



Satirical Realism and Classical Dramatic Structure: A Dual-Framework Analysis of Shrilal Shukla's Raag Darbari

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Abstract— This paper argues that Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari* (1968) represents a uniquely Indian literary form—a "postcolonial satirical tragedy"—that successfully combines realistic social analysis with a classical dramatic structure. By examining the novel through the complementary lenses of Indian literary realism and Aristotelian dramatic theory, we can understand how it achieves both potent political critique and sophisticated literary artistry. The novel functions simultaneously as social documentation, offering a satirical exposure of the rural corruption and failing moral values that characterized the post-Independence era, and as an aesthetic artifact that employs classical principles to create structural coherence. As a work of Indian realism, *Raag Darbari* critiques the collapse of nationalist idealism and the disintegration of the Nehruvian vision. Through its protagonist, Rangnath—an educated urbanite whose idyllic vision is crushed by harsh reality—the novel captures the helplessness of the individual facing a corrupt system. Concurrently, the narrative adheres to an Aristotelian framework. Rangnath's journey mirrors that of a tragic hero, culminating in a moment of *anagnorisis*: a critical discovery of his own powerlessness. The novel skillfully modifies Aristotelian principles, substituting tragic pity with a "satirical catharsis" achieved through bitter laughter. This application of a Western framework to a postcolonial text creates what Homi Bhabha terms a "third space," where different traditions creatively synthesize. Ultimately, this dual approach enables Shukla to bear witness to a collective crisis while achieving aesthetic sophistication, making *Raag Darbari* a cornerstone work of postcolonial satirical realism.



Keywords— Shrilal Shukla, *Raag Darbari*, Satirical Realism, Aristotelian Structure, Postcolonial Literature, Indian Realism, *Anagnorisis*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Realism means, in simple terms, to portray real life with utmost genuineness, a concept that existed since the genesis of literature but was never prominent until the artists from every creative field got tired of the somewhat pretentious illustration of society. In the beginning of 19th century, it started to get the recognition it was always worthy of, with the help of some pioneers of modern literature such as Honoré de Balzac, Henrik Ibsen, Charles Dickens. Yet when it comes to Indian Literature, the mindset of Indian authors post-independence differs from the western culture

and its belief. From the occidental point of view and the disparity between Indians and English colonials, it was suggested that Indians are at a loss of an identity when it came to our own struggles to re-establish ourselves as an independent nation.

However, what makes Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari* (1968) particularly compelling is not just its satirical exposure of rural corruption, but its sophisticated employment of both Indian realist techniques and classical Aristotelian dramatic structure. This dual approach enables the novel to function simultaneously as social documentation and aesthetic

artifact, achieving what might be termed "postcolonial satirical tragedy." As Georg Lukacs argues in *The Theory of the Novel*, realism achieves its most powerful effects when it captures "the totality of social relations through the detailed representation of everyday life" (Lukacs 60). But Raag Darbari goes beyond this by also employing classical dramatic principles to create structural coherence and emotional catharsis through bitter laughter rather than tragic pity.

This paper argues that Shukla's achievement lies in his creation of a uniquely Indian literary form that successfully combines realistic social analysis with classical dramatic structure. By examining the novel through the complementary lenses of Indian literary realism and Aristotelian dramatic theory, we can understand how it achieves both political critique and literary artistry, representing what Homi Bhabha calls the "third space" of postcolonial cultural production where different traditions creatively synthesize.

II. SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AND EVOLUTION OF REALISM IN INDIA

V.S. Naipaul, as he expressed in *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1976), stresses upon India as a country without any ideology of rejuvenating itself after the freedom from the reign of English Empire for over centuries. With Indian Literature still being nascent before the modernity in Indian texts took over, authors came forward from every part of our country heaving the common burden of lost identity to close this debate. By instilling "Indianness" in the text to complement the realistic portrayal of our own struggles, and to state the spiraling emotions of every Indian, hence came the Realism in Modern Indian Literature.

As Meenakshi Mukherjee demonstrates in *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*, Indian realism developed not through direct imitation of European models, but as a response to specific cultural and political conditions of colonization and independence. Mukherjee argues that "Indian literature did not have any tradition of this variety of realism because it was based on a rather different view of reality" (Mukherjee 23). Unlike European realism which emerged from bourgeois individualism, Indian realism developed within the context of colonial subjugation and cultural renaissance, creating distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from Western counterparts.

Parth Chatterjee wrote: "Nationalism sought to demonstrate the falsity and treachery of the colonizer's claim that 'the backward people are culturally incapable of ruling themselves in the prolifically developing and ever emerging conditions of the modern world'. Nationalism denied the alleged inferiority of the colonized people, asserting that a

backward nation could modernize itself while retaining its cultural identity and even express it vividly." This clash of these ideologies produced a discourse which challenged the colonial claim.

Namvar Singh's influential analysis in *Adhunik Sahitya Ki Pravrittiyan* identifies a specifically Indian approach to realist characterization that emphasizes social types over psychological individuals. Singh argues that Indian realist characters often function as representatives of social forces or cultural tensions, reflecting Indian philosophical traditions that emphasize social role and duty over individual psychology, while also serving the practical function of social critique through recognizable social types.

III. POLITICAL AND CLASSICAL REALISM IN INDIAN LITERATURE

By invoking the relationship between realist logic and the ideals of the liberal state and then proceeding to invert that same logic, Indian novels represent and thus critique the collapse of nationalist idealism into manifesting a dismal reality. We also find the concept "ulti baatein" which translates to inverted logic, which posits that said truth or court of public opinion often is deprived of a certain context for a clear-cut explanation which leads to the forgery of truth or contradiction of what was said and what was understood.

This concept of "ulti baatein" represents what Francesca Orsini, in her analysis of *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940*, describes as the adaptive strategies employed by Hindi writers to address distinctly Indian social and political concerns while utilizing adapted Western literary forms. Orsini demonstrates how "Hindi became an established public language in print, education and politics and struggled successfully to become the future national language of India" during the crucial decades of the independence movement.

If we take the example of Raag Darbari written by Shrilal Shukla in 1968, he made use of his satirical humourism to vocalize his critical comments on the distortion of politics and human nature and he pointedly shed light on the inner corruption of an individual. He paints a picture of India and its socio-politico-economic condition through the idea of village Shivpalganj. Every resident of Shivpalganj holds an ulterior motive and treats every opportunity to make their end meet as a Midas touch. In this novel, corruption is justified in such a twisted manner that it appears uncomfortably natural, which mirrors the crumbling state of our current political situation.

IV. ARISTOTELIAN FRAMEWORK IN POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT

Shrilal Shukla, born on 31st December 1925 in the state Uttar Pradesh, Shukla's writing style acutely illustrated the dire scenarios of India and its failing moral values after the post-Independence era and the poignant and bitter convalescent condition of a wounded nation. He conveyed the macro-level India's state in a micro-level storytelling, an anecdotal narrative which did not just tell the humorous happenings of a village but insinuated the other side of that spectrum. The intimate structure of the story of Raag Darbari, published in 1968, helps the reader to consume the information in a colloquial manner but also helps understand the inner philosophies and vices of people.

Keeping in mind that the novel's setting is in an isolated village and the representation of the said narrative is done in a theatrical or more precisely in a dramatic way, we can apply the Aristotelian elements and understand how Shukla's Raag Darbari possesses the core structure of Aristotle's Poetics and general Greek theatrics.

However, as postcolonial critics have noted, the application of Western classical theory to postcolonial texts requires careful cultural translation. As Homi Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture*, postcolonial cultural production operates through "ambivalent" processes that simultaneously employ and subvert dominant cultural patterns. The use of Aristotelian framework in analyzing Indian literature thus becomes what Bhabha terms "mimicry" "a process that is "almost the same, but not quite," creating both resemblance and menace to classical Western forms.

The precise outcome of the points in Poetics is that "imitation of reality is didactic," and Aristotle supported this even though his teacher, Plato, did not. The plot has to be mimetic, as Raag Darbari has an anecdotal narrative, it also has an underlying linear plot as the protagonist of the story, Rangnath, through whom we understand the happenings of Shivpalganj. It dilutes the macro level corruption of a whole country to a mere village, mixing it with humor and satire for the audience and the story to have a symbiotic relationship.

Aristotle's concept of "time, space and action" is pristinely present in the narrative of the story, as it is set in post-independence India era after 1947 with the incidents that states the generalized happenings of India (time), in a small village called Shivpalganj, a common name which can be found in every part of the country (space) and every character's motives and timely development of the story to a breaking point which contributes to the plot (action). These unities, as Aristotle stated them in *The Art of Poetry*, make a story dramatic and engaging for the spectators.

V. SOCIAL HIERARCHIES AND DRAMATIC PERIPETEIA

The problem of caste is prevalent in India to this day, Brahmins, Baniyas still have the upper hierarchical position in the society, and in the novel, the caste system is spread across the plot with characters like Gayadhin and Vaidyaji. It hinders inter-caste marriage, even though Vaidyaji promotes inter-caste marriage, it is just a ruse to elevate his position by showing his pseudo secularism.

As Vasudha Dalmia argues in *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, the colonial period saw the consolidation of Hindu identity that was "emancipatory" in some ways but also "repressive," excluding "not only the Muslims, but also those on the periphery of the Hindu social order". This historical process of exclusion is reflected in Shukla's portrayal of caste dynamics in Shivpalganj, where traditional hierarchies adapt to modern political structures while maintaining their essential power relations.

The prevalence of what might be called social slavery in India because of caste discrimination remains devastating. Aristotle in his *Politics* justified slavery, arguing "to paraphrase "that "it is not just a necessity but a convenience to have slaves at our disposal as some, from their hour of birth, are designated their role in the society as a ruler or a ruled one." Prime examples of this are the characters Shanichar and Chotte Wrestler's father in the novel, who represent what postcolonial critics call the "subaltern" voices.

Individual's position in the hierarchical chain has supremacy over the links that are below it, a clear contrast between the highest political power and the novel's character "Vaidyaji" who is seen as an apex of the village. Raag Darbari does not have Raags per se, but they are present as a metaphorical theme which makes Vaidyaji the Pied Piper of Shivpalganj. His words hold the ultimatum and every being present at his adjacent radius has to follow whatever order he bestows upon them. The desperation of characters such as Ruppen Babu, Principal Sahib, Shanichar and even Vaidyaji himself to please people or be pleased is visible as these characters, throughout the novel, function as chess pieces.

Vaidyaji, an apex in the village who holds the agency over the concept of Peripeteia, as his words are absolute, he can change the fate of anyone who is standing at his adjacent radius. His megalomaniac and pseudo secular personality, which also relates to the concept of Hexis (disposition of virtue), defies what an ideal Indian man should be. India itself went through peripeteia but differently in various parts of the country, as the ratio of rich and poor, literacy and illiteracy, ideals and vices have a balance of 100 kg weight against one hundred feathers.

VI. RANGNATH AS REALIST OBSERVER AND TRAGIC PROTAGONIST

Indian authors in literature never shy away from showing the clashing of realities by putting uncommon characters in the same space. Rangnath, a man with an idyllic vision of rural India with ironclad ideals and an ardent believer of poetic justice who can be considered a true modern man, had to witness the transition from his modernity to the true face of rural beliefs and norms. Many characters like Principal Sahib, his own uncle Vaidyaji, the truck driver, police officers, his own cousins gradually broke Rangnath's bubble of modern reality and the author, Shrilal Shukla did not spare any mercy to show the pristine representation of this through his anecdotal narrative.

Raag Darbari is a satirical novel, not a tragedy, but satire as a genre can only be made after some sort of tragedy has taken place beforehand. In simplification, satire is an aftermath storytelling of a tragedy genre and thus, elements of Aristotelian tragedy can be identified in the text. All the characters in the novel are harmonized by the fact that they have something to achieve except Rangnath. Rangnath does hold the quality of a tragic hero as he came to the village because of his failing health with having an idyllic vision of rural life, just to have his preconceptions met with harsh reality.

From a realist perspective, Rangnath functions as what Georg Lukacs calls a "typical character" "an individual whose personal experience illuminates broader social conditions. His position as an educated urbanite encountering rural reality provides the narrative with a perspective that enables both social documentation and satirical critique. However, his characterization also follows classical dramatic patterns that align closely with Aristotelian tragic structure.

The provoking and explicit show of selfishness and smart aleck nature of people who hold their own agenda and will go to lengths just to have their desire fulfilled is set against a man with a good sense of justice and who aspires to "post-independence" individualistic ideals.

VII. NEHRUVIAN DISILLUSIONMENT AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Considering the grounded portrayal by Shrilal Shukla of a man in a rigid environment where the idyllic vision of a place becomes the source of hopelessness, a broader approach to understand its severity is by understanding Nehruvian era disintegration. India's post-colonial state began to revolutionize itself, as large-scale reform projects in every economic sector started and the goal of socio-economic equality and stability was promised. The

supposed map of ideal India was laid out, yet it gradually began to become clear to an average citizen of India that the actual beneficiaries of this reformation were the pre-established high-class people. The ratio itself was so unfair that the reality of the situation dominated the ideals which were supposed to become the balancing pillar of the ideological engine which was supposed to run India on equal grounds on both micro and macro level.

This disillusionment reflects what postcolonial theorists describe as the "failure of nationalist idealism" "the gap between independence rhetoric and lived reality that characterizes much postcolonial experience.

VIII. COMMON MAN'S REALISTIC PERCEPTION AND CATHARTIC EFFECTS

As Satendra Singh explained in his essay "The Urban Experience": human nature strives to be devoid of the dystopic way of living, yet the reality is never lenient as the topsy turvy life in an urbanized place will always be a slave of chaos. And so, the Indian novels in majority express a yearning for a person who wants the peaceful environment of the countryside or rural lifestyle, where a tired and frustrated urban dweller wants to escape to, away from all the unmerciful happenings of day-to-day life and corruption of uncontrolled urbanization.

In Raag Darbari, a well-educated person is deliberately put in a setting of rural society of India, a village named Shivpalganj which could be found in every part of our nation. Rangnath becomes our lens to participate in the happening life of Shivpalganj people or more precisely Ganjahe, and with him being a person having resemblance to our lives, we as observers can understand the chaos and unhinged uncivilized manners of the village residents. The helplessness of Rangnath's character to just stand there and see how things unfold is the same as ours "what we feel when any wrongdoing or mishaps, be it to our personal lives or to the lives around us, happens and we cannot do anything because that said phenomenon is out of our control.

The essence of Aristotelian tragedy is to dramatize the essence of reality by emphasizing it against another reality, which posits that a perception of what is real to one can be disrupted by putting it against another one's. This explains the concept of catharsis, which means emotional exit in simple terms. When realities or ideals clash, the audience either feels pity and empathizes with the characters, or they feel fear and regret for the same. We feel fear for Chotte Wrestler's father because of domestic abuse, we feel regret for Shanichar's dog-like condition and him not having his own identity, we feel pity for Rangnath, as him being an idealistic man who gets his idea of fair justice and

modernity crushed because of the corruption and vile humans he witnesses. We feel empathy for Langar, who is forced to bow down before the system. We feel disgust for the likes of Ruppan Babu and Badri Pehelwan and so on.

However, the cathartic effect in Raag Darbari operates through what might be called "satirical catharsis" "a modification of Aristotelian principles that substitutes bitter laughter for tragic pity while maintaining the structural function of emotional purification and resolution.

IX. LOSS OF HUMAN VALUES: FAMILIAL AND SOCIAL DISINTEGRATION

Treating a person as an equal was and still is a debatable concept in India even after post-independence modern-culture development. A society thrives when individuals living together in harmony, compassion, ethics, and discipline are combined to make an appropriate environment of coexistence. Raag Darbari questions this philosophy by again bringing uncommon people together to show the reality of the situation at hand.

Shanichar, a man with dog-like loyalty towards Vaidyaji, cannot identify himself as a man with principles and have his own individualism "he is considered a tool by the characters of the novel. Langar, a clever representation of a man who is at the mercy of the corrupt system, becomes an unheard voice of unheard people. The all-pervasive existence of Langar and treatment of his character identifies with the helplessness of a commoner who is forced to bow down before the system.

Familial dispute is a common theme in Indian literary texts which roots from the desire to have an agency over familial wealth or because of ideological egoism. The unflappable duality of people and dishonest communication galvanizes a certain member of a family to act against unfair means. This totalitarianism in families also leads to favoritism or nepotism.

In Raag Darbari, both Ruppan babu and Badri pehelwan are not qualified for anything and they both are self-proclaimed intellectuals, but because of their father having political connections within rural politics, Ruppan babu is the elected president of the student body of Chhangamal inter college but he desires the seat of village co-operative society. Because of his rebellious and problem-making behavior, Vaidyaji elects Badri pehelwan over his younger son. Shrilal Shukla evokes a basic human quality, which is sympathy "though immorality is etched in majority of characters in Raag Darbari, through Rangnath's lens, the reader is bound to sympathize with certain characteristics of a character but not the whole character.

Bhagwaticharan Varma in his *Bhoole Bisre Chitra* (1959) also attributes economic reasons for familial conflict and inevitable breakage of family. The transfer of Ruppan Babu from one father's faction to another is the basic symbolization of realization of the younger generation of the independence of which they are divested. Factionalism, which is present in the novel, states that to achieve something, one must take a side as Ruppan babu took the side of Khanna master to go against Principal sahib. Factionalism is also a by-product of differences in opinions and generational gap. Munshi Premchand in Hindi and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee in Bengali also show the day-to-day problems of rural communities.

X. ANAGNORISIS AND THE ULTIMATE RECOGNITION

The ultimate revelation of Rangnath is that he alone cannot do anything against even a small group of people who are doing whatever they deem worthy. His resemblance to characters like Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet is clear for us to understand, as his reversal of fortune/acceptance that he also became a part of what he was trying to avoid explains the concept of Anagnorisis, which means a critical discovery which emerges at the climax after the mixed aftermath of denouement (unknotting of the plot) and peripeteia.

With actions of principal sahib to get Khanna master fired, Badri pehelwan becoming the president of village Union committee through nepotism, Shanichar, an incapable man becoming the head of Panchayat because of the political power of Vaidyaji, smart aleck like Ruppan babu being the president of Chhangamal inter college, all these things culminated in Rangnath giving up on his ideals and becoming another shell belonging to the corrupt system of India.

This moment represents classical anagnorisis "the painful recognition of a reality previously hidden from the protagonist. As postcolonial critics note, this recognition also reflects the broader postcolonial condition where individual agency encounters systemic corruption that transcends personal moral choice.

XI. REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN: MARGINALIZED VOICES

In an interview, this question was asked to Shrilal Shukla: why is the village of Shivpalganj strangely devoid of women? The author replied: "Society in Raag Darbari is a male-dominated society, and politics is still male-dominated. And all the distortions of values that can attract satire or irony come from men in real life. For example,

defected values created by male society. Very few lady politicians indulge in floor-crossing. So male characters are much more attractive if your aim is to satirize distorted values in political life. I don't think a lady would have behaved like Vaidyaji if she'd overseen the college."

Bela, a character who acts as a surplus in the novel, which itself states the significance of women in male hegemony "through her, the author spoke on the matter of autonomy, and how natural talents are looked down upon. Her only support system was her father who becomes the epitomic presentation of the phrase "ignorance is bliss." He showed every quality of a pseudo-modern man who disguises his own patriarchal values as paternal concern. Her illiteracy, for which she never blamed her father, her falling victim to "male gazes" and her being considered an object at disposal, all of this combined made a rich-spirited woman a downtrodden "another" female who got silenced because she has the urge to speak.

This marginalization of women reflects what feminist postcolonial critics describe as the "double colonization" experienced by women in postcolonial contexts "oppressed both by colonial/postcolonial power structures and by patriarchal traditions.

XII. SYNTHESIS: POSTCOLONIAL SATIRICAL TRAGEDY

The text does not have Raags, but it does possess the soul of rhythm, and the text being satirical, it does tackle serious issues. Raag Darbari is a character-driven novel, and the plot of the novel is carried by the actions of the characters in it while the plot still holds the supremacy which Aristotle stated in Poetics. To paraphrase Aristotle: "characters reveal the moral purpose within the adequate length of the dramatic representation, as tragedy represents the people as they are now while plot being the soul of tragedy."

Aristotle's tragedy and Shrilal Shukla's satire have nihilism in common. Aristotle's analysis of Achilles and Oedipus are similar to Shukla's characters in Raag Darbari "both possess the quality of Hamartia. However, what Shukla creates is not pure Aristotelian tragedy but what can be termed "postcolonial satirical tragedy" "a hybrid form that maintains classical structural elements while adapting emotional and cultural content to postcolonial Indian conditions.

This hybrid approach represents what Homi Bhabha calls the "third space" of cultural production, where different traditions meet and create new possibilities. As Bhabha argues, such hybrid forms are "almost the same, but not quite," creating both resemblance to classical forms and "menace" to their cultural authority.

The combination of Indian realist techniques with Aristotelian dramatic structure enables Raag Darbari to achieve multiple critical effects simultaneously. The realist framework reveals Shukla's techniques of social documentation and satirical critique, while the dramatic framework illuminates his methods of structural organization and emotional manipulation. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of the novel's literary achievement and cultural significance.

XIII. CONCLUSION

The challenges that arose after India's independence to make India a country of pride and re-establish its identity welcomed unfathomable struggles within India's isolated system, which clearly demonstrated a country's journey towards a path of healing. Many authors such as R.K. Narayan, Munshi Premchand, Satyajit Ray, Arvind Adiga, Arundhati Roy, and Shrilal Shukla himself became critics of India's reality and progenitors of Indian Realism, as they chose to present the situation through a common man's vision. The different ideologies clash when even the slightest discursive statement provokes perplexed reaction, and the overtly sensitive personality of an Indian is heavily influenced by the convalescent condition of India which is always present in Indian literary texts.

Indian realism differs from western realism as it does not identify itself with ethnocentric values and is always regarding itself with the Indian legacies and the ground and humble reality of our culture and norms. As Meenakshi Mukherjee argues, Indian realist techniques evolved in response to specific cultural and political conditions rather than through direct transplantation of Western literary methods. The illustration of Indian society in Post-Independence Literature is complemented by poignancy and intimate themes which evoke empathy for the characters within the novel as we have seen in Raag Darbari.

Shrilal Shukla's ingenious and anecdotal narrative covered everything that India is going through "from corruption in politics to inner corruption of people, amputated democracy to iron-fist rule, the deep-rooted problem of nepotism and the ever-emerging fascism while subtly presenting the voices of the unheard and familial problems and loss of human values which get mixed in the severe political issues.

Raag Darbari is a prime example of how modern Indian literature adapted realism with the colors of Indianness in it, which possesses the essence of India's search for its lost identity. By simultaneously employing Aristotelian dramatic structure, Shukla creates what can be termed "postcolonial satirical tragedy" "a uniquely Indian literary

form that achieves both social critique and aesthetic coherence.

This dual approach “combining Indian realist social documentation with classical dramatic structure” represents a significant innovation in postcolonial literature. It demonstrates how postcolonial writers can creatively synthesize diverse cultural and literary traditions to create new forms suited to their specific historical and cultural conditions. Majority of Indian texts can be analyzed through this lens, as it provides a framework for understanding how postcolonial literature operates through processes of cultural translation and creative adaptation while maintaining both critical power and aesthetic sophistication.

The success of this hybrid approach suggests broader implications for understanding postcolonial literary innovation. Rather than simply adopting either Western or Indian literary traditions, Raag Darbari creates new possibilities through their creative synthesis, enabling the novel to function simultaneously as realistic social documentation and aesthetically sophisticated literary art. This achievement makes it a cornerstone work in the development of postcolonial satirical realism and a model for how traditional forms can be adapted to address contemporary postcolonial conditions.

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