm
Psychological Status during the transition	❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ loss
Support	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	❖ Hides the murder of Tim and takes charge of his office
Transition	❖ Yes

Table 12)

PASTORALIA		
Names	Caveman	Janet
Pre-liminal	❖ Period before joining the amusement park	❖ Period before joining the amusement park.
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Submissiveness to capitalist corporates ❖ Powerless and voiceless ❖ Act like an ancestral caveman ❖ Considered as machines ❖ No communication with others ❖ Authorities control his life ❖ Insecurities of life haunt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Submissiveness to capitalist corporates ❖ Powerless and voiceless ❖ Act as an ancestral cavewoman ❖ Considered as machines ❖ No communication with others ❖ Authorities control her life
Post-liminal	❖ Continues to be in permanent liminality	❖ Quits job
Type of Liminality	❖ Coercive	❖ Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ The social and economic instability which makes him work under the capitalist rules and regulations	❖ The social and economic instability which makes him work under the capitalist rules and regulations
Setting	❖ Amusement Park	❖ Amusement Park
Anticipated or Unanticipated	❖ Anticipated	❖ Anticipated
Control/ Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	Permanent	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ Yes	No
Role change	❖ No	❖ Cavewoman (employee) to non-employee
Status	❖ Caveman (employee)	❖ Cavewoman (employee)
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ ambiguous ❖ fear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Anxiety ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ ambiguous ❖ fear
Support	❖ Nil	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	❖ Nil	❖ Decided to quit job
Transition	No	Yes

Table 13)

IN PERSUASION NATION	
Group Name	The Orange, Grammy, man-briefly involved with a Ding-Dong, piles of mush, and Jim, the penniless man.
Pre-liminal	❖ The characters are controlled by the dominants.
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ the inhumane and immoral attitude of the corporate culture towards its working class ❖ subject to humiliation and torture by the dominant characters ❖ Forced to resist and fight against the torture
Post-liminal	❖ Liberated
Type of Liminality	❖ Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Conflict with the dominant characters
Setting	❖ Television commercial advertisement platform
Anticipated/ Unanticipated	❖ Anticipated
Control/ Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ Continuing as victims of the commercial advertisements
Role change	❖ Victims of torture to liberated characters
Status	❖ Characters in television commercial advertisements
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ loss
Support	❖ Fellow characters who are equal victims.
Coping strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ the fight that they conducted till the end ❖ Revolutions initiated ❖ The acceptance of reality and realisation about the reasons of subjugation and repression
Transition	❖ Yes

Table 14)

EXHORTATION	
Names	Employees
Pre-liminal	❖ Before receiving the Memorandum letter from Todd
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Memorandum letter arrives ❖ Hints in the letter about job loss if instructions are obeyed ❖ Threatened and forced to do unethical things. ❖ Gives the example of the employee Andy who obeys the rules.
Post-liminal	❖ Nil
Type of Liminality	❖ Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Memorandum letter from Todd ❖ The advice to obey the instruction of the corporate company
Setting	❖ Corporate firm
Anticipated/Unanticipated	❖ Unanticipated
Control/Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Permanent
Previous experience	❖ Continuing as employees in the same corporate firm
Role change	❖ Nil
Status	❖ Employees in a corporate firm
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Alienation ❖ loss
Support	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	❖ Nil
Transition	❖ No

Table 15)

MY CHIVALRIC FIASCO	
Names	Ted
Pre-liminal	❖ Before when Ted finds Don Murray molesting Martha.
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ he finds Martha being molested by Don Murray ❖ Hide the incident as secret ❖ being in between the personal stress and the pressure from the working atmosphere ❖ confusion about whether to reveal the secret or not ❖ Fear of loss of job
Post-liminal	❖ Though out of the tensions of the secret, he still continues to be the victim of authoritarian and corporate subjugation and torture.
Type of Liminality	❖ Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Witness to the molestation by Don Murray on Martha
Setting	❖ Corporate firm
Anticipated/ Unanticipated	Anticipated
Control/ Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Temporary; but continues to be the victim of corporate torture.
Previous experience	❖ Continuing as employees in the same corporate firm
Role change	❖ Loss of promotion
Status	❖ Employees in a corporate firm
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Dilemma ❖ loss
Support	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Intake of the KnightLyfe drug ❖ Decides to make the secret public
Transition	❖ Yes; but not in terms of being a victim of the oppression being an employee

Table 16)

MY FLAMBOYANT GRANDSON	
Name	Leonard Petrillo (Grandfather)
Pre-liminal	❖ Before they get confused with the rules and priorities to enter the Eisner Theatre to watch the show
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Witness the harshest situation without any kindness from the side of the corporate representatives. ❖ Confused with the bombardment of persuasive advertisement ❖ They were not able to avoid the advertisements ❖ Grandfather removes the shoe, though it was against the rule ❖ They were given choice to pay a fine or to walk again with the shoe
Post-liminal	❖ could only escape their liminal phase using any one of the options provided by the authorities
Type of Liminality	❖ Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Confused with the rules and priorities to enter the Eisner Theatre to watch the musical show.
Setting	❖ Persuasive consumer world of advertisements
Anticipated/ Unanticipated	❖ Unanticipated
Control/ Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ Nil
Role change	❖ Nil
Status	❖ Consumer
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Dilemma ❖ Alienation ❖ loss
Support	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	❖ Had to accept the instruction to walk again the steps using the shoes to avoid penalty.
Transition	❖ Yes

Table 17)

93990	
Group Name	Test Monkeys
Pre-liminal	❖ Before being captured to be in the clinical lab.
Liminal	❖ Injection of the drug without consent ❖ Unethical research conducted on the monkeys ❖ Harmful side-effects of the clinical trials with the drug.
Post-liminal	❖ Death
Type of Liminality	❖ Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Injection of the drug without consent as part of the clinical trials
Setting	❖ Clinical laboratory
Anticipated/Unanticipated	❖ Anticipated
Control/Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ Nil
Role change	❖ Free animal to test monkeys.
Status	❖ Test monkeys
Psychological Status during the transition	❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Dilemma ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ loss
Support	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	❖ Nil
Transition	❖ Yes

Table 18)

ADAMS	
Name	Roger
Pre-liminal	❖ Before Adams went to Roger's house and stood in his underwear
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Adams goes to Roger's house and stands in underwear ❖ Conflict between Adams and Roger ❖ Beaten by Roger with the rifles, steak knives, butter knives, knife sharpener ❖ Usual behaviour of Adams against Roger
Post-liminal	❖ Roger blows the house of Adams.
Type of Liminality	❖ Counter-liminality
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Adams wear underwear and stands opposite to Roger's children's room
Setting	❖ Neighbourhood
Anticipated/ Unanticipated	❖ Anticipated
Control/ Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ Nil
Role change	❖ Peaceful living disturbed and restored.
Status	❖ Neighbour
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Dilemma ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ loss
Support	❖ Neighbours
Coping strategy	❖ Attacks Adams with tools and at last blows Adams' house.
Transition	❖ Yes

Table 19)

THE RED BOW	
Names	Group of people
Pre-liminal	❖ Before Emily gets attacked and killed by a dog.
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Narrator's daughter, Emily, gets killed by a dog's attack. ❖ A group of people get panic and begin to kill dogs. ❖ Killing dogs extends to other animals too for the safety of the people. ❖ Seeks support from others.
Post-liminal	❖ Kills all animals that they find threatening.
Type of Liminality	❖ Counter-liminality
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Attack on Emily by a dog and her death.
Setting	❖ Neighbourhood
Anticipated/ Unanticipated	❖ Anticipated
Control/ Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ Nil
Role change	❖ Peaceful living disturbed and restored.
Status	❖ Neighbours
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Dilemma ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ loss
Support	❖ Neighbours
Coping strategy	❖ Kills not only dogs, but all animals that they find harmful to their peaceful living.
Transition	❖ Yes

Table 20)

ESCAPE FROM SPIDERHEAD	
Escape from Spiderhead	Jeff, Heather and Rachel (Prisoners)
Pre-liminal	❖ Life before being imprisoned for their crime and becoming test subjects.
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Imprisoned for their crime. ❖ Testing Darkenfloxx™ and Verbaluce™ drug on them by Abnesti. ❖ Varied emotions on partners. ❖ Under control of the dominator. ❖ Death of the prisoners
Post-liminal	❖ Jeff suicides, Heather suicides.
Type of Liminality	❖ Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Being prisoners and test subjects
Setting	❖ Torture room
Anticipated/Unanticipated	❖ Anticipated
Control/Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ Nil
Role change	❖ Prisoners to test subjects
Status	❖ Prisoners, Test subjects
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Dilemma ❖ Alienation ❖ Isolation ❖ loss
Support	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	❖ Rachel saved, Jeff suicides, Heather suicides.
Transition	❖ Yes

Table 21)

THE SEMPLICA GIRL DIARIES	
Names	The Semplica Girls
Pre-liminal	❖ Before being imported from home countries to America.
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Imported to undesired situations. ❖ Showcased in front yards of wealthy people by hanging them by their heads with unseen threads to connect one with the other. ❖ Alienation from home country, unsafe situations, and are considered as decoration slaves.
Post-liminal	❖ Eva releases the SGs and they escape
Type of Liminality	❖ Coercive
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Imported to become decoration slaves on the lawns of wealthy people.
Setting	❖ The lawn of wealthy people
Anticipated/Unanticipated	❖ Anticipated
Control/Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ Nil
Role change	❖ Humans to decoration-slaves on lawns
Status	❖ Decoration slaves
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Dilemma ❖ Alienation ❖ loss
Support	❖ Eva helps to escape
Coping strategy	❖ Escapes as Eva helps to untie their connected threads.
Transition	❖ Yes

Overcoming the Entrapment of Liminality

The process of human life in the world can be equated to the process of the transition happening in the rites of passage described by Arnold van Gennep. As the process continues to happen in a dynamic mode rather than being static, people get involved in the process of moving in, moving through, and moving out, being part of the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases. Turner aimed to generalise, expand, and make use of liminality's transitional phase beyond the ritual transitions in small communities, as he knew that the 'betwixt and between' situation that lies at its core is applicable in various situations outside the limits of anthropology (Popper 129). While considering the life situations through which an individual passes, enormous situations and events contribute to the liminal existence of that individual. The individual might be out of one liminal situation to enter another, or even without exiting from one liminal moment, the person can move into the other at the same time. The unpredictability of life situations and unexpected changes that happen around a person makes it impossible to predict many of the liminal situations of a person.

"Human experience is full of passage and liminal dimension. From the *Odyssey* to *Hamlet*, classical literature has always depended on plot lines with deep liminal elements. The great religious traditions frequently include overarching narratives of passage, transition, and transformation."

(Carson, *Neither Here Nor There* xxii)

In such a scenario, the liminal phase of the individual turns out to be both negative and positive. It acts negatively as the individual is caught suspended in the phase, being in neither one nor the other position. The inability to stick to one decision or one position makes the person entrapped within the liminal phase. The positive aspect of the liminal phase is that it has the potential to make the person decide to take a stand to end the liminal status. While taking such a strategic stand, the individual moves out of his/her liminal status to the post-liminal phase. Though the

liminal stage is crucial for the transformational process, staying in it for too long is extremely harmful to the individual (Dunsmore 5).

While the previous chapter was exclusively centred on the presence of coercive liminality, vulnerability, and victimisation of the characters in the selected short stories of George Saunders, this chapter includes certain selected short stories with diverse contexts. The most prominent aspect prevalent in the short stories selected for this chapter is the different ways in which the characters try to escape or overcome the entrapment of liminality. To study the coping strategies exercised by the characters in transition and to understand their transition “is to study them at several points in time” (Goodman et al. 40). The intention of exploring liminality in the characters of the short stories selected for this chapter is to highlight the methods used to overcome the entrapment of liminality. It helps to identify that an individual gets into unexpected and unintentional liminal phases in life and often tries to move out of it to the post-liminal phase. The types of liminality dealt with in the short stories of George Saunders are mostly negative in nature, which produces intense tension and confusion.

For the exploration and identification of such kind of liminal entrapments and overcoming processes by the characters, five stories of Saunders, namely, “Victory Lap”, “Sticks” and “Tenth of December” from the anthology *Tenth of December*, “The Falls” from *Pastoralia*, and “The Wavemaker Falter” from *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* are analysed. Apart from these short stories, two more short stories, namely “Offloading for Mrs. Schwartz” from *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* and “My Amendment” from *In Persuasion Nation*, are also analysed for their expression of liminal qualities. These are included not to explore the liminal phase, but to trace the liminal aspect included in the context of the stories. “The passage through the liminal environment signifies uncertainty, vulnerability, chaos, and danger because customary rules are upturned and normal codes of activity or behaviour are suspended” (Jewkes 375).

The application of a coping strategy in a particular situation in the liminal phase depends on “whether or not the situation can be changed” (Lazarus 54). The theoretical foundations of liminality and transition make it clear that the change in situation or type of liminality can help in the process of coping strategy. If such

situations can be tackled by changing the situations, then the problem-focused instrumental strategies such as “information seeking, direct action, and inhibition of action can be employed” (Goodman et al. 81). If not, the emotion-focused palliative strategies related to intrapsychic behaviour can be applied. These include “denial, wishful thinking, and distortion that enable people to carry on” (Goodman et al. 81). The application of emotion-focused behaviour helps to reduce emotional distress.

The coping strategy to overcome liminality and liminal existence leads the character to exit their liminal phase into the post-liminal phase of the tripartite structure. The transition from the liminal phase to the post-liminal phase is explained as the passage of a person from being neither one nor other to “reincorporating the person back into society as a new creature with a new identity” (Myerhoff, *Age and Anthropological Theory*).

6. 1. “Victory Lap”

The importance of George Saunders’ thoughts about empathy, compassion, and kindness is well presented in the short story “Victory Lap”, which was published in the anthology *Tenth of December*. His characters solely exhibit the quality of empathy as he says “there is an empathetic guy inside me. If I keep coming to the writing table every day, he will sort of participate” (Earp, “George Saunders explains the empathy that drives his short story writing”). The entrapment of liminality drags a person from expressing empathy towards living beings as it leads to dilemmas and confusion. Saunders effectively expresses such a situation through the short story “Victory Lap”. In the story, Kyle Boot is entrapped in his liminal phase which takes him back from acting in accordance with the situation in which he sees Alison Pope being kidnapped by an abductor. As he was trained by the authoritarian parental control (Neeper 287) to stay away from situations that cause tension, he had to experience a strong conflict of ideologies within him at the particular moment that produced liminality. Saunders mentions how Kyle overcame the liminal phase which made him react against the abductor and save Alison from her unexpected critical situation. Amid his in-between state due to the entanglement between the instructions that held him back from reacting to critical situations and that of his self-motivated empathic emotions, he manages to overcome the entrapment of liminality. “As a psychological capacity,

liminality is the ability to bridge the gap between the self and the other. At an interpersonal level, this is called empathy” (Larson, “Liminality” 1032). This link in Kyle is abrupt due to the dilemma influenced by the collective consciousness and experience that has trained him to be self-alienated and selfish, leading to ambiguous uncertainties for him.

George Saunders has always given prior importance to highlighting the situations of characters that move through unpleasant situations in life. Moving apart from the pleasant situations of American life, his short stories concentrate on the difficulties in life situations experienced by people in America. Through such representations, he intends to produce empathy in the reader. The omniscient third-person narration and various internal monologues of the three major characters, namely Alison Pope, Kyle Boot, and the unnamed abductor in “Victory Lap” help to understand the in-depth thoughts in the characters’ minds. Like the anti-consumerist notions, magical realism, anti-capitalist ideology, and alternative reality, Saunders does not complicate “Victory Lap” with complex and confusing plots and situations. The story of Alison and Kyle is a journey through internal and external perspectives that continuously shifts through the first-person and the omniscient third-person narrations. The narration engages with empathy and literary technique that identifies with Alison’s suffering, the self-centred calculation of Kyle, and the cruelty produced by the abductor (Whalen-Bridge, *Journal of American Studies* E54).

The growth and development of the two characters in the short story are different as they were trained in different ways. For this very reason, the two characters’ attitudes and behaviour towards society are distinct. Alison was allowed to be free without any restrictions to be social in her life, whereas Kyle was discouraged from interacting and being involved with other people without any particular need. When Alison was trained to be empathetic to her surroundings, Kyle was instructed to be selfish and self-centred. Saunders provides the hint when he describes her imagination of a baby deer isolated in the forest when its mother had been killed by a hunter. Her care for the baby deer is evident from her enquiry: “Are you afraid? Are you hungry? Do you want me to hold you?” (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 5) feels empathetic to the situation of the baby deer and tries to protect her from the hunter and even asks him, “Only, for your task of penance, do not eat her. Lay her out in a

field of clover, with roses strewn about her. And bestow a choir, to softly sing of her foul end” (6). At the same time, the strict and suffocating way of Kyle’s life is represented in the story when he is found by the abductor who warns him not to move. The unusual situation that he witnesses invites his thoughts to have an abrupt liminal status.

Saunders presents both the characters to be in their respective liminal phases (See Table 22) as the attempt of kidnap and rape had an influence on Alison and Kyle as direct and indirect victims of the incident, respectively. The cacophony of voices suggesting many directives that engage in Kyle revokes him about the instructions he received as part of his training to be isolated from such situations. Saunders informs,

“Mom had said that she considered Kyle’s decision not to intervene judicious. Dad had said, That was none of your business. You could have been badly hurt. Mom had said, Think of all the resources we’ve invested in you, Beloved Only. Dad had said, I know we sometimes strike you as strict but you are literally all we have.”

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 17)

Even though he had strict instructions to refrain from interfering in such matters, he began to violate the rules, one after the other, that had been framed exclusively for him. He was barefoot on the deck, shirtless on the deck, outside when a stranger approached and chatted with that individual (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 17). These moves of Kyle inform the reader that he was not completely subjugated to the rules that alienated him from being empathetic towards society and other individuals at the critical time. The moral values in him began to push him forward to be active in response. In the same manner, his fear of violating the rules pulled him back to being inactive. He even thought about acting innocent, as if nothing had happened around him, and getting surprised at the situation of Alison, as “What? Alison? Raped? Killed? Oh God” (21). The second thought was to call the police without directly being in action with the abductor. The struggle between the need to show empathy for Alison’s critical condition and the need to stay away from everything by concentrating on his private life is projected by Saunders in the story. The “state and process of mid-transition” (Turner, “Variations on a Theme of

Liminality” 37) in Kyle influences his expression of empathy towards Alison, which has the ability to make him stop the abductor from kidnapping her.

The act of overcoming the entrapment of liminality to exhibit the expression of empathy by Kyle towards Alison’s unexpected situation highlights Saunders’ viewpoint in the story that “To do good, you just have to decide to do good. You have to be brave. You have to stand up for what’s right” (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 10). It is because of Kyle who was ready to act on what was right for him, unlike for his parents, as Alison’s dad said, “A bad thing happened to you kids, But it could have been worse. But because of you kids, it wasn’t” (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 27). The expression of empathy at the right time with appropriate and wise action helped Kyle to covert the potentiality of liminality to produce a positive result rather than a negative.

Analysing the short story from the angle of Schlossberg’s transition model, the situation that occurred to both the characters was unanticipated and uncontrollable. As the duration of the liminal period was only a few seconds, it can be considered temporary liminality. Kyle suffered from the effects of liminality in that the dilemma over taking a decision was challenging. The psychological status of Kyle shifted from one to the other decision as he was manipulated by his parents not to help others in any circumstance. He received no particular help from anyone in overcoming the challenge of liminality that he faced at the moment. In fact, the instructions that his parents had given him made him worried about selecting a suitable option to react. Kyle goes through a transition and a role change during the process of the liminal phase because his trajectory through the liminal situation helped him to overcome the dilemma in the situation and thereby be strong in his decision.

6. 2. “Tenth of December”

Moving from one liminal position to another may help in reducing the intensity of the former by resolving the tension of the latter. The story “Tenth of December” helps the reader to understand the passage from one particular liminal position of the protagonist to the other liminal state which helped him to overcome both at the conclusion of the story. Don Eber, the protagonist of the short story, is fifty-three years old and suffers from the stress of brain cancer, for which surgeries and

chemotherapies have had no effect on its progression. Saunders begins by explaining the liminal state of Don Eber, who comes to the forest to die with dignity. The unusual condition of cancer in his life has overturned the normal days, which he wants to end through suicide. Saunders informs about the painful moments by saying,

“Ouch, ouch. This was too much. He hadn’t cried after the surgeries or during the chemo, but he felt like crying now. It wasn’t fair. It happened to everyone supposedly but now it was happening specifically to him. He’d kept waiting for some special dispensation. But no. Something/someone bigger than him kept refusing.”

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 231)

He thinks that the act of suicide would help him escape from the liminal phase (See Table 23) in which he currently suffers from the pain of cancer. The instant one has a suspicion of the diagnosis; one has entered liminality. All of the emotions associated with serious sickness, including fear, hope, rage, shame, rejection, suffering, pain, and dispossession, are included in the liminal experience. (Little et al. 1492). He finds it a strategy to move out of the liminality caused by cancer. Saunders writes, “Then it would be done. He would have pre-empted all future debasement. All his fears about the coming months would be mute” (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 232). The liminal state of Don Eber makes his thoughts swing without giving him a chance to make a stable decision on whether to commit suicide to end the painful suffering and unusualness of the disease. It keeps on questioning him through his thoughts, producing the instability of the liminal phase.

“This was it. Was it? Not yet. Soon, though. An hour? Forty minutes? Was he doing this? Really? He was. Was he? Would he be able to make it back to the car even if he changed his mind? He thought not. Here he was. He was here. This incredible opportunity to end things with dignity was right in his hands. All he had to do was stay put.
I will fight no more forever.”

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 232-233)

At the moment of thinking to conduct suicide, he was diverted to another liminal moment where he noticed a boy named Robin drenching in the pond. The boy had fallen into the pond when he was about to return Don's discarded coat to him. When Don saw the boy in the lake, he was dragged into another liminal moment where all his previous thoughts went secondary to him.

"He was on his way down before he knew he'd started. Kid in the pond, kid in the pond, ran repetitively through his head as he minced. Progress was tree to tree. Standing there panting, you got to know a tree well. This one had three knots: eye, eye, nose. This started out as one tree and became two."

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 234)

Saunders gives a hint to the liminal state of Don Eber by highlighting the neutral situation that he faced while seeing the boy getting drenched in the pond. Saunders says,

"Suddenly he was not purely the dying guy who woke nights in the med bed thinking, Make this not true make this not true, but again, partly, the guy who used to put bananas in the freezer, then crack them on the counter and pour chocolate over the broken chunks."

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 235)

The partially one and the other situation of Don Eber are well-plotted by the author through the above description to show how active and inactive he was at the same time. Without losing much time on his thoughts, he could act well according to the need to save the boy from the pond. Saunders describes the method by which Don Eber saved the boy from the pond in the same way he could have thought about the process. The below lines describe the action as well as the thoughts of Don Eber at the same time.

"What to do? When he got there? Get kid out of pond. Get kid out of pond. Get kid moving. Force-walk kid through woods, across soccer field, to one of the houses on Poole. If nobody home, pile kid into Nissan, crank up heater, drive to – Our Lady of Sorrows? UrgentCare? Fastest route to UrgentCare?

Fifty yards to the trailhead.

Twenty yards to the trailhead.

Thank you, God, for my strength.”

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 235)

Through these processes, Don Eber could successfully overcome his second liminal phase where he was in the hangover of the partially inactive state of his mind and also active as how he was before the first liminal phase in the short story. As he could successfully overcome the liminality of the second liminal phase in the short story, he was also influenced by the positivity of it to overcome the initial liminal phase that had haunted him. Saunders says, “Did he still want it? Did he still want to live? Yes, yes, oh, God, yes, please” (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 249). He could feel and understand that “there could still be many – many drops of goodness, is how it came to him – many drops of happy – of good fellowship – ahead, and those drops of fellowship were not – had never been – his to withheld” (249). The realisation that the second liminal phase brought him was much higher as it could influence him to overcome the liminal entrapment from the painful suffering of cancer.

The factor that helped Don Eber to overcome his liminal entrapment was the boy’s involvement even though it was an unknowing blessing to him. He could think about the good things that he could even do at the stage of cancer. Saunders says,

“Listen, Eber said hoarsely. You did amazing. You did perfect. I’m here. Who did that?

There. That was something you could do. The kid maybe felt better now? He’d given the kid that? That was a reason.”

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 249)

Upon analysing the major character, Don Eber, it explains that he went through an unexpected situation where he had no control over the disease or the particular situation that he had to face during his walk to the forest. The psychological state of mind of the character as mentioned in the discussion above leads him to his liminal phase where he had to find a solution to overcome it. Saunders does not inform about any help that he received from anyone. The story reveals that Don Eber moves through his liminal phase and successfully overcomes it by realising the importance of life and deciding not to conduct suicide. The status of a depressed and unsatisfied person in him changed to become optimistic and enthusiastic about life.

Thus, the incident in the story gives a hint about the transition that occurs in the character.

6. 3. “Sticks”

The title of the story “Sticks” published in the anthology *Tenth of December* represents the major symbol used by George Saunders to express his idea. The representation of sticks or metal pole in the story is symbolic as it reflects the thoughts and interests of the major protagonist character. Though it is narrated from the perspective of the protagonist’s son, Saunders tries to explore the situation faced by the dad-character throughout the story by equating it with the metal pole on the lawn. Like how he becomes in-between his expectations and realities, the pole has an identity of being intermediate to the changing events and also its static identity of being a metal pole. It reflects both the opposite sides without being neither one nor the other.

As the pole is inanimate, the attributes of this particular liminal aspect of the metal pole are delivered by the protagonist character who relates himself to it. The hopes, aspirations, memories, recognition, relationships, attachments, the societal, and cultural bonds of the protagonist character are reflected through the metal pole which he decorates according to the importance of the day or in relation to the importance he feels about his surroundings. The protagonist’s son remembers him decorating the pole with a Santa suit on Thanksgiving night, a jersey and Rod’s helmet on Super Bowl week, a soldier on Veterans Day, Uncle Sam on the Fourth of July, and a ghost figure on Halloween day (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 29). These days, which have peculiarities in the history of America, are symbolic representations of the transitional events that had a significant influence on the historical or cultural tradition of America. Through the depiction of these events, Saunders looks into the ethnic identity of America.

These can also be regarded as his aspirations to be beyond the limits of his restricted boundaries of family life, which is his present reality. The description of the decoration done by the protagonist character is further explained as draping fur over the pole on Groundhog Day, with a floodlight along with it, the theme of death on his wife’s demise, decorations with his medals from the army, old sweatshirts, theatre

tickets, and tubes of his wife's makeup. He also painted it bright yellow, covered it with cotton swabs and provided offspring for it by hammering six more sticks near it (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 30).

On analysing the status of the metal pole decorated by the protagonist character, it is liminal (See Table 24) as it situates itself in-between the reality of events that resemble the decorations and the expectations raised by the decorator. On one hand, it reflects the events in America that are the expectations of the decorator, reflecting his "complexity and less discernible logic" (Saunders, *Tenth of December* 29) and, on the other hand, its innate identity as a metal pole. Having an identity of liminal status, the pole that represents the decorator can also be termed as a liminal entity with a threshold.

Through the diverted expression of love towards the metal pole and having empty love for his family, he is a liminal entity who stays in-between his desires and the reality of life. As with the dad-character, the metal pole or the sticks are also in liminal status, thus becoming a liminal entity. It reflects the mind of the protagonist character, who decorates it with his absurd logic and attachment to it, which denotes his life from a different perspective, unlike the others. It is this peculiarity of his character that makes his son complain about him through the reminiscence of past moments with him.

The moral of the story which Saunders would like to convey to his readers would be the importance of the concept of *carpe diem*, put forth by the Roman poet Horace in his Odes in 23 BC. Unlike living in the past with memories or expecting a better future, *carpe diem* suggests one live in the present moment at its fullest. Towards the conclusion of the story, Saunders provides the same idea through the symbols of regret expressed through the decorations of the protagonist character.

"He ran lengths of string between the pole and the sticks and taped to the string letters of apology, admissions of error, pleas for understanding, all written in a frantic hand on index cards. He painted a sign saying LOVE and hung it from the pole and another that said FORGIVE? and he died in the hall"

(Saunders, *Tenth of December* 30)

Saunders points to the fact that the protagonist lived in his memories rather than living his life in the present. Even at the last moments of expressing regret, he was not able to convey it directly; rather, he delivered it through his usual means of communication by decorating the poles. Thus, the short fiction helps the reader understand the importance of living in the present rather than being in a liminal status.

In the case of the dad-character, the instability of his mental state gives rise to his actions and behaviours, which he is not able to control. His normative track of life is informed as deviated by the death of his wife, which leads him to separate from the realities of the world. As discussed earlier, the unstable mental state of the character that developed after the death of his wife initiated his change from normal status to abnormality. There is no support that he receives from anyone, and natural death decides his transition to the post-liminal phase.

6. 4. “The Falls”

The inability to overcome the inner conflicts that lead to liminal indecisiveness is well portrayed in the short story “The Falls” by George Saunders. He depicts the characters, Cummings and Morse, who are equally subject to the same liminal situation in their lives. The description provided by Saunders helps the readers to understand how inner conflicts and lack of confidence extend the duration of liminality in a person. Even though the situation faced by the two men was urgent in its nature, they were reacting to the need for the time by staying within the entrapment of liminality. While analysing the crucial part of the story through the third-person narration, the perspectives of the two men and their attitude in handling a liminal moment (See Table 25) are understood.

When the two men witness two young girls headed swiftly down the river towards the falls, the reaction from both the characters is almost identical. Saunders first describes the situation of Cummings, after which he details the overthinking conflicts within the character of Morse. Saunders says,

“Cummings stood stunned, his body electrified, hairs standing up on the back of his craning neck, thinking, I must do something, their faces are bloody, but what, such fast cold water, still I must do something, and he stumbled over the

berm uncertainly, looking for help but finding only a farm field of tall dry corn.”

(Saunders, *Pastoralia* 185)

From the shocking situation experienced by Cummings, it is revealed that even though he wanted to help them when he saw their critical situation, he was not able to act in accordance with the need of the situation. He was in-between two extreme decisions that he could take at the time. He could have either moved ahead without helping them, which he did not do. He could also jump into the river to save the two girls from the fall, which he did not do. So, from the position of Cummings, it is clear that the particular situation gave rise to a liminal phase in the person of neither being able to save them nor being able to avoid them completely. Rather than the lag in taking a decision, the problem with Cumming was that he could not act according to what he wished for due to the fear of jumping into the river which may also cause harm to him.

On the other side, Morse’s character extends his thoughts on the situation by deciding whether to act or not. Saunders explains him as “he had never been good under pressure and in a crisis often stood mentally debating possible options with his mouth hanging open” (Saunders, *Pastoralia* 186). The situation with Morse was that he was having self-doubt and indecisiveness in acting rightfully. He was worried about what would happen to him if he went for the help of the two girls.

“And throwing his thin legs out ahead of him, awkwardly bent at the waist, shirttails trailing behind and bum knee hurting, he remonstrated with himself to put aside all self-doubt and negativity and prepare to assist the decisive men in whatever way he could once he had rounded the bend and assessed the situation.”

(Saunders, *Pastoralia* 187)

Even though he decides to help them with all his efforts, he does not see any decisive men around him to assist. It again takes him to the same kinds of thoughts and indecisiveness. He keeps on thinking rather than doing anything of his own. He thinks, “What to do? This was a shocker. Go for help? Sprint to the Outlet Mall and call 911 from Knife World? There was no time. The canoe was sinking before his

eyes. The girls would be drowned before he reached Route 8” (Saunders, *Pastoralia* 187). These continuous thoughts make him stay within the boundaries of his liminal phase without being able to overcome the entrapment of liminality. Like Cumming, he is also in an in-between state where even though he wanted to save the two girls, he cannot do it. Towards the end, Saunders informs readers that Morse decided to jump into the river. It was a failed attempt after such a long time spent thinking about what had to be done. Saunders says,

“They were dead. They were frantic, calling out to him, but they were dead, as dead as the ancient dead, and he was alive, he was needed at home, it was a no-brainer, no one could probably blame him for this one, and making a low sound of despair in his throat he kicked off his loafers and threw his long ugly body out across the water”

(Saunders, *Pastoralia* 188)

6. 5. “The Wavemaker Falters”

George Saunders’ “The Wavemaker Falters” depicts the liminal situation faced by the protagonist after being the responsible person for the death of a little boy named Clive. The incident happened at the theme park where the protagonist works. He accidentally got caught in the wave machine while ogling the members of a girls’ glee club. The narrator, Mr. Guilt is haunted by the visit of the ghost of Clive. Though he admits his mistake to him, he does not accept his apologies. Finally, the boy’s father decides to kill Mr. Guilt, but leaves him alone without killing him.

“He has to cope with a society which destroys the weak as it has nature, he is haunted by the ghost of the child, and is nearly shot by the child’s father. The ghost’s constant complaining about what has been taken away from him is commensurate with society’s excessive alienating power—both cause desolation within and around the narrator.”

(Moisy 207-227)

The liminal phase of Mr. Guilt is traced from the point when he made the mistake of not attending to the kid and was busy looking at the attractive all-girl glee

club. He says, “Consequently, I never heard Clive screaming or Leon shouting at me to kill the waves” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 34). The traumatic moment in his life starts from that particular point by separating him from the pre-liminal events in the story. The journey of the narrator through the liminal phase was not as interesting as the pre-liminal phase as he was haunted by the ghost of the kid; his wife loses patience and cheats on him with the park’s supervisor, Leon. These abnormal and unusual incidents in his life make him depressed, desponded, and impotent. The guilt in his thoughts is expressed in the story. “Forgive me, “I say in tears. “No,” he says, also in tears” (35).

The intensity of the protagonist’s guilt makes him do unusual things that he has not ever done. He explains what he does after the incident.

“Sometimes at night I sneak over there to do chores in secret and pray for forgiveness at his window. I’ve changed his dad’s oil and painted all their window frames and taken the burrs off their Labrador. If anybody comes out while I’m working, I hide in the shrubs. The sister who wears cateye glasses even in this day and age thinks it’s Clive’s soul doing the mystery errands and lately she’s been leaving him notes.”

(Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 33)

The liminal situation reaches its peak when Clive’s dad decides to kill the narrator. Clive’s dad tells him that he does not hate him, but lets him live on the earth where his son is not alive (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 38). The moment was very fearful for the narrator as he expected death in front of him. He says, “Close my eyes and wait. Then I urinate myself. Then I wait some more. I wait and wait. Then I open my eyes. He’s gone and the front door’s wide open. Jesus, I think, embarrassing, I wet myself and was ready to die” (39). The guilt and fear of killing the kid made the narrator experience an unusual situation in his life that dragged him into more instances of liminality. He was neither able to be what he was before, nor could he overcome the liminal phase of his life. This in-between situation in the life of Mr. Guilt due to a grave mistake in professional life gives the idea that people can be entrapped in their liminal situations without any prior information about the situation. It will be an unexpected and unanticipated event that may not be

possible to control. In Mr. Guilt's situation, the liminal phase was unanticipated and uncontrollable as connected events in his life put him in a worse condition. In the conclusion, Saunders gives a hint to the end of this particular liminal phase in Mr. Guilt's life by saying, "Lightning strikes the slaughterhouse flagpole and the antelope scatter like minnows as the rain begins to fall, and finally, having lost what was to be lost, my torn and black heart rebels, saying enough already, enough, this is as low as I go." (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 39).

6. 6. "Offloading for Mrs. Schwartz"

If certain past events and moments in an individual's life can be considered as packs of liminal memories, George Saunders' short story "Offloading for Mrs. Schwartz" opens the door to the discussion about liminal spaces and occasions. The story is about how certain specific memories are extracted from individuals by the narrator who conducts a virtual interactive personal holography. He sells it as a virtual experience to customers, from which he makes a good profit. He sells the memories of an old lady named Mrs. Schwartz for money, and also, towards the end, he sells his own memories. "Liminality is always characterised by crossing a definitive threshold and passing into and often through an undifferentiated yet potentially transforming time and space" (Carson, *Neither Here Nor There* xxii).

The extracting, as well as the virtual experience of being in another person's memories, can be regarded as liminal processes as the people involved in the process are temporarily taken away from their normal way of life and are situated to either offload or experience a liminal moment. The narrator says,

"To my horror, I see that his eyelids are fluttering and his face is contorting. My God, I think, this is no Scan, this is a damn Offload. I check the console. Sure enough, via one incorrect switch setting, I've just irrevocably transferred a good third of his memories to my hard drive."

(Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 66)

The narrator's excitement begins from the point when he notices the working of the offloading process in an intruder. He felt relieved from harsh memories as certain memories were extracted from him.

“He comes to and hops off the table looking years younger, suddenly happy-go-lucky, asks where he is, and trots blithely out the door, free now of boot camp, free of Iwo, free of all memory of youthful slaughter, free in fact of any memory at all of the first twenty years of his life.”

(Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 66)

He makes it a business by extracting the memories of Mrs. Schwartz. The kids who were mostly his customers were interested in such experiences as they received knowledge about Hank’s life, the Pacific Theater, the making of bombs, first-hand War Years’ experience and the lines of “American Patrol” (Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 67). The narrator could not borrow the memories of Mrs. Schwartz, but could only extract them forever (68) which deleted many years from her. He says,

“I haul my stuff over to her place and take what I need. I edit out her mastectomy, Ken Schwartz’s midlife crisis and resulting trip to Florida, and her constant drinking in his absence. I stick to her walking past a protest and counseling a skinny girl on acid to stay in school.”

(Saunders, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* 68)

From the perspective of the individuals who allow erasing their memories, the process of erasing particular memories helps them to get free from the burden of such incidents in their lives. They may be liminal events or incidents in life that may have haunted them throughout their life. The process of erasing memories by the narrator makes them relieved from the constrained limits of that particular liminal incident from their whole memory. The process of extracting itself is a liminal process as it takes a certain time that is different from their normal way of living. It is an unusual and not very commonly occurring process.

Likewise, the people who experience such liminal events related to history or incidents in the memories of other people through virtual experiences are transported into a different world away from their normal way of living. It is a temporary experience that feels real for a specific period of time. In such virtual experiences, the person who is involved in the process is neither completely in the temporary new world nor completely away from their own normal situations. They thus become trapped in-between the two worlds of neither here nor there. It leads to a liminal

situation for the people participating in the virtual experience, which is a liminal space.

6. 7. “My Amendment”

Gender issues are not much discussed in George Saunders’ short story anthologies but are indirectly involved without much focus on the specific theme. But, the fiction titled “My Amendment” points directly to the gender issue that is even a hot topic of conflict in many countries. The world is making a significant transition to conventional standards from the adamant social system based on traditional norms. Inclusion of people having an affiliation with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) has been accepted in various countries due to their uncompromising protests for rights and freedom. Saunders’ short story highlights the issue of same-sex marriage as it relates to gay and lesbian issues. The plot of the story is a letter written by the character Ken in response to an article that opposes same-sex marriage. Saunders uses a satirical tone with exaggerations to depict ideas from the viewpoint that opposes same-sex marriage. The deliberate satiric tone reveals the actual intention of the author, who wishes to make it both humorous and critical to the reader. The ideological perspective that is put forth by the author does not match with that of the narrator in the fiction, which sometimes would have been misunderstood if the exaggerations were not present. Saunders’ works combine satiric wit and narrative empathy with postmodern irony without undermining the moral agenda (Hadaway 4). The literal meaning of his writings does not produce the same result and enthusiasm in reading as in writing, but it has to be understood through the hints provided at particular points. The meaning and purpose of the writing may be hidden behind the words, which are left for the readers to interpret and understand in their own way. The contradiction is well informed at the beginning of the fiction, in the form of a letter to Mr. Terence Rackman. The sarcasm is employed as,

“Like any sane person, I am against Same-Sex-Marriage, and in favor of a constitutional amendment to ban it...I feel that, in the interest of moral rigor, it is necessary for us to go a step further, which is why I would like to propose a supplementary constitutional amendment.”

(Saunders, *In Persuasion Nation* 73)

The ‘Manly Scale of Absolute Gender’, a self-improvement strategy and supplementary constitutional amendment proposed against same-sex marriage, is the most ludicrous stuff provided by Saunders from the perspective of Ken. The writing can be understood from the perspective of President George W. Bush’s advocacy for a constitutional amendment that would prohibit gay marriage in order to defend civilisation’s most fundamental institution (Bumiller). On March 5, 2004, nine days after Bush’s pronouncement opposing homosexual marriage, Saunders responded to the controversy in *The New Yorker*. It was framed on the basis of such a social and political scenario in America, but the relevance of the same is still reflected in different parts of the world.

The liminal aspect of the story is contained within the exaggerated and sarcastic tone used in the Manly Scale for Absolute Gender. It is expressed by Ken, who claims that it can measure a person’s manly and feminine natures, which will aid in determining the proximity of a Samish-sex marriage between a man and a woman. The scale is provided with measurements from negative ten to positive ten, in which negative ten represents the most feminine nature of a person and the positive ten refers to the manliest behaviour of a person. From the perspective of Ken, who represents the existing beliefs of society, the extreme points - negative ten and positive ten are considered perfect, exhibiting the most feminine and manly attributes, respectively. These points are considered the normative points that a perfect person must have in their life. When a point deviates from these expected points, it is regarded as ineligible to be classified as male or female. Saunders draws the attention of his readers to a common societal mistake. In the instance of gender, Ken sees just binaries, with a female at one end of -10 and a man at the other end of +10.

From the studies based on gender, it is said that “... gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time -an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts” (Butler 519). In the same way, Simon De Beauvoir claims in *The Second Sex*, “one is not born, but rather one becomes a woman” (283). When gender is designed according to the criteria of traditional gender differentiation, the liminality of gender is considered invalid. However, according to Sandra L. Bem’s research based on the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) exam, which assesses an individual’s

femininity and masculinity, those who took the test and expressed both masculine and feminine characteristics were labelled as androgynous. The imaginative and scientific gender scale explanations lead to the conclusion that everyone in the world possesses a certain amount of masculinity as well as a feminine personality. The mixed expression of these two characteristics leaves one in the liminal state of the scale. Thus, the ‘Manly Scale of Absolute Gender’ proposed by Ken is invalid. Saunders’ mock through the depiction of the scale gives the hint that he indirectly pointed to the thought that all human beings are in one or the other way in the liminal status of their gender, as there is no perfect manly or feminine expression of gender that can be visible in a human being as the formation of gender involves a mixing of the manly and feminine characteristics that are believed by society.

*

The above-referred textual analysis and interpretation from the perspective of liminality by Victor Turner gives a mixed idea about the themes discussed by George Saunders. Unlike the previous chapter which focused on a specific expression of liminality, this chapter does not point to a particular form. The expression and presence of liminality in the short stories discussed in this chapter are miscellaneous themes. It is because George Saunders has written these short stories at different periods, pointing at contemporary issues of those times. Still, the presence of liminal concepts and liminality is visible as it stands independently regardless of the type of theme discussed by the author. Liminality is, in one or the other way, expressed in George Saunders’ short stories.

A prominent liminal space that is visible in the above-listed short stories is the virtual interactive personal hologram in “Offloading Mrs. Schwartz” that serves as a middle factor between virtual experience and reality for the people who purchase it to experience the liminal memories. These spaces can also be referred to as liminoid as they resemble modern-day virtual gaming platforms and entertainment technologies. Victor Turner writes about liminoid when he equates it to the spiralism of William Watson, described in *Closed Systems and Open Minds*. “The liminoid phase between leaving one post and taking up another would repay study in terms of comparative symbology, both in regard to the subject (his dreams, fantasies, favourite reading and entertainment) and to those whom he is leaving and joining (their myths about him,

treatment of him, and so on)” (Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, In Play, Flow, and Ritual” 58). In “Sticks”, in the place of liminal space, the metal pole serves the role of reflecting the feelings and thoughts of the protagonist. It can be considered a liminal object or factor that stands to represent the emotions of the father character.

The characters that are involved in the process of transition from their normative usualness to the entrapments of the liminal phase and sometimes to the post-liminal phases are considered liminal entities. As discussed in the previous chapter in detail, they are called liminal entities or liminal personae because they possess liminality. In the above-analyzed short stories, Kyle of “Victory Lap”, Don Eber of “Tenth of December”, Cummings and Morse of “The Falls”, the father character of “Sticks”, Mr. Guilt of “The Wavemaker Falter”, and Mrs. Schwartz, the narrator, the intruder, and the customers in “Offloading for Mrs. Schwartz” come under the category of liminal entities as they are the major participants in liminal transition and are the characters who experience liminality.

Considering the permanence and temporary nature of liminality experienced by the characters in the short stories, the most applicable form of liminality in terms of duration is the temporariness of liminality. From the insights of Victor Turner, Timothy Carson identifies that “in most cases, the liminality that is embodied by rites of passage is temporary in nature, even if that means for an extended period. There are, however, more permanent forms of liminality, and they come in both voluntary and involuntary varieties, by choice or condition” (*Neither Here Nor There* 8). In “Victory Lap”, the liminality experienced by Kyle when he sees Alison being kidnapped by the abductor is only for a few moments. He manages to escape the entrapment of liminality that had held him back from reacting to the incident. Don Eber in “Tenth of December” and Cummings and Morse in “The Falls” also experience a brief duration of the liminal phase. Though the first phase of liminality in Don Eber was much longer than the second, he manages to overcome the first liminality with the influence of the second. Mr. Guilt of “The Wavemaker Falter” experiences a bit longer period of liminal phase compared to the other characters in other short stories. Even then, he also manages to overcome the suffocating boundaries of his liminal phase. The liminality experienced as part of the liminal space provided by the virtual experience is temporary in nature. Apart from the other

short stories, the father character in “Sticks” experiences a permanent form of liminality which ultimately ends when he dies.

From the perspective of the effort taken by the characters in overcoming the entrapment of liminality with respect to their specific situations, characters such as Kyle of “Victory Lap”, Don Eber of “Tenth of December”, Cummings and Morse of “The Falls”, the father character from “Sticks”, and Mr. Guilt of “The Wavemaker Falterers” all fall under the same category of existential/ spontaneous *communitas*. This is because of the temporariness of being in the liminal state that is maintained throughout the story in the case of the characters. Even though they tend to possess normative *communitas* of permanence, as per the plot of the stories, it is converted to existential *communitas*. They all experience liminality in their liminal phase of the story and try to move out of it to the post-liminal phase with their efforts to concentrate on the most suitable action to be conducted. Cummings and Morse of “The Falls” are an exception to the category, as though they wished to move out of their liminal status, they were either inactive or late in conducting a suitable decision.

6. 8. Conclusion

From the analysis of the short stories, the most identical theme that can be found is the effort taken by the characters to overcome the entrapment of liminality. As said by Victor Turner, George Saunders’ characters in the short stories discussed in this chapter get into a state of “a no-man’s-land betwixt and between the structural past and the structural future” (Turner, *The Anthropology of Experience* 41). As already discussed in chapter two, the interpretation of the phrase ‘no-man’s land’ has to be conceived as the indecisive and dilemmatic situation experienced by the characters. In such a condition, a person would be confused about selecting the best option suitable for him/her. It also produces anomie, alienation, and angst (Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, In Play, Flow and Ritual” 78) in the characters as they cannot find a stable position amid the “neither one thing nor another; or maybe both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere, and are at the very least ‘betwixt and between’ all the recognised fixed points in space-time of structural classification” (Turner, “Betwixt and between: The Liminal Period of Rites of Passage” 48). The characters that have been analysed for their expressions of liminality possess such attributes. According to

the viewpoint of Turner, in the liminal stage of a person, the individual is in an ambiguous state, which is a rejection of previous social structures and the association of new social order (Popper 129). The characters who successfully overcome the entrapment of liminality succeed in overcoming this ambiguity.

The entrapment of liminality, if it exceeds a longer period, leads to its permanence in the characters.

“A liminal situation is by definition temporary, transitory, transient; a brief moment of passage in between two stable states. However, it might conceivably happen that a temporary situation becomes extended, lasting, eventually all but a permanent state.”

(Szokolczai, “Living Permanent Liminality: The recent transition experience in Ireland” 6)

The characters in the short stories attempt their coping strategies to reduce the duration of the liminality in them.

“Coping, in sum, is certainly not a unidimensional behavior. It functions at a number of levels and is attained by a plethora of behaviors, cognitions, and perceptions. We cannot completely understand coping without: looking beyond the personality attributes of individuals to the specific responses to problems in different social roles.”

(Pearlin and Schooler 7–8)

According to the coping strategies mentioned in transition theory, there are several methods, such as negotiations, discipline, optimism, seeking advice, neutralising, substituting, comparing, ignoring, avoiding, denying, accepting, withdrawing etc. From such an application perspective, it is evident that the characters in the above-mentioned stories had direct action, information seeking, inhibition of action, or an intrapsychic mode of coping. From the analysis, it is known that most of the characters in the stories had the impact of an intrapsychic mode of coping strategy that helped them to move from their liminal phase to the post-liminal phase. While analysing liminality from “the intrapsychic level, liminality is the capacity to move within and between the boundaries of one’s psychological structure” (Larson, “Liminality” 1032). The various strategies attempted by the characters are different from each other. Kyle in “Victory Lap” decided to react to the situation of kidnapping

to save Alison from the abductor. Through such a strategy, he successfully escaped from his liminal phase to the post-liminal phase. Don Eber of “Tenth of December” jumped to the pond to save the boy, which also helped him overcome the first liminal phase, i.e., the depression due to cancer. In “The Falls”, Cummings could not act as he was inactive even though he wanted to save the girls from the falls and Morse, who at last jumped into the river, could not save the girls. Even though Morse could break the entrapment of his liminal phase, he was not active at the right time. All his efforts were in vain as he could not act at the required moment. The father character in “Sticks” does nothing to relieve himself from his liminal status. It automatically happened with his death. Mr. Guilt in “The Wavemaker Falters” could not overcome his liminal phase as he was continuously haunted by the ghost of the boy who died because of his negligence. Even though he asked for apologies, he could not get it from the boy’s father who came to attack and murder him.

From analyzing the short stories, the conclusion of the chapter is that liminality is an entrapment that can be escaped by the liminal entities that experience it at various intensities. With wise decisions taken by Kyle of “Victory Lap” and Don Eber of “Tenth of December”, the liminal entities can overcome the liminal situations and phases. It has to be at the right time or otherwise, even though such strategies are taken from the side of the liminal entities, the process will be of no use like how it happened with Morse in “The Falls”. Inaction during such critical liminal moments will result in permanent entrapment in the liminal phase, as Cummings experienced in “The Falls” and the father character in “Sticks”. From another perspective, even if the person feels guilty about his/her ignorance, the liminal moment may continue to haunt the person. The example of Mr. Guilt in “The Wavemaker Falters” gives such an idea about the nature of liminality. Therefore, the importance of overcoming the liminal phase is crucial in a liminal entity that experiences liminality.

Therefore, most liminal entrapments can have fruitful solutions if the situations that trigger it, the psychological states that make it continuous, and the liminal phases of the transition are identified in its real sense. It is said that “those who are going through the vacuum stage of the [transition] process, this period is one of the most extreme anxieties and creates a sense of normlessness” (Ebaugh, *Becoming an Ex: The Process of Role Exit* 209). Thus, the coping strategy of

accepting such situations becomes the base of both exiting and overcoming the entrapments of liminality.

6. 9. Analysis at a Glance

Table 22)

VICTORY LAP	
Name	Kyle Boot
Pre-liminal	❖ Before Alison gets kidnapped by the abductors.
Liminal	❖ Alison gets kidnapped by the abductors. ❖ Kyle sees and gets into a dilemma on what to do. ❖ The conflict between his moral side and the instructions from his parents.
Post-liminal	❖ The period after Kyle saves Alison
Type of Liminality	❖ Coercive/Situational
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Alison gets kidnapped by abductors.
Setting	❖ Neighbourhood
Anticipated/ Unanticipated	❖ Unanticipated
Control/ Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ Nil
Role change	❖ From selfish to empathetic
Status	❖ Children
Psychological Status during the transition	❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Dilemma ❖ Alienation ❖ loss
Support	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	❖ Decides to act according to the need by keeping selfishness aside.
Transition	❖ Yes

Table 23)

TENTH OF DECEMBER	
Name	Don Eber
Pre-liminal	❖ Details (not mentioned) before the protagonist goes to the forest.
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ He goes to the forest to suicide. ❖ Sees the drenching boy named Robin ❖ Thoughts causing dilemma came to Don Eber's mind on what to do. ❖ Saves him.
Post-liminal	❖ The boy is saved by Don Eber. He decides not to suicide.
Type of Liminality	❖ Situational
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Cancer; drenching boy Robin.
Setting	❖ Forest
Anticipated/ Unanticipated	❖ Anticipated and Unanticipated
Control/ Uncontrolled	❖ Controllable
Duration	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ Suffering from cancer.
Role change	❖ Depressed state to optimistic.
Status	❖ Cancer patient
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Dilemma ❖ Alienation ❖ loss
Support	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Decides to save the drenching boy. Also, decides not to suicide to escape from cancer. ❖ Accepts the situation of cancer to face it rather than escaping it.
Transition	❖ Yes

Table 24)

STICKS	
Names	Dad Character
Pre-liminal	❖ Before the death of his wife.
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ decorating the pole with a Santa suit on Thanksgiving night, ❖ decorating a jersey and Rod's helmet during Super Bowl week, ❖ decorating Uncle Sam on the Fourth of July, ❖ decorating a soldier on Veterans Day ❖ decorating a ghost figure on the Halloween day ❖ decorations with his old sweatshirts, army medals, theatre tickets, and tubes of his wife's makeup
Post-liminal	❖ Death
Type of Liminality	❖ Situational
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Death of wife
Setting	❖ House lawn
Anticipated/ Unanticipated	❖ Unanticipated
Control/ Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Permanent till death
Previous experience	❖ Continues to be insane after the death of his wife.
Role change	❖ Normal to Insane
Status	❖ Mentally unstable
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Dilemma ❖ Alienation ❖ loss
Support	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	❖ Nil
Transition	❖ Yes

Table 25)

THE FALLS		
Names	Cummings	Morse
Pre-liminal	❖ Before he sees the girls drowning	❖ Before he sees the girls drowning
Liminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ He sees the girls drowning. ❖ Critical situation. Dilemma. ❖ Self-doubt and indecisiveness ❖ Lag in taking a decision. ❖ Stood still without any action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ He sees the girls drowning. ❖ Critical situation. Dilemma. ❖ self-doubt and indecisiveness ❖ He wanted to save them, but was tense about what would happen.
Post-liminal	❖ Cummings couldn't decide. The girls were dead by the time.	❖ Morse jumps to the river. But the girls were dead by the time.
Type of Liminality	❖ Situational	❖ Situational
Positive or Negative Liminality	❖ Negative	❖ Negative
Triggering Factor	❖ Girls drowning in the river.	❖ Girls drowning in the river.
Setting	❖ Riverside	❖ Riverside
Anticipated/Unanticipated	❖ Anticipated	❖ Anticipated
Control/Uncontrolled	❖ Uncontrollable	❖ Uncontrollable
Duration	❖ Temporary	❖ Temporary
Previous experience	❖ Suffering from cancer.	❖ Suffering from cancer.
Role change	❖ Depressed state to optimistic.	❖ Depressed state to optimistic.
Status	❖ Friends	❖ Friends
Psychological Status during the transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Dilemma ❖ Alienation ❖ loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anxiety ❖ Fear ❖ Uncertainty ❖ Dilemma ❖ Alienation ❖ loss
Support	❖ Nil	❖ Nil
Coping strategy	❖ Nil	❖ Jumps after overcoming the liminality. But could not save the girls.
Transition	❖ Yes	❖ Yes

Conclusion

“The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear”

(Gramsci 276)

The principal component that shows its appearance at various significant and insignificant points in life makes this research equally simple and complex in its analysis and interpretation. While thinking about the possibility of occurrence, the state of liminality is common to all human beings as it appears throughout life and helps the transitory phases by being the crucial intermediate state. Human life cannot progress if it behaves static to the altering situations. It develops a dynamic functioning according to the surroundings that continuously keep on changing and is involved in the transition that occurs as part of anticipated and unanticipated events. Transitions refer to the periods of change that occur very rarely as simple processes and mostly as complex experiences over time and space. The changes have to be adopted by the individuals who actively deal with the transition. These are often regarded as challenges to them as the transition from one phase to the other requires much effort and struggle. “The universe itself is governed by a periodicity which has repercussions on human life, with stages and transitions, movements forward, and periods of relative inactivity” (Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* 3). The situations that the individuals go through during the process of transition are redefined, which is also reflected in the modifications of internal or/and external delineations.

The study of transition has been conducted in various disciplines with change and adaptation to the situation. Studies have been conducted related to the factors affecting nurses’ coping with the transition (Azimian, et al. 88-95), transitions into the undergraduate university world (Gibson et al. 819-833), the importance of role models during the identity transition during pregnancy (Hennekam 1765-1790), different perspectives on career transitions (Sullivan and Ariss), and transition processes in immigrant and refugee youth (Record-Lemon et al.). “Sociology, psychology, psychotherapies, education, history, literature, and religion all have

related liminality to the driving themes, concerns, and questions of their own disciplines” (Carson xxii).

Likewise, certain themes such as slavery, the American Civil War, capitalism, consumerism, authoritarianism/ totalitarianism, discrimination, and victimisation are discussed with the help of liminality in this thesis. These researches are conducted at the various levels of human interaction where the transition occurs as part of its transformation from one level to the other. It examines individuals or groups that undergo transition before and after a particular event. Individuals’ information at various stages, such as before, during, and after the event, has to be identified with relevance to the particular context of the event that occurred. An early definition expressed transition as “passage from one life phase, condition, or status to another” including the concepts of “process, time span, and perception” (Chick and Meleis 239).

Apart from the discussion about transition and transformation in research conducted in various disciplines, the method of research about the transitions in characters and their situations conducted in this research thesis is different. It incorporates academic discussions based on anthropology to explore the essence of transitions in literature. The analysis conducted throughout this research is based on the lens of liminality, which helps in identifying the transitional nature of the situation in which the individual experiences the liminal phase. The transition in an individual can be understood from the perspective of that individual’s liminality. Being the intermediate phase in the rites of passage, the liminal phase is also known as the transitional phase from the pre-liminal phase to the post-liminal phase. From such an analytical viewpoint, “the state and process of mid-transition is liminality” (Turner, “Variations in the theme of Liminality” 37).

To confine the application aspect of the research, it can be pointed to what is derived from the phrase ‘betwixt and between’ used by Victor Turner in his essays which describe the holistic essence of liminality. As how Turner defines liminality, it is the threshold position of transition from the pre-liminal phase to the post-liminal phase where the liminal entity experiences being “neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere” (Turner, “Betwixt and between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage” 48). The three phases in the

tripartite structure or the rites of passage introduced by Arnold van Gennep and modified by Victor Turner were used for the analysis of the selected works of George Saunders in this research. Apart from such an analysis, the characters were further studied for their expression of the qualities of liminality where the state of becoming in a neither here nor there position is highlighted. Uncertainties, anxieties, and ambiguities in the characters have also been analysed for the presence of liminal status. The rites described by Turner in his research based on Ndembu villagers showcase the existence of pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal stages of transition in the participants. The discovery of the liminal phase in the rites or the experience of the liminality of the liminal entities participating in the rituals and ceremonies are elaborated on by Turner in his research on liminality. The findings based on small scale societies were considered as a base for the analysis of George Saunders' selected works wherein the characters and their behaviours in the settings within the plots of the stories reflect the lives of human beings in the society. The analytical framework of Turner's liminality, described by Graeme Laurie in the article "Liminality and the Limits of Law in Health Research Regulation: What are we Missing in the Spaces In-Between", can be characterised as - experiential because it can be understood through experience from a subjective perspective. The expression of the emotions and feelings at the liminal phase is more elucidative from analysing the personal narrative or through the analysis of the situations. The passage through the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases is transformative and transitory that can be recognised as processual in the sense that it has both spatial and temporal dimensions, as defined in the rituals and ceremonies. The aspects of liminality are marked by uncertainty, which has the potential to cause significant disruption. These uncertain situations are explored in the short fiction wherein the characters experiencing liminality are identified as being anti-structural – which challenges the existing and established structures prior to their liminal phase. The passage through the tripartite structure therefore guides people through liminality, which often leads them to temporary or permanent states of liminal experiences that are considered both challenging and empowering with influence that initiates change in status (Laurie 60).

By way of conclusion to the present research thesis, it is imperative to provide an outline of the application of Victor Turner's liminality to George Saunders'

selected works. The novel, short stories, short fiction and novellas of George Saunders were written in different years and are more related to the relevance of the particular period, situations, and events. The intention behind writing the works in a satiric and sarcastic tone is unmistakably critical. Although Saunders had such intentions behind his works where many of such themes are still relevant for discussion, the perspective of this research does not focus on any of its specific qualities. With the suitable definition of incidents, the thematic content of the stories is adopted without missing its essence, and with the help of the most projected themes in the stories, the liminal existence of the characters is identified. Thus, “the states of being or states of mind, as well as physical spaces, as we pass from a period of stability to one of ambiguity or undergo some kind of transformation” are referred to as liminality (Jewkes 376). Different contexts and situations discussed in the various stories of Saunders help to define the various aspects of liminality that provide increased insight into the application of liminality in literature and also in understanding its importance in the existence of humans in society. Turner states in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* that

“Liminal areas of time and space—rituals, carnivals, dramas, and latterly films - are open to the play of thought, feelings and will; in them are generated new models, often fantastic, some of which may have sufficient power and plausibility to replace eventually the force-backed political and jural models that control the centers of a society’s ongoing life”

(Turner vii)

Saunders’ works act as a canvas that helps to project the different shades of the expression of liminality in society. In the same way, literature becomes a reflection of society; George Saunders’ works reflect the internal and external transitions in human beings. It is connected with the culture and society in America. For the purpose of analysis, the themes discussed in this research consider the applicability of the stories in general, as most of the topics dealt with by the author have a wider platform of relevance and significance. Through the description of various stories, Saunders tries to highlight the importance of empathy, compassion,

and kindness that has to be shared mutually in the world to build a peaceful and cooperative association of human living.

For the research, twenty-five works were selected. It included a novel – *Lincoln in the Bardo*, two novellas – “Bounty” and *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*, a short fable – *Fox 8*, a morality tale – *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* and twenty short stories from four anthologies – *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, *Pastoralia*, *In Persuasion Nation* and *Tenth of December*. Liminality in the novel is discussed in chapter three, the two novellas, a short fable and a morality tale are analysed in chapter four. Chapters five and six discuss the presence of liminality in George Saunders’ short stories.

Lincoln in the Bardo is George Saunders’ most important work, and it has been examined for its presence of liminality from a variety of views, both within and outside the text’s confines. The work is significantly noticeable due to the word ‘bardo’ which is closely associated with the theoretical concepts discussed in liminality. The novel’s in-between status of the bardo-dwellers helps in the exploration of the characters’ direct and indirect, internal and outward manifestations of liminality. The setting of the fictional bardo and the plot that backdrops the events of the American Civil War of 1861-1865 are crucial in the analysis of the novel. Saunders’ inclusion of both fiction and non-fiction in the plot of the novel makes it a blend of fiction and reality. Though the author highlights the grief of Abraham Lincoln for the loss of his son, Willie Lincoln, the analysis through the lens of liminality helps to decipher the importance of the novel from the perspective of the themes of slavery and the American Civil War. The interpretation of the incidents discussed in the novel throws light on the symbolisation made through the death of Willie Lincoln and the resultant grief of Abraham Lincoln as the deaths of numerous soldiers and civilians during the period of the American Civil War, and the resultant grief of Abraham Lincoln as the President of America.

The title *Lincoln in the Bardo* is discussed to explore two details that are crucial in the analysis of the novel. The name Lincoln referred to in the title is confusing as it may refer to Willie Lincoln or Abraham Lincoln. The clarification for the surname used in the title is discussed to find out that the author tactically used it for the purpose of pointing to both the major characters. With the flow of the novel,

the reader comes to know that the title directly refers to Willie Lincoln being in the bardo state. But, the analysis of the character of Abraham Lincoln through the angle of liminality helps to interpret the title from the perspective of the father character also. The examination of the novel from the perspective of the insights shared in the theory of liminality and transition helps to find that if Willie Lincoln had been in the state of bardo as directly stated in the novel, the experience of bardo for Abraham Lincoln is by being in the state of liminality. The research, with the help of fictional and non-fictional excerpts from the novel, as well as from other historic sources, identifies that Abraham Lincoln experienced dual liminality at the same time. If the loss of Willie Lincoln becomes his projected form of liminal situation, the American Civil War and its various connected losses are identified as the other form of liminality that continuously disturbed Abraham Lincoln. The state of the bardo of Willie Lincoln and other bardo-dwellers symbolises the liminal experience of the civilians and soldiers who participated in the Civil War for the domination of their ideological standpoints. The expression of racism and conflict between the whites and the blacks within the limits of the bardo setting resembles the larger form of the same conflict in the territorial limits of the land of America. The bardo experience of the characters within the limits of the setting is used by George Saunders as a micro-expression of the liminality experienced by a larger group of Americans during the Civil War period. As for how the setting of the bardo becomes the liminal space for the characters entrapped in it, the event of the American Civil War can be considered a liminal event for the citizens who “moved in, moved through and moved out” (Goodman, et al. 167) of the struggles during the period 1861-1865.

In the process of exploring the liminal identity of the characters entrapped in the setting of the bardo, the original concept of bardo, which is based on Buddhist traditions, is also discussed. The traditional concept is equated with the fictional concept of bardo used in the novel by the author to find that the setting of bardo adapted in the novel does not entirely match that of the original concept in the Buddhist traditions. The original concept of bardo discussed in the Buddhist texts is complex when analogised with the simplified version of bardo used in *Lincoln in the Bardo*. Through such discussions, the liminal status of the setting of the bardo is

explored to identify it as a liminal space created from the influence of the traditional concept of the Buddhist bardo by George Saunders.

In the novel, the liminal experiences of Abraham Lincoln and Willie Lincoln are interconnected with each other as the liminality of both characters influences them to continue their liminal status and also ultimately end it to move to their post-liminal phases. The loss and grief of Abraham Lincoln are strengthened when he realises that Willie is dead and lost forever. While Abraham Lincoln slipped into the liminal phase due to his loss, Willie Lincoln experiences the liminal existence in the bardo which is a liminal space that is believed to be the space between death and the afterlife. The reader finds the liminal status of Abraham Lincoln to be at its peak when Willie is not able to move out of his liminal space to the afterlife. The liminal situation and entrapment in the bardo are not admitted by Willie Lincoln in the same way how his fellow bardo-dwellers also have not agreed to the reality that goes around them. The transition from the pre-liminal to the liminal phase occurs as a gradual flow for them. Timothy Carson, in his *Neither Here nor There: The Many Voices of Liminality*, reflects the view of Turner by examining that “the experience of liminality is feeling a loss of steady and familiar landmarks, the kind of security that accompanies past structure, even as the future has not yet materialised. With everything in flux, angst becomes the predominant mood” (4). The writer also points to the notion that “the liminal person does not necessarily know that transformation is occurring at the time it is happening” (6). Saunders frames the plot by allowing Willie Lincoln to experience the thoughts of Abraham Lincoln by entering into him which makes Willie realise the reality of his existence. He admits the truth that the space in which he is entrapped is not real as he is already dead to the reality of the world. This realisation helps him and other bardo-dwellers endured in the bardo’s liminal space to escape the entrapment of the bardo to the post-liminal phase. The exit of Willie from his liminality is also reflected in Abraham Lincoln as he experiences relief from the grief and loss that he had been experiencing for the past few hours.

The analysis of the existence and expression of liminality also points to its significance in handling the sensitive issues of racism and slavery in America. The exit of Abraham Lincoln from his liminal phase related to the loss of Willie Lincoln also helped him to move out of the liminal phase influenced by the tensions that he

suffered due to the ongoing American Civil War. His decision to include the slaves with him gives a hint to the end of slavery in America. With the help of historical records of the period and utilising the hints from the novel, the research concludes that the liminal phase of Abraham Lincoln helped him to rethink the situations around him. It made him comprehend reality in the same way that Willie Lincoln comprehended his existence in the bardo. The decision taken by Abraham Lincoln ended the uncertainty and ambiguity of the citizens, especially the slaves who suffered more from the liminal situations in the country. Saunders gives the hint that the slaves were happy with the decision of Abraham Lincoln through the depiction of the slave Thomas Haven who goes with Abraham Lincoln rather than moving out to his afterlife. Through the act of Thomas Havens' entry into the body of Abraham Lincoln, Saunders gives a hint to the decision taken by Abraham Lincoln in signing the historically significant Emancipation bill that abolishes slavery and provides freedom to the slaves in America. The decision to give a conclusion to the American Civil War provided a solution to Abraham Lincoln's liminality concerned with political matters. Saunders intersects the crucial questions in the novel at a single point and provides a solution to them as a chain of release from their liminalities.

For the analysis of the liminal status of Abraham Lincoln, Willie Lincoln, and the major bardo-dwellers in the novel, the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases of the characters are explored with the help of the insights provided by Arnold van Gennep through his rites of passage and Victor Turner on the intermediate phase of liminality. Such exploration and division of the situations experienced by the characters help to distinguish the particular phase of liminality from that of the pre-liminal and post-liminal phases. The transitions in the characters that pass through these three phases are irregular as the description of the three different phases may be incomplete for many characters. Moreover, the different concepts related to liminality such as liminal space, *communitas*, permanent or temporary liminality, liminal entity, etc. are also explored. It helps in defining the liminal existence of the characters that pass through the rites of passage. The bardo-dwellers in the setting of the bardo are considered *communitas* as they all come under the same category that experiences the same kind of liminality by being in the liminal space of bardo.

The analysis of the theme of slavery in the novel shows that Saunders tries to project the liminal status of the slaves who suffered discrimination in American society through their depiction in the liminal space of the bardo. The interpretation of the novel through the angle of liminality helps to identify the internal and external conflicts of the characters that represent the people in America during the period of the Civil War.

From the textual analysis of *Lincoln in the Bardo*, the research based on liminality moves to the next chapter that explores the four fundamental stories that express the core idea of liminality profound in the majority of the works of George Saunders. The two novellas “Bounty” and *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*, as well as the short fictions *Fox 8* and *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip*, are included in a separate chapter as an introduction to the upcoming chapter that deals with the same themes. The texts discussed in chapter four stand independently, unlike the short stories in the anthologies. The common theme of the chapter is the unusualness of the events that describe the liminal aspect of the stories. The novellas and short fictions point to the unanticipated changes in the lives of characters that go through the liminal phase of their lives. The pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases of the characters are divided as per the rites of passage for distinguishing the intermediate phase of liminality in the stories. Through such divisions and comparisons, the liminal phase of the characters is separated to explain their liminal status. Identification of the liminal status and phase of the characters helps to understand how liminality is affected by the characters. From the analysis of the situations of the stories, the liminality experienced by the characters is identified as coercive in nature. The coercive forms of liminality present in the characters are a result of the domination or exertion of pressure from power structures such as capitalism and authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. Turner, in his book *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, regards the liminal as a source of flow with its holistic sensation where there occurs the “loss of ego” in which the “self becomes irrelevant” (Turner 254).

The protagonist characters in the selected short fiction of George Saunders are subject to loss of their self and are forced to be in the liminal state between their self and the forced ‘other’ identity. The plots of the novella “Bounty” and that of *The Brief*

and Frightening Reign of Phil point to the exertion of coerciveness on the victimised characters by the dominant and powerful authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. This shows that the liminality experienced by the characters is made to experience liminality due to the direct or indirect exertion of the power that subjugates the victimised characters in the story. Likewise, *Fox 8* points to a similar form of liminality experienced by the inhabitants due to the domination of human beings who invade and exploit the natural existence of the forest. *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* lay the foundation for the explanation of how domination and subjugation exercised by capitalism over the working class make the victimised group of people experience liminality that is coercive in nature.

The identification of the liminal status of the victimised group of characters in these stories and the type of liminality experienced by them helps to elaborate the research from the perspective of coercive liminality in the following chapter. As the quirk and quiddity of liminality in the stories is the focal point in chapter four of the research thesis, the coerciveness of liminality is detailed in chapter five. A selected number of thirteen short stories from the four anthologies of George Saunders are included in the chapter for detailed analysis from the perspective of understanding the coerciveness of liminality on the characters.

The coerciveness of liminality on the victimised groups is traced from the short stories discussed in the chapter that gives the idea that liminality in such circumstances is created in the victims by the dominant group of power structures. The chapter explores how capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism create a sense of liminality in their victims. The key passages from the short stories that hint at the expression of being in neither one nor the other state of mind are highlighted. With the help of the insights related to liminality and the points extracted from the short stories, the link between the liminality experienced by the victimised group of characters and that of the dominant power structures is explained. It describes how the liminal status of the victims in the short stories is a reflection of the reality faced by people who suffer from the exploitation, domination, and subjugation exerted through the multiple forms of power expressed over the powerless.

Though chapter six continues the analysis of the expression of liminality in George Saunders' short stories, the type of short stories discussed in the chapter is

entirely different from that of the previous. If liminality had been explored for its coerciveness in chapter five, the following chapter discusses the nature of entrapment in liminality and the overcoming quality of the characters. Certain situations that resemble dilemmas in the characters are selected from the short stories for the analysis of liminality experienced in such situations by the characters. The analysis of the short stories is conducted for the presence of liminality in the characters and also to understand the way they deal with it. A total of seven short stories are selected, out of which five deal with the common theme of entrapment and the overcoming quality of the characters. The liminality in the characters is of a nature that can even extend to permanence. But these liminal entrapments are escaped through suitable decisions and actions taken by the characters that can be considered as the coping strategy of the characters. Such a breaking of liminal entrapments makes the liminal phases temporary. The other two short stories, “Offloading for Mrs. Schwartz” and “My Amendment”, are explored for their depiction of liminal space and also for the applicability of liminality in the division of gender according to masculine and feminine qualities.

Therefore, it is evident from the analyses of the selected works of George Saunders that characters and certain settings pass through their liminal phase exhibiting the attributes and effects of liminality. The uncertain, anxious, and ambiguous states are mostly prevalent in the characters of Saunders as he has included the unfortunate plight of characters facing inconsistent and conflicting situations, either formed naturally or due to the intervention of external forces. Though liminal moments can also be positive and energetic, the themes discussed by Saunders in the selected works mostly depict the unusual and unwelcomed conditions of the characters. The instabilities of identities that are disturbed and deviated from the normalities of the flow of life could be traced throughout the analysis of the selected works of Saunders. As noted in the first chapter, Saunders himself had situations of instability when he was exploited by the capitalist ideologies of corporates in Sumatra. His works have always reflected the transitional shift from such liminal experiences in life. Therefore, it is certain that the characters developed by such an author have a strong bond with the social, political, economic, and cultural situations around him. Though the works have fictional settings and cultural touch

with the American lifestyle, the essence of what he had intended to share with his readers extends beyond such limitations.

If the previous chapters that conduct analysis of Saunders' selected works are revisited, it is evident that the amusement theme park settings, clinical laboratories, lawns, financially unstable family situations, workplace atmospheres, territorial conflicts, livelihood problems, isolated conditions, etc., either directly or indirectly, point to the recurring conflicts in the lives of human beings. The issues of marginalised sections, oppressed and exploited groups of people where the vulnerable become victimised under the powerful repression conducted by the dominant groups of the society – all resemble real-life situations in the world. The incessant refugee displacements, racial conflicts, environmental concerns, slave trade, working class struggles, discrimination towards certain marginal sections, etc. highlight the social significance of Saunders' works, the essentiality to understand through the lens of liminality, and their literary efficaciousness.

While referring to the previous chapters for its analysis part, the understanding of the selected works through the perspective of liminality would help relate to similar situations in real-world scenarios. The state of becoming in-between happens to everyone at some point in their lives with a difference in the context and settings. Such liminal experiences can either be for a fraction of a second or for an extended period; sometimes throughout a lifetime. Work pressures at the office, tensions during unusual happenings, helpless situations, coerciveness due to voiceless conditions, becoming entrapped in liminal spaces, financial instabilities, unsatisfactory living conditions, etc. are common to a person who tries to survive amidst several unanticipated and uncontrollable situations in life. Therefore, the findings of the chapters where the application of liminality and transition had been utilised can be converged and concluded to a few brief points such as:

Chapter 3:

1. The title *Lincoln in the Bardo* denotes liminality in both Abraham Lincoln and Willie Lincoln
2. Multiple liminalities affect Abraham Lincoln
3. Bardo is a liminal space

4. Liminality of the bardo-dwellers resembles the existence of people during the American Civil War
5. Bardo-dwellers entrapped in the setting of bardo can be called *communitas* as they all experience the equal and same liminal situation
6. Liminality in Willie Lincoln influences Abraham Lincoln and vice versa
7. Liminal transition in Willie Lincoln and Abraham Lincoln equally affects the transition of the bardo-dwellers, certainty in the American Civil War and thus the lives of slaves
8. American Civil War can be considered a liminal event

Chapter 4:

9. The characters experience liminality due to the altering situations and enforced dominance
10. The characteristic features of liminality, mode of liminality and coping strategies influence the transition in the characters

Chapter 5:

11. Coercive liminality experienced by the characters is a result of the dominance exerted by various power structures in society
12. Capitalism, consumerism and authoritarianism cause liminal experiences in their victims

Chapter 6:

13. Coping strategies relied on by the characters decide the way they overcome the entrapment of liminality
14. The mode of liminality and coping strategies influence the transition in the characters

Thus, it can be stated that the presence of any of the significant features such as uncertainty, anxiety, ambiguity, indecisiveness, unusualness, deviation from normality, fear, loss of the previous state of mind, alienation, isolation, identity crisis, and dilemma can initiate the experience of liminality in a person. The most relevant and continuing situation at the stage of conducting this research, which had mild and strong effects around the world, directly and indirectly on most people, is the

pandemic situation that happened as a result of the spread of the various mutated versions of novel coronavirus. Having its effect from December 2019, and continuing with its occurrence as different waves to date, it could be the most significant and suitable reflection of the liminality discussed in the thesis. As per the methodology applied in the chapters to distinguish the tripartite structure of the characters, the pandemic falls under a similar analysis of division. Referring to the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases described, the pandemic can also be divided into the pre-pandemic period, the pandemic period, and the post-pandemic period. The pre-pandemic period can be considered as the normative life on earth before the discovery of the novel coronavirus and its adverse effects on human beings. The pandemic period denotes the intermediate phase similar to that of the liminal phase where the world faces uncertainty, anxiety, and ambiguity about the spread and destruction that can be caused due to the virus. The pandemic period has also caused uncertainties in several sectors affecting health, financial stability, jobs, social life, etc. The world, during the different fluctuating and recurring waves of the pandemic period, is continuously going through an unusual existence. The post-pandemic period refers to the stage after the settlement of these uncertainties and anxieties due to the spread of the virus. Compared to the pre- and post- pandemic periods, the pandemic period is anti-structural and creates fear in people about the future. It has also contributed to transitions and transformations in several sectors, including the attitude towards life till then. The applicability of liminality and transition theory is flexible and wide. While analysing the different research perspectives of scholars and academicians around the world, it can be understood that they have incorporated Turner's liminality to study a variety of instances in the world that resembles the projection of liminal existence. Bell, Genevieve (2021) uses Arnold van Gennep's rites of passage and Turner's liminality to explore the nuances of the pandemic. The chapter focuses on the structure of the pandemic, utilising the rituals of separation and reintegration. Wiele, Chad van de and Papacharissi, Zizi (2021) identified the COVID-19 pandemic as an activation of a long revolution. Through a theoretical lens, the article explores the pandemic through the state of suspended order in describing the systems and tools of subjugation in American society. From the perspective of liminality, the pandemic

that has occurred as an unusual and challenging situation in the world is evident in its three phases.

The case of wars of all time that have happened in various parts closely relates to the circumstances of liminality that arise for a particular temporary period, which is also possible to have long-lasting effects. Taking an example from Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo*, the history of the American Civil War itself can be a very prominent example of the liminal effects of war. Whether it is the Civil War, the First World War or the Second World War, the Cold War, the Iraq-Kuwait war, or any kind of war where people get affected due to its consequences, the effects of liminality appear. The people who suffer from the effects and after-effects of the war are forced to experience the nuances of liminality. They are gradually or suddenly transitioned from their normal state of living to an unusual and unwelcomed war situation. It has an impact on the peaceful living of people who become uncertain about the duration of the war, what will happen to them in the next moment, and the possible ways to avoid its negative consequences on their lives. The anxiety would be high at the peak moment, and they would be ambiguous about the actual details of the war. The tripartite division of such situations can be traced by stating the normative status of the people as pre-liminal, the peak of a war situation as liminal, and the escape or exit from such fearful conditions as post-liminal phases.

Similar is the situation when revolutions occur in a place. As said by Turner, revolutions can be regarded as liminoid conditions. Still, the liminal effect of the revolutions remains the same, and it can be identified through the tripartite division. There occurs a sudden shift from what had been to the point of the activities that support the revolution, which may lead to violations of state laws by possible violence, riots, and protests from the side of the people who try to resist and overrule a system, state, or ideology. For example, the Russian Revolution, the French and European Revolutions, the American Revolution, the Arab Spring, etc. point to such transitions from the previous state of existence. Equally important as war, revolutions cause almost the same distribution of liminal experiences in the people who are part of it and also affected by it. Revolutions can also be defined as a tool used by the affected to oppose the anti-human policies of dominant groups, most likely the State. It occurs as part of the resistance initiated by the people who suffer from the dominant

powers. This concept is discussed in chapters four and five through Saunders' novellas and short stories where the affected are forced to experience liminality due to the domination and subjugation of the powerful class. In a world where there exists both the mentality of a dominator – subjugator – repressor and the unfortunate situation of being victimised in such situations, the significance of liminality and liminal existence is high.

While the research based on George Saunders' selected works discusses a variety of situations in which liminality plays an important role in deciding the transition from the pre-liminal to the post-liminal phases, there are many more relatable situations beyond the coverage of the study that is closely relatable to liminal existence. The permanent and temporary modes of liminality can be identified in the daily life situations of people. The study can be related to the debatable topics that fall under gender issues, where there is always an existence of a victim. In the short story "My Amendment", the research has given hints on how LGBTQ comes under the study of liminal experience and existence. Moreover, the increasing number of marital rapes, domestic violence against women, discrimination, marginalisation and denial of equal freedom of rights lead the victims to a coercive liminal experience.

The discussions on authoritarianism and totalitarian regimes reflected in Saunders' novella and short stories are relevant to the recent developments in the political and social situations of many countries. The direct and indirect ways of exercising the extremities of political power in the name of patriarchy, development, and security matters gradually create situations of having been dominated, exploited, and repressed. Saunders' opposition against Donald Trump and his administration in America, referred to in the first and third chapters, also through the short stories from a general perspective, demonstrate how such political ideologies are not welcome by people who find them irrelevant. The autocratic rule in various countries and policies that are framed against the citizens also create an environment that is least welcomed and most unappreciated. The disturbances in living caused by the policies, decisions, and actions of the authoritarian and totalitarian dominators cause situations of struggle, trauma, and victimhood in people.

Unlike the common issues in society, there are subjective reflections of liminal situations in people due to the temporal or permanent existence of being in liminal

conditions. It may be considered one of the different problems faced by a person in the world. But, identifying the nature of these liminal situations can help to cope with its unusualness, which can provide a better way to the post-liminal phase in the person. People who suffer serious health issues and diseases, who lost their beloved ones and are caught in the trauma associated with it, the tensions and anxieties that arise unexpectedly due to the various changing factors, unusual happenings in daily life, etc. lead them to experience a transit from their comparatively normative pre-liminal phase to the liminal phase and thereafter to the post-liminal phase depending on the coping strategies and developments. Scholars who would like to conduct future research on the potential area of liminality can focus on such topics that provide scope to explore the various in-between situations of life in human beings. It would extend the possibilities of linking research to interdisciplinary fields, thus making it innovative and productive.

Likewise, there are many more situations where the applicability of liminality is prominent enough to understand it deeply by analysing its structural changes and transitions. Therefore, multiple liminalities take a person to his/her liminal state of mind. Sometimes it can be a single experience, multiple or overlapping experiences according to the nature and intersectionality of situations and related factors.

The analyses conducted on Saunders' selected works, specifically mentioning, the novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*, two novellas, two short fictions, and twenty short stories – a total of twenty-five works – on the basis of certain selected objectives for the thesis have provided findings that give rise to outcomes that help to understand the works through a different perspective unique to the discussions in the discipline of literature. Though there have been a few articles and books where liminality is a substantial analytical contributor, the perspective of liminality in understanding the creative soul of the writings of George Saunders is novel regarding its vastness and selection of a majority of works related to the author.

Research Output One:

Through the exploration of liminality in the characters, the interconnection between the selected works of George Saunders is established

The different works of Saunders being published with a gap of at least four to five years allow the plots to be discussed in connection with the then-relevant social

context. In such a condition, with thematic and contextual dissimilarities, the analysis of the works under a single notion had been challenging. With the flexibility discovered in the application of liminality, the novel, short fiction and short stories of George Saunders could be joined in a single thread of liminality. The major link to adding suitable stories to the thread of liminality is initiated by the concept of bardo discussed in *Lincoln in the Bardo*. The spatial, spiritual, and social experience of the characters in the liminal space of bardo is extended to the other chapters in finding similar liminal existences of characters. The research could distinguish the different stages of the transition occurring to the characters by following the track of finding the liminal passage of the characters. This interconnection between the liminal existence of the characters in Saunders' selected works is highly significant for identifying the presence of liminality in the stories. Taking the research output as a whole, the establishment of this connection between the selected works of Saunders has to be considered the most prominent space among the other outputs of the research. Through such an attempt to apply the theoretical concepts of liminality to the selected works of George Saunders, the outcome that is able to be achieved helps the enthusiastic readers to approach the works through the perspective of liminality.

Research Output Two:

The development of liminality and its implication in the selected works of George Saunders is portrayed

Though the discovery and development of liminality go back more than six decades, it has been widely applied to various topics in different disciplines in recent times. The development of liminality does not confine to Victor Turner alone. It has roots in its past and is also in the process of adding new insights through various applications of the same. From the initial discussions in the second chapter, it has been understood that Arnold van Gennep's rites of passage and Victor Turner's rediscovery of liminality have provided a base for its theoretical implications in the disciplines of anthropology and comparative symbology. Further, the correlation between liminality and Schlossberg's transition theory was described in the second half of the chapter, which immensely helps in the process of application and analysis in the selected works of Saunders. The selected theoretical concepts related to

liminality are explained in the second chapter, providing an extended knowledge of liminality. It also gives a base to the possibilities of its application in the selected works of George Saunders.

Research Output Three:

The tripartite structure is identified in George Saunders' selected works where the transitional effect of liminality is described

From the analysis of the selected works of George Saunders as per the objectives of the research, the major finding was that the stories of Saunders have a space for the application of liminality through the identification, division, and analysis of the rites of passage of the characters. The pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases of the characters, which were discoverable and distinguishable in most of the stories, gave the base for tracing the transitional flow of the characters. The transitional effect of liminality on the characters was described in the chapters that were divided on the basis of the genres of the works. The research question of what happens to the characters prior to, during, and after the peak phase of liminality is described, which gives the output that the transitional nature of liminality in the characters depends mainly on the intermediate phase, i.e., the liminal phase of the characters that can either be temporary or permanent in effect.

Research Output Four:

The influence of dominant external forces and subsequent ideologies in producing liminality in the characters are traced

This particular outcome of the research is based on the objective: to delve into the impact of liminality held sway by societal upheaval and other emerging ideologies depicted in the selected works. Though the four chapters contain stories that fall under this category, the major analysis and application of liminality are traced in the fifth chapter, where the term coercive liminality is coined to denote the enforcement of liminality on vulnerable groups. As part of the analysis of Saunders' stories, the thematic ideologies prevalent in the selected works were grouped to distinguish and classify the stories under capitalism, consumerism, and authoritarianism. The fourth objective, which aimed to discover the direct and indirect domination of external forces, has found that due to the exertion of power on the vulnerable groups, the

ideologies projected by the power structures of society produce coercive liminality on the victims.

Research Output Five:

The correlation between literary fiction and the real world regarding the inevitability and relevance of liminality are delineated

By linking the selected works of George Saunders on the thread of liminality, the conclusive output of the four previous outputs of the research can be related to their connection with real-world scenarios. The universality of liminality makes this research significant as most people have experienced liminal situations at some point in their lives. A very few such experiences are traced through discussing the writings of Saunders. The insights of liminality and the research utilising the application of the same are significant because of their inevitability and relevance. The final chapter discusses the relationship between literary fiction and the real world in terms of the importance of liminality. This output of the research is part of the final objective that tries to find the connection between fictional derivatives and the real world. The summarisation of the major findings based on the research objectives and the following chapters gives a clear sketch of how the characters and situations of George Saunders are related to real-world situations. It thus explains how crucial liminality is to human beings and life on earth where unanticipated and uncontrollable events would create multiple, overlapping or single liminal moments.

George Saunders' works that have been selected for the analysis of liminality are diverse in content and theme. This diversity helped to understand the various aspects of the applicability of liminality in literary texts and also the different forms of liminality experienced by the characters that reflect the lives of people in society. As George Saunders' works mostly highlight the problems and struggles of human beings, the negative aspects of liminality are mostly highlighted in the research rather than the positive aspects. The analysis of liminality through the highlights of various themes helps to understand the root cause of victimisation and vulnerability to the domination of power structures in society. The problems of alienation from the possible identities, powerlessness in the act of domination, and the meaninglessness of the situation are reflected in the liminality experienced by the characters.

From the identification of the triggering factor responsible for the liminal phase of the characters, the analysis of the situation, its duration, the role change, control over the situation, and the concurrent stress of the characters, with the help of Schlossberg's four S, the nature of the expression of the liminal situation is understood. The details about the self, psychological resources available from the works of George Saunders, the support, and coping strategies taken by the characters also make it clear about the impact of liminality on the characters. Schlossberg's transition model is used whenever necessary and suitable to explore the background details of the liminal situation and the resultant expression of liminality in the characters. As Schlossberg's transition and Victor Turner's liminality move along the same track, the amalgamation of both helps to draw a better sketch of the characters and situations in the selected works of George Saunders.

The analysis of the works of George Saunders has been conducted according to the five objectives of the research. As it was already said in the introduction, the objectives have been discussed in the chapters in a scattered form, where chapters three, four, five, and six contain almost all the objectives in them. The selected works of George Saunders have been analysed in the light of Victor Turner's liminality to describe the transitional effect of liminality affecting the actions and behaviour of the characters depicted in the selected works. Chapters four and five exclusively explore the impact of liminality on the victims due to the domination of power structures. The ideological and conceptual understanding of the development of Turner's liminality has been discussed in chapter two. These objectives converge on a single point to explore the inevitability of various liminal conditions in human life and their relevance. The analysis of George Saunders' selected texts through the lens of liminality explains the core part of the objectives.

The relevance of the research is timeless as it informs about the often-occurring transitions in life and the in-between states within the process. This framework and analysis method using liminality can be applied to interpret historical, contemporary, and futuristic records of situations and events. The selected works of George Saunders increase the possibility of the research to interpret and relate to the existing societal problems related to capitalism, consumerism, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism. Though the scope of the present research has been limited to

Saunders' selected works, the flexibility, versatility, and potential of liminality do not confine to the limits of literature and literary works. Rather, the possibilities of extensive research are open when linked to other disciplines through the application of quantitative, qualitative, or mixed approaches. While Saunders' selected works present limited scope to explore the application of liminality, researchers can focus on literary works and relevant topics from other disciplines.

From the point of view that literature is a reflection of reality in society, the different ways of existence of liminality in the characters in the selected works of George Saunders give the hint that liminality is present in society in various forms. From the works of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, it is evident that the shift between structure and anti-structure is prominent in society. "The core substance of Turner's proposition is that this structure is the key to the structure of human experience" (Szakolczai, *International Political Anthropology* 147). To understand the nature of the expression of liminality in an individual, the different works of George Saunders have to be considered as taking place in the life of an individual rather than in different characters in various liminal situations. While considering the liminal situations of different characters as a whole, the multiple, overlapping, or continuous forms of expression of liminality would be visible. Sandor Klapcsik, in *Liminality in Fantastic Fiction: A Poststructuralist Approach* (2012), gives three distinct characteristics of liminality with the help of the poststructuralist theories of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. According to the hypothesis stated by the author, liminality is always oscillating, crossing back and forth between social and cultural positions, resulting in continuous transference in a never-ending narrative that forms an unending process towards an unreachable finish. Its distinguishing quality is also linked to transgressions over ephemeral, permeable, indefinite, ambiguous, and evasive borderlines (Klapcsik 14). These liminal situations and liminality are essential for the progress of society because it is these liminal conditions that make a person move forward while sustaining the dynamicity of the person. For a human being, the transitions in life are essential as they reduce the possibility of the static nature of life. These transitions are controlled and intermediated by the liminal phases and liminality. From the perspective of the analyses done, the thesis that traced the presence of liminality in the selected works of George Saunders and tried to equate to

the realities of society would like to conclude by quoting the lines written by Victor Turner himself, that man “is both a structural and an antistructural entity, who grows through anti-structure and conserves through structure” (Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* 298). This continuous shift from the structural to the antistructural spheres of life through the transitional layers of liminality, in the spatial and temporal existence, influences an individual’s thoughts, actions, and emotions – thus creating space for a parallel liminal experience in the person.

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