



“Unseeing Truths: Gandhari’s Blindness as Narrative Prosthesis in The Curse of Gandhari” by Aditi Banerjee

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Abstract— In Aditi Banerjee’s *The Curse of Gandhari*, Gandhari’s self-imposed blindness operates as a central narrative prosthesis, deeply influencing the development of her character and the thematic direction of the novel. Narrative prosthesis refers to the use of disability to advance the plot, reveal deeper meanings, or shape the trajectory of character development. Gandhari’s voluntary blindness serves multiple purposes—it reflects her internal conflict, symbolizes her moral dilemmas, and becomes a powerful metaphor for the blindness of power, fate, and maternal helplessness. This article examines how Gandhari’s blindness not only reflects her psychological state but also drives the narrative forward, making it an indispensable tool in the novel’s exploration of patriarchal restrictions, moral blindness, and the tragic weight of maternal responsibility.



Keywords— Gandhari- blindness- narrative prosthesis.

I. INTRODUCTION

Aditi Banerjee’s *The Curse of Gandhari* is a rich reimagining of one of the most enigmatic characters from the Mahabharata. Gandhari, the queen of Hastinapur, is best known for her self-imposed blindness, a decision she makes to share in her husband Dhritarashtra’s disability. However, Banerjee’s novel gives Gandhari a new depth, framing her blindness as a symbolic and narrative device that influences not only her personal journey but the overarching themes of the novel.

Narrative prosthesis, a concept developed by David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, refers to the use of disability as a narrative device that shapes character and plot development. In *The Curse of Gandhari*, Gandhari’s blindness is more than a physical disability—it becomes a metaphor for the emotional, moral, and social struggles she faces. This article explores how Gandhari’s blindness functions as a narrative prosthesis, driving the novel’s key themes of moral conflict, maternal grief, and resistance against patriarchal structures.

Gandhari’s Blindness: A Dual Symbol of Agency and Surrender

In *The Curse of Gandhari*, Gandhari’s decision to blindfold herself at the time of her marriage can be interpreted as both an act of agency and surrender. On the surface, it is a display of loyalty and devotion to her husband, but it also signifies a deeper psychological tension between her autonomy and the limitations imposed on her by her role as a wife and queen in a patriarchal society.

As a narrative prosthesis, Gandhari’s blindness reflects her personal sacrifice, but it also becomes a tool through which the novel explores her internalization of patriarchal values. By choosing to share Dhritarashtra’s blindness, Gandhari symbolically accepts her subordinate role in the royal household, even though she harbours a keen awareness of the moral and political corruption surrounding her. This act of blindness represents both a moral stance—loyalty to her husband—and a form of suppression, as Gandhari consciously shuts herself off from the painful truths of her life.

This blindness is crucial to the narrative, as it creates a constant tension between Gandhari’s internal knowledge and her external inaction. Psychoanalytically, this can be seen as a form of repression, where Gandhari’s physical

blindness mirrors her psychological attempt to distance herself from the difficult realities of her family's destructive actions.

II. BLINDNESS AS RESISTANCE TO PATRIARCHAL CONSTRAINTS

While Gandhari's blindness can be interpreted as a form of repression, it also serves as a subtle form of resistance. In a patriarchal society that imposes strict roles on women, Gandhari's decision to blindfold herself can be seen as a way of reclaiming agency. By voluntarily disabling herself, Gandhari exercises control over her own body and rejects the passive role expected of her as a queen. This act of self-imposed blindness is not merely an acceptance of her husband's condition, but a defiant rejection of the expectation that she must always "see" and conform to the moral and social codes of her society. By blindfolding herself, Gandhari creates a space of resistance—she refuses to witness the injustices around her, and in doing so, asserts her autonomy in a limited and symbolic way.

In the novel, her blindness functions as a narrative prosthesis that challenges the traditional roles of women in the epic. It allows the reader to view Gandhari not just as a passive victim of fate, but as a complex character who resists patriarchal norms, even as she is constrained by them. This tension between her resistance and her powerlessness is central to the novel's exploration of gender and power.

III. BLINDNESS AS PSYCHOLOGICAL REPRESSION

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Gandhari's blindness can also be understood as a form of repression. Freud's theory of repression suggests that individuals often push disturbing thoughts or desires into the unconscious to protect themselves from psychological pain. Gandhari's decision to blindfold herself can be seen as an unconscious effort to shield herself from the overwhelming emotions associated with her role as a wife, mother, and queen.

As a mother, Gandhari is acutely aware of the consequences of Duryodhana's actions, yet her blindness allows her to avoid confronting the full reality of his destructive path. By blinding herself, she represses her maternal guilt and her responsibility for the actions of her sons. Her disability becomes a defense mechanism, a way of coping with the unbearable burden of watching her family disintegrate while being unable to stop it.

This repression is critical to understanding Gandhari's character in the novel. While she is portrayed as wise and perceptive, her blindness—both literal and figurative—prevents her from taking decisive action. Her disability is thus a narrative prosthesis that enables the exploration of repression, guilt, and emotional detachment. The novel uses her blindness to show how her refusal to see the truth ultimately contributes to the tragic outcome of the war, positioning her as a passive observer of her own family's destruction.

IV. BLINDNESS AS MORAL BLINDNESS

A central theme in *The Curse of Gandhari* is the moral blindness that plagues the Kuru dynasty. Gandhari's physical blindness becomes a narrative tool to explore the larger theme of ethical and moral failure. By choosing to blindfold herself, Gandhari also blinds herself to the flaws in her sons, particularly Duryodhana. Throughout the novel, she remains torn between her maternal love for him and the knowledge that his actions will lead to the downfall of their family.

Gandhari's blindness thus becomes a metaphor for her inability to intervene in the moral decay that surrounds her. She is physically blind to her sons' faults, but her moral blindness is more significant—her inability to confront the unethical choices made by her family, particularly Duryodhana, who leads the Kauravas into the catastrophic war. This use of blindness as a narrative prosthesis is crucial, as it highlights Gandhari's tragic position: she is aware of the impending disaster but feels powerless to change it.

The novel uses her blindness to underscore the broader theme of moral compromise. Gandhari, despite her wisdom and intuition, is rendered passive in the face of her son's ambition. Her blindness serves to magnify her inner turmoil, as she grapples with the guilt of being unable to "see" and correct the moral failings that lead to the war. In this sense, her disability is not just a reflection of her personal struggle but a narrative device that embodies the moral blindness of those in power.

V. BLINDNESS AND THE TRAGEDY OF MATERNAL GRIEF

The culmination of Gandhari's blindness as narrative prosthesis is most evident in her profound grief after the war, when she loses all of her sons. Her blindness, which has shielded her from fully confronting their moral failings, now becomes a symbol of her deep emotional pain. As a mother, she is left to mourn the loss of her children, and her blindness amplifies the intensity of her suffering.

In her final act of cursing Krishna, Gandhari's blindness takes on a new role—it becomes a form of rage and despair. She holds Krishna responsible for the destruction of her family, and her curse is a powerful moment in the narrative where her blindness is no longer a passive disability, but an active force of judgment and condemnation. Her blindness, which had previously symbolized her inability to intervene, now becomes a vehicle for her grief and her desire for retribution.

The novel uses Gandhari's blindness to explore the theme of maternal grief, showing how her disability becomes both a shield and a weapon. Her curse on Krishna is an emotional outburst born from the pain of her loss, and her blindness intensifies the impact of this moment, making it a defining point in the novel's tragic arc.

VI. CONCLUSION

In *The Curse of Gandhari*, Gandhari's blindness functions as a powerful narrative prosthesis that shapes the novel's exploration of moral conflict, repression, and maternal grief. Her blindness is not merely a physical condition but a complex symbol that drives the plot and deepens the thematic concerns of the novel. Through Gandhari's disability, the novel examines the tension between agency and helplessness, resistance and surrender, and the tragic consequences of moral and emotional blindness.

Aditi Banerjee's portrayal of Gandhari reclaims her as a nuanced and tragic figure, whose blindness becomes the lens through which the novel's central themes of power, fate, and maternal responsibility are explored. Gandhari's blindness, both literal and metaphorical, is an indispensable narrative tool that underscores her internal struggles and the broader tragedy of the Mahabharata's catastrophic war.

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