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**ŚRĪ CAITANYA DEVA AS A
CONNOISSEUR OF SĀHITYA
ŚĀSTRA: A CRITICAL STUDY
OF THE PAÑCADOṢA AND
PAÑCĀLANKĀRA IN KEŚAVA
BHAṬṬA'S VERSE**

*Dr. Rakesh Das & Sri
Prolay Nandi*

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SAMĀDHI: REFRAMING
NRTTA IN THE
NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA THROUGH
YOGIC AND TANTRIC
FRAMEWORKS, WITH
EXTENSIONS TO
SOUTHEAST ASIAN DANCE
TRADITIONS"**

Ashwini Srivatsan

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Preface

Poorvam International Journal of Creative Arts and Cultural Expressions, Volume 2, Issue 1, goes into the world today, on the fifteenth of August, the eightieth anniversary of a svarāj that came, as Kṛṣṇacandra Bhattacharyya had already anticipated when he delivered "Svaraj in Ideas" as a lecture in 1928, in only one of the two senses that word demands. Political subjection is felt, he said, so it can be resisted. Cultural subjection is quieter. It begins the day a mind stops noticing that the ideas it recites are not its own. Eighty years on, the flag is settled. The other svarāj, the one Bhattacharyya meant when he spoke of ideas rather than land, is still being worked out, paper by paper, in journals like this one. It does not apply evenly to everything in this issue, and I have not tried to force it where it does not belong. But in a few of these papers it shows up clearly enough that I want to name it before handing the issue over to readers.

Dr. Rakesh Das and Sri Prolay Nandi open the issue with Śrī Caitanya's meeting with Keśava Bhaṭṭa on the banks of the Gaṅgā, where a single verse in the Śikharinī metre becomes the occasion for a full display of command over alaṅkāraśāstra, five doṣas and five alaṅkāras identified in one composition by a man remembered mostly as a devotional revolutionary. Prof. Susanta Kumar Bardhan follows with an ecolinguistic reading of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, counting the poem's own vocabulary word by word (fourteen instances of air, eighteen of water, against stony, dead, rock) to argue that the poem moves from the mechanized cruelty of the Unreal City toward the peace of shantih. It is careful, close, empirical work, and I mention it here simply as excellent literary criticism, not because it needs the frame above to justify itself. Ashwini Srivatsan's paper is the third in the issue and the second featured on this cover. Building on Piya Bhattacharya's work on embodiment in the Nāṭyaśāstra, she reads karaṇa and aṅgaḥāra not just as units of dance technique but as meditative structures, mapping sthāna to dhāraṇā, karaṇa to dhyāna, aṅgaḥāra to samādhi. Of the nine papers here, this is the one that comes closest to svarāj as Bhattacharyya meant it: a category examined from inside its own tradition, on its own terms, rather than translated into someone else's vocabulary to be taken seriously.

The middle of the issue turns to more openly literary and philosophical ground. Dr. Ritushree Sengupta writes on Rabisankar Bal's *Dozakhnama*, and the detail worth keeping in mind is that Bal deliberately avoids the Latin American and European conventions of magic realism and builds a mode he means to be specifically Bengali, letting Ghalib and Manto argue across a century in a narrative that refuses any single, settled version of the past. Dishari Chatterjee takes up niṣkāma karma in the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, and rather than dissolving the apparent contradiction in that phrase, she works through Arindam Chakrabarti's Nyāya-Kantian reading, in which the desire for mokṣa is not an ordinary desire at all, closing with the Gītā's own verse on acting without attachment to the fruit of action. Vishnu Mishra reads Vikram Balagopal's *Simian* and Samhita Arni and Moyna Chitrakar's *Sita's Ramayana*, and argues that retelling the epic in graphic form is not distortion but recognition, a way of letting Sita and Hanuman carry weight the received text never gave them room for. Pratichi Chowdhury reads *Stree* and *Bulbbul* against their own horror conventions and argues that the occult, in these

films, is the vocabulary through which women extract accountability from men who would otherwise face none.

Rajendrani Mukhopadhyay's paper on Byomkesh Bakshi is where the frame returns most plainly. She cites Pinaki Roy's observation that Bengali detective fiction moved from a peripheral position, always measured against Sherlock Holmes and his kind, to a new centrality of its own, built on its own sense of class, caste and nationality. Byomkesh's insistence on calling himself *satyānveṣī*, a truth-seeker rather than a detective, is read here as exactly that kind of refusal: a genre imported wholesale from elsewhere, made to answer to its own soil instead.

The issue closes with Nilambar Chakrabarti's review of *Subject as Freedom*, Nalini Bhushan and Jay Garfield's new translation of Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya's hardest book. It is a generous review, but not an uncritical one. Chakrabarti's real argument is that Bhushan and Garfield's Advaita "bookend" reading, however scholarly, may settle in advance what a text built on Bhattacharyya's own restless, tradition-departing vocabulary should be allowed to mean. It is a fitting question to end on. A journal that opened this preface under Bhattacharyya's idea of *svarāj* closes with a paper asking whether even Bhattacharyya's own thought has yet been given the freedom he wrote about.

I am grateful, as always, to the Editorial Board, to the peer reviewers whose work stays invisible in these pages but decides what stands in them, and to every author who trusted PIJCACE with work that could easily have gone elsewhere.

Amritanath Bhattacharya

Editor-in-Chief, PIJCACE

August 2026

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Śrī Caitanya Deva as a Connoisseur of Sāhitya Śāstra: A Critical Study of the Pañcadoṣa and Pañcālāṅkāra in Keśava Bhaṭṭa's Verse

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Abstract:

Śrī Caitanya Deva, revered in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition as the combined manifestation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Rādhā, is widely recognized for his philosophical contributions and devotional movement. This article highlights a less-explored dimension of his genius—his profound mastery of *Sāhitya Śāstra* (literary theory and poetics)—through a critical examination of his scholarly encounter with the Kashmirian digvijayī scholar Keśava Bhaṭṭa, as detailed in Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta and Caitanya Bhāgavata. During their meeting on the banks of the Gaṅgā, Keśava Bhaṭṭa, renowned for his extemporaneous composition (*ghaṭikāśataka*), composed one hundred verses glorifying the Gaṅgā. Caitanya selected one verse in the *Śikharinī* metre and subjected it to a masterful critique based on the principles of *Alaṅkāraśāstra*. He identified five poetic defects (*pañcadoṣa*)—two instances of *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṁśa*, *viruddhamatikṛt*, *bhagnakrama*, and *punarātta*—and five literary ornaments (*pañcālāṅkāra*): *anuprāsa* (alliteration), *punaruktavadābhāsa*, *upamā* (simile), *virodhābhāsa* (semblance of contradiction), and *anumāna* (inference). The article provides detailed definitions and textual analysis of each doṣa and alaṅkāra, drawing from authoritative texts like *Sāhityadarpaṇa* and *Alaṅkāraśāstra*. It demonstrates how Caitanya's analysis reveals both the aesthetic strengths and compositional flaws of the verse, underscoring the primacy of doṣa-guṇa vicāra (critical evaluation of defects and merits) in poetic composition. This episode not only affirms Caitanya's extraordinary erudition in Sanskrit poetics alongside grammar and philosophy but also

exemplifies his humility and spiritual magnetism, which ultimately led to Keśava Bhaṭṭa's surrender. The study thus illuminates Caitanya's multifaceted brilliance as a consummate connoisseur of Sāhitya Śāstra.

Keywords: Caitanya, Gaudiya Philosophy, Gaudiya Poetics, Caitanya-caritamṛta

1. Introduction

In Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava doctrine, Śrī Caitanya Deva is regarded as an avatāra of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who descended in the *Kali Yuga* bearing the spiritual disposition (*bhāva*) and complexion (*kānti*) of Rādhāⁱ. In this connection, Gosvāmī Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, in his celebrated work *Śrī Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, has cited two verses from the *Viṣṇusahasranāma Stotra* from the *Mahābhārata*ⁱⁱ. While there remains scholarly disagreement regarding the question of Caitanya Deva's *avatāra* status, his extraordinary erudition in Sanskrit scriptural literature has been acknowledged without dissent across traditions. References to his scriptural discussions with various *śāstrakāras*—learned authorities on sacred texts—are found in numerous biographical works dedicated to his life. Śrī Caitanya Deva was, by all accounts, among the most distinguished scholars of his time, even though he did not undertake the customary *digvijaya*—the triumphal tour of intellectual conquest prevalent among learned men of that period. Nevertheless, accounts of his doctrinal and exegetical exchanges with various scholars on different occasions are attested in multiple sources.

Although references to various compositions attributed to Caitanya Deva are found in the available sources, only a single poem of his has survived to the present day. Nonetheless, that single poem containing 8 verses shows not only his deep erudition of Philosophy and rhetoric but also his poetic brilliance. An intense study of his poem *Śikṣāṣṭakam* allows us to form a partial estimate of his remarkable scholarly depth. Śrī Caitanya Deva is widely recognized as the propounder of the *Acintyabhedābheda* views of the *Vedānta* and is held in particular esteem within philosophical circles. However, the concern of the present article is not his philosophical contributions but rather his command over *Sāhitya Śāstra*. He was notably proficient in the discipline of *Sāhitya Śāstra* alongside his mastery of grammar (*Vyākaraṇa*) and philosophy (*Darśana*). This dimension of his intellectual formation comes to the

fore in the account of his scholarly dialogue with Keśava Bhaṭṭa of Kashmir.

A detailed account of this episode is found in verses 26 through 108 of the sixteenth chapter of the *Ādi Līlā* of Śrī Śrī Caitanya *Caritāmṛta*. In addition to this, Śrīla Vṛndāvana Dāsa has also provided an elaborate description of the same episode in his *magnum opus Caitanya Bhāgavata*ⁱⁱⁱ. He records that Śrī Caitanya Deva was endowed with extraordinary intellectual gifts from his very childhood^{iv}, and that his reputation for profound scholarship had spread widely among learned communities far and near. Whenever he was present in any scholarly assembly, all those gathered would accept his views without contest or deliberation. It was as though, by some ineffable power of *māyā*, everyone present remained wholly under his influence. Without his own bestowal of grace, no one possessed the capacity to comprehend him in any adequate or meaningful sense^v. In this manner, he presided as the central figure—the *madhyamaṇi*—centerpiece—in every assembly he attended.

In his *catuṣpāthī*—the traditional residential school of learning—Śrī Caitanya primarily taught the *Kalāpa Vyākaraṇa*^{vi}. One evening during the bright fortnight of the lunar month, Śrī Caitanya was seated on the bank of the *Gaṅgā*, engaged in some discussion with his disciples, when the *digvijayī*—the triumphant scholar—Keśava Bhaṭṭa arrived at that place. Many scholars commonly refer to Grammar as *bālaśāstra*, a subject for the children, as it is an elementary discipline, on the grounds that its study constitutes the foundational preparation necessary before one proceeds to the study of other branches of learning. Within the domain of grammar itself, the *Kalāpa* system is considered comparatively easier. Keśava Bhaṭṭa had come to know of this through common report. He was of the considered opinion that only one who is proficient across multiple branches of *śāstra* may rightly be regarded as a true *paṇḍita*; the possession of knowledge in merely one or two disciplines does not, in his view, warrant the conferral of such a distinction. For this reason, Keśava Bhaṭṭa did not regard Nimāi Paṇḍita, the teacher of grammar, as anything more than an ordinary teacher of a *catuṣpāthī*. It was in this frame of mind that, upon observing Śrī Caitanya engaged in a discussion of *Kalāpa* with his disciples, Keśava Bhaṭṭa remarked in a tone of evident condescension that one who teaches so elementary a text as the *Kalāpa* grammar could scarcely be accorded the title of *paṇḍita*^{vii}.

Remaining entirely unperturbed by Keśava Bhaṭṭa's dismissive remark, Śrī Caitanya outwardly appeared to concede his point and expressed, with studied humility, an acknowledgement of his own limited learning. He then proceeded to lavish considerable praise upon Keśava Bhaṭṭa and requested him to compose verses in glorification of the greatness of the Gaṅgā. Keśava Bhaṭṭa was a *ghaṭikāśataka*—one renowned for the extraordinary feat of composing a hundred verses extemporaneously within a single *ghaṭikā*, that is, within the span of twenty-four minutes^{viii}—and true to his reputation, he proceeded to compose a hundred verses in rapid succession, with the swiftness of a storm.

From among those hundred verses, Caitanya Deva selected one and asked Keśava Bhaṭṭa to elaborate upon its meaning. The verse in question reads as follow—

*Mahattvaṃ Gaṅgāyāḥ satatam idam ābhāti nitarāṃ
yad eṣā Śrī-Viṣṇoścaraṇa-kamalotpatti-subhagā.
Dvitiya-Śrī-Lakṣmīr iva sura-narair arcyā-caraṇā
Bhavānī-bhartur yā śirasī vibhavaty adbhuta-guṇā.*

The greatness of the Gaṅgā shines forth eternally and with particular brilliance, for she is most blessed in having her origin at the lotus feet of Śrī Viṣṇu. Venerated at her feet by deities and men alike, as though she were a second Śrī Lakṣmī, she of wondrous attributes rests in glory upon the husband of the lord of Bhavānī—that is, Śiva himself.

Keśava Bhaṭṭa was struck with astonishment upon hearing the flawless recitation^{ix} of a verse selected from the hundred compositions he had just extemporaneously produced^x. He proceeded to expound upon the meaning of the verse in the following manner—the glory of the Gaṅgā shines forth perpetually and without doubt: she who is supremely blessed by virtue of her origin at the lotus feet of Śrī Viṣṇu; she at whose feet both deities and mortals offer their veneration, even as they would at the feet of a second Lakṣmī; she who, resting upon the head of Bhavānī's lord—that is, Mahādeva himself—has come to be endowed with qualities of wondrous excellence. Such is the Gaṅgā, whose greatness remains resplendent and undiminished at all times.

Having listened to the exposition of the verse's meaning, Caitanya Deva requested Keśava Bhaṭṭa to undertake a critical evaluation of the poetic merits and defects (*guṇa* and *doṣa*) present

within it, in accordance with the principles of *Alaṅkāraśāstra* (rhetoric and poetics). Keśava Bhaṭṭa replied that his verse was entirely free from even the slightest trace of any poetic defect, and that it contained, on the contrary, several figures of speech (*alaṅkāra*) such as *upamā* (simile), *anuprāsa* (alliteration), along with certain recognised *guṇas*. It was in this very context that he directed a pointed remark at Śrī Caitanya, asserting that one who confines himself exclusively to the study of grammar could by no means be capable of evaluating the merits and defects of a poetic composition in accordance with the canons of *Alaṅkāraśāstra*. He further maintained that the verse in question represented the very essence of all poetic composition, and that any attempt to identify defects within it was therefore wholly without justification. In response to this, Caitanya calmly observed that the said verse contained five instances of poetic defect (*doṣa*) and five instances of *alaṅkāras*^{xi}, and proceeded to enumerate them in due order.

2. The Five Defects (*Pañcadoṣa*)

In the course of his critical analysis of the verse composed by Keśava Bhaṭṭa, Caitanya identified five distinct instances of poetic defect. In the technical vocabulary of *Sāhityaśāstra*, a defect (*doṣa*) is defined as anything that creates hurdles in relishing (*āsvādana*) the *rasa*^{xii}. Of the five defects identified in the said verse, two instances involve the defect known as *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṁśa*, while the remaining three consist respectively of *viruddhamatikṛt*, *bhagnakrama*, and *punarātta*^{xiii}. An attempt will be made in the following discussion to examine the defining characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of each of these defects in the light of *Sāhityaśāstra*, and to trace their occurrence within the verse in detail.

The verse has been composed in the *Śikharinī*^{xiv} metre. Within this verse, the expressions "*Mahattvaṃ Gaṅgāyāḥ idam*" and "*Dvītiya-Śrī-Lakṣmīḥ*" have been identified as bearing the defect of *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṁśa*. The compound "*Bhavānī-bhartuḥ*" has been found to carry the defect of *viruddhamatikṛt*; the construction "*yad eṣā*" and related expressions have been noted as instances of *bhagnakrama*; and the phrase "*adbhuta-guṇā*" and its contextual usage have been identified as exhibiting the defect of *punarātta*.

2.1 The Defect of *Avimṛṣṭavidheyāṁśa*

The first defect that Caitanya Deva identified in the course of his analysis of the verse composed by the *digvijayī* scholar Keśava Bhaṭṭa is that of *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṁśa*. The *Sāhityadarpaṇa* defines this

defect as "*vidheyasya vimarśābhāvena guṇībhūtatvam avimṛṣṭavidheyāṃśattvam*"^{xv}— that is to say, the defect of *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṃśa* arises when the element that constitutes the principal predicate or the primary assertion (*vidheya*) of a sentence is not accorded its due prominence but is instead expressed in a subordinate or secondary manner, owing to an absence of proper deliberation (*vimarśa*) regarding its placement. In the technical framework of *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, that which is already known to the reader or listener is designated as *anuvāda*, while that which is new or unknown constitutes the *vidheya*. According to the established canons of literary theory, the natural and correct order of composition requires that the *anuvāda* be stated first and the *vidheya* follow thereafter. When this natural order is disrupted—that is, when the *vidheya* precedes the *anuvāda*—the defect of *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṃśa* is said to occur.

In the verse beginning "*Mahattvam Gaṅgāyāḥ*", Keśava Bhaṭṭa has undertaken a description of the greatness of the Gaṅgā. However, without prior knowledge of the complete purport of the verse, the precise nature of the greatness being attributed to the Gaṅgā does not become immediately apparent to the reader at the outset. Consequently, the word "*mahattva*" functions here as the *vidheya*^{xvi}—the predicate conveying something as yet unknown to the reader. The subsequent portion of the verse then proceeds to elaborate upon the specific nature of this greatness, and it is on this ground that Caitanya has referred to this "*mahattva*" as the "*mūla vidheya*"—the primary or root predicate. The term "*mūla vidheya*" denotes that predicate which bears the principal assertion or the central significance of the sentence as a whole. Alternatively, the *vidheyāṃśa*—the predicative element—holds primacy by virtue of its being the most essential and meaningful component of the statement, the one most worthy of being received and attended to. It is precisely in order to underscore this primacy of the predicative element that the *vidheya* in this instance has been designated as the "*mūla vidheya*".

On the other hand, the word "*idam*" in the verse points to something already known, and therefore functions as the *anuvāda*. According to the prescriptions of *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, the proper order of composition requires that the *anuvāda* appear first and the *vidheya* follow thereafter. In the present verse, however, the reverse has occurred—the *vidheya* "*mahattva*" appears first, and the *anuvāda* "*idam*" follows subsequently. As a consequence of this inversion, the predicative element—the *vidheyāṃśa*—has been rendered

subordinate, and the defect of *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṃśa* has thereby arisen. This compositional irregularity further results in an impediment to the clear and immediate apprehension of meaning within the verse^{xvii}.

A second instance of the defect of *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṃśa* is also found in the verse at the expression "*Dvitiya-Śrī-Lakṣmīḥ*". The fact that Śrī Lakṣmī Devī is the consort residing on the lap of Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa, and that she is venerated by both gods and men, is a matter of common knowledge. The word "*Śrī-Lakṣmī*" therefore functions here as the *anuvāda*. The precise import of the word "*dvitiya*"—meaning "second"—however, is not immediately apparent and remains unknown to the reader prior to its explication. It is on this ground that the word "*dvitiya*" constitutes the *vidheya* in this context. Keśava Bhaṭṭa has compounded the two words "*dvitiya*" and "*Śrī-Lakṣmī*" into the single compound expression "*Dvitiya-Śrī-Lakṣmī*", and the phrase "*Dvitiya-Śrī-Lakṣmīr iva*" in the verse accordingly yields the meaning "like a second Śrī-Lakṣmī". In the proper order of composition, the *vidheya* "*dvitiya*" ought to have followed the *anuvāda* "*Śrī-Lakṣmī*". However, by virtue of the demands of *samāsa* (compound formation) the word "*dvitiya*" has come to precede "*Śrī-Lakṣmī*", and it is this inversion, brought about through compounding, that has given rise to the defect of *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṃśa*.

In general terms, the defect of *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṃśa* arises whenever the principal or predicative element of a sentence is expressed in a subordinate or secondary manner. In the verse of the learned Keśava Bhaṭṭa, we observe that this defect has manifested at two distinct points—in the expressions "*Mahattvaṃ Gaṅgāyāḥ satatam idam*" and "*Dvitiya-Śrī-Lakṣmīḥ*". What is particularly noteworthy in this connection is that of these two instances, one involves a *samāsa* (a compound formation) while the other does not. This distinction serves to illustrate that the subordination of the primary element may be brought about either through the mechanism of *samāsa* or through an alteration in the natural order of words (*padakrama*) within a sentence. The *Alaṅkāraustubha*, which holds the status of one of the principal authoritative texts on *Sāhityaśāstra* within the Gauḍīya tradition, contains a substantial discussion of the subordination of the primary element through *samāsa* and presents several illustrative examples of the resultant defect of *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṃśa*^{xviii}.

At this point, a problem of meaning (*artha*) has also arisen alongside the defect of *avimrṣṭavidheyāṃśa*. The expression "*suranarair arcya-caraṇā*" in the verse conveys that Gaṅgā Devī, like Śrī Lakṣmī Devī, is venerated at her feet by both gods and men. It is evident, therefore, that Keśava Bhaṭṭa's intention was to present the Gaṅgā as the equal of Lakṣmī—to establish a correspondence of status between the two. Had he instead constructed the phrase as "*Śrī-Lakṣmīr dvitīyā iva*", the intended meaning—that the Gaṅgā is the equal of Lakṣmī—would have been expressed with clarity and precision, and the defect of *avimrṣṭavidheyāṃśa* would not have arisen. The inversion brought about through compound formation has thus simultaneously compromised both the structural propriety of the verse and the transparent communication of its intended sense.

However, the use of "*Dvitiya-Śrī-Lakṣmīr iva*" has not succeeded in conveying the intended equality between the Gaṅgā and Lakṣmī with any degree of adequacy. What the expression in fact communicates is rather the sense that "the Gaṅgā is like a second Lakṣmī"—and the designation "*dvitīya Lakṣmī*", or "second Lakṣmī", does not refer to Lakṣmī herself but rather to some other entity who possesses qualities resembling those of Lakṣmī. As a consequence, instead of establishing a correspondence of equality with Lakṣmī, the expression inadvertently suggests a kind of secondariness or diminution—implying that the Gaṅgā is not Lakṣmī's equal but merely her likeness. Thus, the compounded use of the word "*dvitīya*" has produced a twofold adverse effect—on the one hand, it has given rise to the defect of *avimrṣṭavidheyāṃśa*, and on the other, it has undermined the very sense of equality between the Gaṅgā and Lakṣmī that the poet had intended to establish^{xix}. The result is that the intended meaning has been rendered secondary and the primary expression of the poet's *bhāva* (central emotive intent) has been obstructed and impaired.

2.2 The Defect of *Viruddhamatikṛt*

In the said verse, Caitanya has identified the defect of *viruddhamatikṛt* in the compound expression "*Bhavānī-bhartuḥ*"^{xx}. The term "*viruddhamatikṛt*" literally signifies "that which generates a contrary or adverse understanding." The rhetoricians (*alaṅkārikas*) have defined this *doṣa* as—"prakṛtārtha-jñāna-pratibandhibhūta-aprakṛtārtha-jñāna-janakattvam"^{xxi}—that is to say, *viruddhamatikṛt* arises when a word or expression, by virtue of its syntactic

connection (*anvaya*) with other words in the sentence, produces a meaning that is contrary to or in conflict with the intended or primary meaning, and thereby acts as an impediment to the apprehension of that intended meaning. In other words, when the association of words within a construction leads the reader towards an understanding that runs counter to what the poet actually sought to convey, the defect of *viruddhamatikṛt* is held to have occurred.

The presence of this defect is discernible in the compound expression "*Bhavānī-bhartuḥ*" in the said verse. Here, a *ṣaṣṭhī tatpuruṣa samāsa* has been formed, carrying the meaning "the lord of Bhavānī." The etymological sense of the word "*Bhavānī*" is the consort of "*Bhava*" (Mahādeva), while the word "*bhartā*" signifies husband or lord. The compound "*Bhavānī-bhartā*" thus literally yields the meaning 'the husband of Śiva's consort'. This construction inadvertently generates the suggestion of another husband of Bhavānī, distinct from Bhava or Mahādeva himself. In common understanding, upon hearing a construction such as 'the husband of Śiva's wife', the mind is naturally led to entertain the impression that Bhavānī has a husband other than Śiva—an implication that is entirely contrary to the intended and actual meaning. In reality, Bhavānī has no husband other than Śiva or Mahādeva; he alone is her consort. The expressions 'the husband of Śiva's wife' or 'the husband of Bhavānī' thus produce a meaning that runs directly counter to the true and intended sense^{xxii}. It is precisely because of the syntactic connection (*anvaya*) between the word "*Bhavānī*" and the word "*bhartṛ*" that this contrary understanding is generated, and it is on this ground that the defect of *viruddhamatikṛt* is held to be present here.

Words that, like "*Bhavānī-bhartṛ*", carry the potential to generate a contrary or adverse sense ought to be avoided in the construction of sentences. Caitanya has furnished an analogous example to illustrate this point—"brāhmaṇa-patnīr bhartār haste deha dāna", meaning "give into the hands of the husband of the brahmin's wife." The intended purport of this sentence is that one should make a gift into the hands of the husband of a brahmin woman. However, the expression "*brāhmaṇa-patnīr bhartā*"^{xxiii}— 'the husband of the brahmin's wife'—inadvertently gives rise to the impression that the brahmin woman has a husband other than the brahmin himself, which is, of course, contrary to fact. In precisely the same manner, the use of "*Bhavānī-bhartā*" is liable to generate the erroneous impression that Bhavānī has a husband other than

Bhava or Mahādeva, even though no such reality exists. It is owing to this very possibility of an adverse or contradictory apprehension of meaning being generated in the reader's mind that the defect of *viruddhamatikṛt* is identified at the said point in the verse.

In general terms, the defect of *viruddhamatikṛt* arises when a word or expression, by virtue of its syntactic connection (*anvaya*) with certain other words or expressions, produces a meaning that is contrary to or in conflict with the intended sense. This is the primary condition under which this defect is held to occur. However, in certain instances, the defect may also manifest when a word is employed in an uncommon or non-prevalent sense (*aprasiddha artha*). In such cases, readers tend naturally to receive the more familiar and commonly accepted meaning of the word, which may happen to be undesirable or contrary to the poet's intention, and it is this reception of an unintended sense that gives rise to the defect of *viruddhamatikṛt*. The *Alaṅkāraśāstra* contains an extended discussion of this matter, accompanied by illustrative examples, which elaborates upon the various conditions under which this defect may be said to occur^{xxiv}.

2.3 The Defect of *Punarātta*

In the expression "*vibhavatyadbhuta-guṇā*" occurring in the aforementioned verse, Caitanya has identified the defect of *punarātta*^{xxv}. According to *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, this defect arises when, after a sentence has already been rendered complete through the mutual syntactic connection (*anvaya*) of its constituent elements—such as verbs, *kāraṅkas* or case relations, and adjectives—an additional word that bears a relation to one already present within that completed sentence is introduced once again^{xxvi}. In other words, when a sentence that is structurally and semantically self-sufficient is further extended through the superfluous addition of a related word or expression, the defect known as *punarātta* is held to have occurred. The essential condition for this defect, therefore, is the redundant introduction of a term whose semantic function has already been adequately discharged by the existing constituents of the sentence.

In the expression "*vibhavatyadbhuta-guṇā*" occurring in the said verse, the verb "*vibhavati*" is present. This verb enters into syntactic connection (*anvaya*) with the relative pronoun "*yā*" found in the expression "*Bhavānī-bhartur yā śīrasi*", thereby forming the complete sentence "*yā Bhavānī-bhartuḥ śīrasi vibhavati*"—meaning

"she who resides upon the head of Mahādeva." It is evident here that the sentence attains full grammatical and semantic completion through the verb "*vibhavati*" alone. However, the adjective "*adbhuta-guṇā*"—meaning "endowed with wondrous qualities"—has been appended thereafter, functioning as a qualifier of the relative pronoun "*yā*" already present in the completed sentence. Since this adjectival expression "*adbhuta-guṇā*" has been introduced after the sentence has already achieved its completion, its addition constitutes a superfluous extension of a structurally self-sufficient construction. It is on account of this redundant application of the adjective "*adbhuta-guṇā*" subsequent to the conclusion of the sentence that the defect of *punarātta* is held to have arisen at this point in the verse.

The meaning of a sentence is rendered complete through the mutual syntactic connection (*anvaya*) of its constituent elements—verbs, *kāraṅgas*, adjectives, and the like. If, even after such completion, a further word that stands in syntactic relation to any element already present within the sentence is introduced, the defect of *punarātta* is held to arise. However, certain exceptional circumstances are also recognised in this regard. In the course of its discussion of this defect, the *Alaṅkāraustubha* states that repetition does not constitute a defect in the following contexts—*vivāda* (debate or dispute), *vismaya* (astonishment), *harṣa* (joy), *kopa* (anger), *daiṇya* (humility or distress), *avadhāraṇa* (emphasis or affirmation), *prasādana* (propitiation or appeasement), *uddeśya-pratinirdeśya* (the relation between subject and predicate in a definitional statement), and *anukramya* (sequential enumeration), among others^{xxvii}. That is to say, in these particular contexts, even if repetition is present, it is not to be regarded as a poetic defect. The *Alaṅkāraustubha* contains an extended and detailed discussion of this matter, supported by illustrative examples^{xxviii}.

2.4 The Defect of *Bhagnakrama*

In the course of his analysis of the aforementioned verse, Caitanya has also identified the defect of *bhagnakrama*^{xxix}. According to *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, this defect arises when the order or compositional pattern (*krama*) adopted at the outset of a literary composition is disrupted or broken in the subsequent portions of that composition^{xxx}. In other words, when a consistent mode or arrangement is not maintained throughout a piece of writing from beginning to end, the defect of *bhagnakrama* is held to occur. The

underlying principle here is one of structural and stylistic consistency—any deviation from the pattern initially established within a composition, without adequate justification, constitutes a breach of compositional propriety and gives rise to this defect.

A verse (*śloka*) typically consists of four *pādas* or metrical quarters. The verse under discussion likewise comprises four *pādas*. The first *pāda* extends from "*Mahattvaṃ Gaṅgāyāḥ*" to "*nitārām*"; the second from "*yad eṣā*" to "*subhagā*"; the third from "*dvitīya*" to "*caraṇā*"; and the fourth from "*Bhavānī-bhartuḥ*" to "*adbhuta-guṇā*". An examination of the verse reveals that the ornament of *anuprāsa* (alliteration) is present in the first, third, and fourth *pādas*. Specifically, the first *pāda* carries the alliteration of the consonant "*ta*", the third *pāda* that of "*ra*", and the fourth *pāda* that of "*bha*". The second *pāda*, however, contains no such alliterative pattern. Thus, while alliteration is consistently present across three of the four *pādas*, its absence in the second *pāda* disrupts the continuity and stylistic coherence of the composition as a whole. In other words, the verse has not been constructed in a uniform manner throughout. It is on this ground that the defect of *bhagnakrama*—pertaining specifically to a disruption of sequential or stylistic regularity—is identified in the verse.

Had alliteration been present in the second *pāda* as well, or alternatively, had no *pāda* in the verse employed alliteration at all, this inconsistency would not have arisen and there would have been no occasion for the defect of *bhagnakrama* to manifest.

In the instance discussed above, the defect of *bhagnakrama* has arisen on account of a disruption in the sequential pattern of *alaṅkāra*. In a similar manner, this defect may also manifest when there is a breach in the established sequence with respect to *kāraṇas* (grammatical case relations), *vacana* (number) and *paryāya* (systematic arrangement or gradation) among other elements^{xxx}. The *Alaṅkāraustubha* contains a discussion of several illustrative examples pertaining to these varying conditions under which *bhagnakrama* may occur^{xxxii}. A further distinguishing characteristic of this defect is also worth noting in this connection—where no discernible order or pattern has been established from the very outset of a composition, the defect of *bhagnakrama* does not arise^{xxxiii}. The defect presupposes the prior establishment of a consistent pattern; it is only the subsequent disruption of such an established pattern that constitutes the breach referred to as *bhagnakrama*.

In the course of his analysis of the aforementioned verse, Caitanya not only identified various defects at five distinct points but also pointed out the presence of five *alaṅkāras* within the same verse. However, he made it evident that owing to the defects enumerated above, the aesthetic beauty of these five *alaṅkāras* had not been able to manifest with the fullness and clarity that they might otherwise have achieved. In other words, although the ornaments are indeed present within the verse, their inherent qualities and expressive efficacy have been considerably diminished by the predominance of the identified defects^{xxxiv}. This critical observation reflects a fundamental principle of *Sāhityaśāstra*—that the mere presence of *alaṅkāra* within a composition does not in itself guarantee aesthetic excellence, for defects, when they prevail, have the capacity to impair and overshadow the very ornaments that are meant to enhance the beauty of a literary work.

In this connection, Caitanya has furnished an illuminating analogy^{xxxv}—just as a beautiful body, however adorned with numerous ornaments, is considered blemished and worthy of censure if it bears even a single mark of leucoderma (*śvetakuṣṭha*), so too a verse, however richly embellished with multiple *alaṅkāras*, may have the cumulative beauty of those very ornaments undermined and compromised if even a single defect is present within it. The analogy is instructive in its implications—the presence of ornamentation, however abundant, does not render a composition immune to the adverse effects of a defect; on the contrary, a solitary defect possesses the capacity to detract from the overall aesthetic effect of the entire composition, much as a single blemish on an otherwise beautiful form diminishes the very splendour that the ornaments were intended to enhance.

3. The Five Ornaments (*Pañca Alaṅkāra*)

The five *alaṅkāras* identified in the verse under discussion are—*anuprāsa*, *punaruktavadābhāsa*, *upamā*, *virodhābhāsa*, and *anumāna*. Of these, the first two belong to the category of *śabdālaṅkāra*—ornaments that operate primarily at the level of sound—while the remaining three are *arthālaṅkāras*—ornaments that function at the level of meaning^{xxxvi}. Each of these will now be taken up for detailed discussion in the order in which they have been enumerated.

3.1 Anuprāsa

The *Anuprāsa* is present in the first, third, and fourth *pādas* of the verse under discussion^{xxxvii}. Etymologically, "*anu*" signifies "after"

or "following", and "*prāsa*" denotes "placing" or "setting down" in an excellent manner—thus *anuprāsa* refers to the placement of one consonant of a particular class immediately after another consonant of the same class^{xxxviii}. The *Sāhityadarpaṇa* defines *Anuprāsa* as—"*anuprāsaḥ śabdāsāmyaṃ vaiśamye'pi svarasya yat*^{xxxix}"—that is, *Anuprāsa* consists in the creation of a similarity of sound through the repetition of consonants, even when the vowels accompanying those consonants differ from one another. It is the similarity of consonants, rather than that of vowels, which is accorded primary significance here, and it is precisely this consonantal correspondence that produces a particular kind of aesthetic charm and delight within a poetic composition. The repeated occurrence of consonants of the same class generates a musical resonance within the verse that constitutes the essential beauty of this ornament.

The application of the *Anuprāsa* is clearly discernible in three *pādas* of the aforementioned verse. In the first *pāda*—"*Mahattvaṃ Gaṅgāyāḥ satatam idamābhāti nitarāṃ*"—a similarity of sound has been created through the multiple repetition of the consonant "*ta*". In the third *pāda*—"*Dvītīya-Śrī-Lakṣmīr iva sura-narair arcya-caraṇā*"—an analogous phonetic correspondence is produced through the repeated occurrence of the consonant "*ra*". In a similar manner, the fourth *pāda*—"*Bhāvānī-bhartur yā śirasi vibhavaty adbhuta-guṇā*"—exhibits a noticeable repetition of the consonant "*bha*", which occurs four times within the *pāda*. As a consequence of this repeated consonantal occurrence, a similarity of sound has been achieved through the recurrence of the consonant, notwithstanding the variation in the accompanying vowels. Since the consonants beginning with "*ta*" and related sounds recur repeatedly across the verse, the specific variety of *Anuprāsa* that has manifested here is *Vṛtṭyanuprāsa*—that form of alliteration which is characterised by the repeated recurrence of the same consonant or consonantal cluster multiple times within a given stretch of composition.

In general terms, consonantal similarity has been referred to here as *Anuprāsa*. However, such similarity may occur either once or multiple times within a given composition. It is on the basis of this difference in the frequency of recurrence that *anuprāsa* is further divided into two subcategories—*Chekānuprāsa* and *Vṛtṭyanuprāsa*. When a particular arrangement of consonants of the same class occurs only once, it constitutes *Chekānuprāsa*^{xl}. When this *Chekānuprāsa* is further realised through consonants that are

expressive of sweetness and grace, it is designated as *Upanāgarikā vṛtti*^{xi}. On the other hand, when a single consonant or a group of consonants recurs repeatedly in a habitual or systematic pattern, the ornament that arises is *Vṛtṭyanuprāsa*^{xiii}. In the aforementioned verse of Keśava Bhaṭṭa, since consonants beginning with "ta" and related sounds recur more than once in a pattern of consonantal similarity, the variety of *anuprāsa* that has manifested in the verse is *vṛtṭyanuprāsa*.

3.2 Punaruktavadābhāsa

In the expression "*Śrī-Lakṣmī*" occurring in the verse under discussion, Caitanya has identified the *Punaruktavadābhāsa*^{xliii}. According to *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, *Punaruktavadābhāsa* arises when two words are employed in a sentence that appear at first glance to be synonymous with one another—giving the impression that the same meaning has been repeated—but which are, in actuality, used in distinct and different senses^{xliv}. In other words, *Punaruktavadābhāsa* denotes that condition in which the repetition of meaning appears to have occurred but has not in fact done so. The term itself is instructive in this regard—"punarukta" signifies repetition, "vad" signifies resemblance or appearance, and "ābhāsa" denotes a semblance or illusion—thus the compound yields the sense of "that which has the appearance or semblance of repetition without actually being so"^{xlv}. In general, this *alaṅkāra* is produced through the deliberate use of different words that create such an impression of apparent semantic redundancy, while in reality each word contributes a distinct shade of meaning to the composition.

The expression "*Śrī-Lakṣmī*" in the said verse serves as an instance of the ornament of *Punaruktavadābhāsa*. One of the recognised meanings of the word "*Śrī*" is "*Lakṣmī*". Consequently, upon encountering the compound "*Śrī-Lakṣmī*", it appears at first glance as though the word "*Lakṣmī*" has been uttered twice—once through the word "*Śrī*" and once again through the word "*Lakṣmī*" itself. In this manner, if the meaning of "*Śrī*" is taken to be "*Lakṣmī*", the compound "*Śrī-Lakṣmī*" appears to contain two synonymous words, giving the impression that the same meaning has been repeated. In reality, however, no such repetition has occurred. This is because the word "*Śrī*" has not been employed in the sense of "*Lakṣmī*" in this particular context, but rather in the sense of "beauty" or "radiance" (*śobhā*). Viewed from this perspective, the compound "*Śrī-Lakṣmī*" yields the meaning "Lakṣmī endowed with

beauty" or "the resplendent Lakṣmī." The two words "Śrī" and "Lakṣmī" are therefore not genuinely synonymous here but have been employed in distinct senses. For this reason, no actual defect of repetition (*Punaruktadoṣa*) has occurred. Nevertheless, since the semblance or appearance of repetition presents itself to the reader at first encounter, the ornament of *Punaruktavadābhāsa* is held to have manifested at this point in the verse.

The ornament of *Punaruktavadābhāsa* generally involves the use of two apparently synonymous words, giving rise to the impression that the same meaning has been repeated. As in the verse under discussion, the two words "Śrī" and "Lakṣmī"—appearing to be synonymous—seem to reiterate one another, thereby creating the impression that the meaning of "Lakṣmī" has been expressed twice over. In the course of the discussion pertaining to this ornament, the *Alaṅkāraustubha*—an authoritative text of the Gauḍīya tradition—states that *Punaruktavadābhāsa* may be of two kinds, namely *śabdaniṣṭha* and *śabdārthanīṣṭha*^{xlvi}. Where only two synonymous words appear to be repeated while no actual repetition of meaning occurs, the ornament that arises is designated as *śabdaniṣṭha Punaruktavadābhāsa*^{xlvi}—that is, a semblance of repetition that resides purely at the level of the word itself. In this variety, the impression of redundancy is generated solely through the phonetic or lexical proximity of the two words employed, without any corresponding duplication at the level of meaning.

On the other hand, where the semblance of repetition extends beyond the level of the word and manifests at the level of meaning as well—that is, where both the words and their meanings appear to have been repeated—the ornament that arises is designated as *śabdārthanīṣṭha punaruktavadābhāsa*. In this variety, the impression of redundancy operates simultaneously at two levels: the phonetic or lexical and the semantic. In the expression "Śrī-Lakṣmī" occurring in the verse under discussion, the semblance of repetition is discernible not only in the two apparently synonymous words themselves but also in their meanings, inasmuch as both "Śrī" and "Lakṣmī" appear to convey the same referential sense. It is on this ground that the instance of *punaruktavadābhāsa* present in this verse is to be understood as belonging to the *śabdārthanīṣṭha* variety—one in which the appearance of repetition encompasses both word and meaning together.

3.3 Upamā

Upamā is present in the expression "*Lakṣmīr iva sura-narair arcya-caraṇā*" occurring in the verse composed by Keśava Bhaṭṭa^{xlvi}. According to *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, *Upamā* manifests when two objects are compared on the basis of a common property or quality (*sāmāna dharma*) shared between them^{xlix}. The *Sāhityadarpaṇa* defines *Upamā* as—"sāmyaṃ vācyam avaidharmyaṃ vākyaika upamā dvayoh!"—that is, when the similarity between two objects is explicitly expressed (*vācya*) within a single sentence, and no contradictory or opposing property is mentioned in relation to them, *Upamā* is held to be present. Within the technical framework of *Upamā*, the primary object—that is, the object in which a resemblance to another object is being demonstrated—is designated as the *upameya* or the subject of comparison, while the secondary object—that to which the primary object is being likened—is designated as the *upamāna* or the standard of comparison. The quality on the basis of which the comparison is drawn is referred to as the *sāmānadharma* or *sāmānadharmata*.

The application of the ornament of *upamā* is discernible in the expression "*Lakṣmīr iva sura-narair arcya-caraṇā*" occurring in the verse under discussion. This description conveys that just as gods and men venerate the feet of Devī Lakṣmī, so too do they offer their reverence at the feet of the Gaṅgā. In this comparison, Lakṣmī serves as the *upamāna*—the standard of comparison—while the Gaṅgā functions as the *upameya*—the subject of comparison. Between the two, there exists a common property (*sāmāna dharma*) in the form of *arcanīyatā*—the quality of being worthy of veneration and worship. It is precisely on the basis of this shared quality that the Gaṅgā has been compared to Lakṣmī. Thus, by virtue of the common property of *arcanīyatā* subsisting between Lakṣmī and the Gaṅgā, *Upamā* manifests in the expression "*Lakṣmīr iva*"—the word "*iva*" itself serving as the explicit marker of comparison (*upamāvācaka*) that signals the presence of this ornament within the verse.

Upamā generally comprises four constituent elements (*aṅga*)—the *upamāna* (the standard of comparison), the *upameya* (the subject of comparison), the *sāmāna dharma* (the common property shared between the two), and the *sādrśyavācaka* word—that is, a word explicitly denoting similarity, such as "*iva*" and its equivalents. When all four of these constituent elements are present and

explicitly stated within a given instance of *upamā*, it is designated as *pūrṇopamā*—the complete or full simile. The expression discussed above constitutes an example of *pūrṇopamā*. Here, the feet of Lakṣmī serve as the *upamāna*, the feet of the Gaṅgā as the *upameya*, *arcanīyatā*—the quality of being worthy of veneration—as the *sāmāna dharma*, and the word “iva” as the *sādrśyavācaka*—the explicit marker of similarity. Since all four constituent elements are present and accounted for in this instance, it is accordingly designated as *Pūrṇopamā*. Conversely, when one, two, or three of these four constituent elements are absent or left unstated in an instance of the ornament of *Upamā*, the resulting figure is designated as *Lūptopamā*^{li}—the incomplete or elliptical simile.

In general terms, *Upamā* is said to occur whenever the *upamāna* and the *upameya* are related through any form of common property (*sāmāna dharma*) subsisting between them. In this connection, the *Alaṅkāraustubha* advances a particularly significant theoretical proposition. It holds that if the common property (*sādharmya*) between two objects—that is, between the *upamāna* and the *upameya*—is present in its entirety and without any remainder, the relationship between them does not qualify as *Upamā*. For the figure of *Upamā* to be properly constituted, the common property must be present only in a partial or qualified manner—that is, the similarity must subsist between the two objects to a certain degree but not in all respects completely. It is only when such a partial or qualified correspondence obtains between the *upamāna* and the *upameya* that the relationship between them is to be regarded as a genuine instance of the ornament of *upamā*. This theoretical position reflects a fundamental distinction between identity (*abheda*) and similarity (*sādrśya*)—complete correspondence between two objects dissolves the very basis of comparison, whereas partial correspondence sustains it^{lii}.

3.4 Virodhābhāsa

In the expression “*eṣā Śrī-Viṣṇoś caraṇa-kamalotpatti-subhagā*” occurring in the verse under discussion, *Virodhābhāsa* has been identified specifically in the compound “*kamalotpatti-subhagā*”^{liii}. According to *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, *Virodhābhāsa* arises when, in the subject under description, there appears at first glance to be a contradiction or opposition, whereas in reality no such contradiction actually exists. The *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, states that *Virodhābhāsa*—that is, the semblance of contradiction—occurs when an apparent mutual opposition presents itself between *jāti* (class or

genus) and *jāti*; between *guṇa* (quality) and any of the three—*jāti*, *guṇa*, or *kriyā* (action); between *kriyā* and *kriyā* or *dravya* (substance); or between *dravya* and *dravya*. In each of these cases, the contradiction that appears to subsist between the two elements is not a genuine or real opposition but merely an apparent one—a semblance of conflict that dissolves upon closer examination of the actual meaning and context of the expression^{liv}.

The expression "*eṣā Śrī-Viṣṇoś caraṇa-kamalotpatti-subhagā*" in the said verse conveys the meaning that the Gaṅgā is supremely blessed by virtue of her origin at the lotus feet of Śrī Viṣṇu. The ornament of *virodhābhāsa* has manifested specifically in the compound "*kamalotpatti*". The statement asserts that the Gaṅgā—who is of the nature of water—took her birth from the lotus (*kamala*) that constitutes the feet of Viṣṇu. However, in common natural experience, it is the lotus that is born in water; water is never born from within a lotus. The assertion that the Gaṅgā had her origin within a lotus therefore appears to run contrary to the established order of natural reality.

In actuality, however, no genuine contradiction exists here. For while the birth of ordinary water from an ordinary lotus is indeed impossible, the birth of the Gaṅgā—who is of the nature of water—from the lotus feet of Śrī Viṣṇu has been made possible through the *acintya śakti*—the inconceivable divine power—of the Lord. Thus, although an apparent contradiction exists between this assertion and the ordinary laws governing the natural world, it is entirely acceptable from both a theological and a poetic standpoint. In this instance, the contradiction that presents itself is between two *kriyās* or actions—the origination of the lotus from water on the one hand, and the origination of water from the lotus on the other. The *Virodhābhāsa* operative here is therefore of the variety involving an apparent opposition between *kriyā* and *kriyā*.

It is worth noting in this connection that the Gaṅgā is the presiding deity (*adhiṣṭhātṛī devī*) of water and is conceived of as water itself in its divine form. In this sense, the word "*Gaṅgā*" has been employed in the verse in the meaning of water. On the other hand, it is a universally known truth that the lotus originates in water. Consequently, when the verse asserts that the Gaṅgā—who is of the nature of water—was born from the lotus that constitutes the feet of Viṣṇu, this remarkable statement generates a particular sense of wonder and aesthetic delight (*camatkāra*). It is precisely because this wonder-producing quality of the expression enhances

the beauty of the verse that it has been designated as an *alaṅkāra*—a literary ornament. Although an apparent contradiction presents itself to the reader at first encounter, it is not a genuine contradiction in any real sense but merely a semblance or appearance of opposition. The actual meaning, upon reflection, resolves the apparent conflict entirely. It is on this very ground—that what appears to be a contradiction is in truth no contradiction at all but only its semblance—that this ornament has been designated *virodhābhāsa*, literally meaning "the appearance" or "the semblance of contradiction."

In the ornament of *virodhābhāsa*, although a contradiction appears to present itself on the surface, no genuine opposition exists in reality. In general terms, contradiction (*virodha*) implies a conflict between at least two entities or elements. With regard to the possible nature of these two elements, the rhetoricians (*alaṅkārikas*) have specified ten categories of combinatory relations (*saṁyoga-sthala*) within which such apparent opposition may manifest^{lv}. These are—the apparent conflict between *jāti* and *jāti* (genus and genus), between *jāti* and *guṇa* (genus and quality), between *jāti* and *kriyā* (genus and action), between *jāti* and *dravya* (genus and substance), between *guṇa* and *guṇa* (quality and quality), between *guṇa* and *kriyā* (quality and action), between *guṇa* and *dravya* (quality and substance), between *kriyā* and *kriyā* (action and action), between *kriyā* and *dravya* (action and substance), and between *dravya* and *dravya* (substance and substance). Each of these ten combinatory categories has been discussed in detail with illustrative examples in texts such as the *Alaṅkāra-kaustubha* and related works of the Gauḍīya tradition^{lvi}.

3.5 Anumāna

In the first two *pādas* of the said verse, Caitanya has identified the *Anumāna alaṅkāra*^{lvii}. When the *sādhya*—that which is to be established or demonstrated—is established by means of the *sādhana*—the instrument or ground of demonstration—the process is designated as *anumāna*. Here, that which is established or proved is called the *sādhya*, and that by means of which it is established is called the *sādhana*. When the mention of both *sādhya* and *sādhana* within a poetic composition results in an enhancement of the beauty of the verse, *anumāna* is held to have manifested. Since, as in logical inference (*anumāna*), three constituents are present here as well—*sādhya*, *sādhana*, and *hetu* (the reason or ground)—this ornament has been designated *Anumāna alaṅkāra*^{lviii}. The

Sāhityadarpaṇa defines *Anumāna alaṛkāra* as—“*anumānaṃ tu vicchittiyā jñānaṃ sādhyasya sādhanāt^{lix}*”—that is, the ornament of *Anumāna* consists in the knowledge or apprehension of the *sādhyā*—the conclusion to be established—as conveyed through the *sādhana* in a manner that produces aesthetic wonder and delight (*vicchitti* or *camatkāra*).

The presence of the ornament of *anumāna* is discernible in the first two *pādas* of the verse under discussion. The central subject of demonstration (*pratipādyā*) in the verse is the greatness (*mahattva*) of the Gaṅgā, and the primary purpose of the verse is accordingly the establishment of that greatness. It is for this reason that the greatness of the Gaṅgā has been taken as the *sādhyā*—the conclusion to be established—in this context. On the other hand, the ground adduced in support of this greatness is the Gaṅgā's *Viṣṇupādōtpatti*—her origin from the lotus feet of Śrī Viṣṇu. The origin of the Gaṅgā from the lotus feet of Viṣṇu thus constitutes the *sādhana*—the instrument or ground by means of which her greatness is established and demonstrated. *Anumāna* manifests in a poetic composition when the *sādhyā* is apprehended through the *sādhana* in a manner that generates aesthetic wonder and delight. In the verse under discussion, the greatness of the Gaṅgā—the *sādhyā*—is made known through the *sādhana* of her origin from the lotus feet of Viṣṇu, and the remarkable manner in which this relation between *sādhyā* and *sādhana* has been expressed has served to enhance the overall aesthetic beauty of the composition. It is on these grounds that *Anumāna* is held to manifest with clarity and fullness in the first two *pādas* of the verse under discussion.

In this manner, Caitanya undertook a detailed and systematic analysis of the verse composed by Keśava Bhaṭṭa, identifying five instances of poetic defect and five instances of literary ornament within it. He further observed that the learned Keśava Bhaṭṭa was endowed with a special and extraordinary poetic genius (*pratibhā*) bestowed upon him through divine grace, by virtue of which he was capable of composing verses fluently and in rapid succession, with little recourse to deliberate reflection or careful consideration. However, Caitanya indicated that it is quite natural for poetic defects of one kind or another to find their way into compositions produced without adequate critical deliberation (*vicāra*). He also suggested that upon closer and more refined analysis, many more defects as well as merits could potentially be discovered within the said verse. It is for this reason, he implied, that the critical evaluation of defects and merits (*doṣa-guṇa vicāra*) is of the utmost

importance in the composition of poetry. For when a composition that is free from defects is further enriched through the incorporation of appropriate literary ornaments, it attains a higher degree of purity and aesthetic excellence, and its beauty is correspondingly enhanced and rendered more complete^{lx}.

On the other hand, upon witnessing Caitanya's extraordinary erudition in *Sāhitya śāstra*, the learned Keśava Bhaṭṭa was overcome with astonishment. He began to reflect inwardly—how could this young Nimāi Paṇḍita, who taught nothing more than the elementary *Kālāpa* grammar and who appeared never to have studied *Alaṅkāraśāstra* or related disciplines, have carried out such a remarkably subtle and penetrating critical analysis of a verse composed by a *digvijayī* scholar of his own standing! This reflection left him utterly bewildered and at a loss. A doubt arose in his mind that Devī Sarasvatī—the goddess of learning—had perhaps turned unfavourable towards him. For the kind of profound and refined exegesis that Nimāi Paṇḍita had offered was simply not within the capacity of an ordinary person; it seemed as though Sarasvatī herself had given expression to this analysis through the mouth of Nimāi^{lxi}. Overcome by this thought, Keśava Bhaṭṭa was seized with a deep sense of shame, and the pride and arrogance that he had carried within himself over many years were shattered and reduced to nothing.

At this juncture, when the disciples, delighted at the defeat of the *digvijayī*, were on the verge of breaking into laughter, Caitanya Deva restrained them^{lxii}. Perceiving the inner transformation that had come over Keśava Bhaṭṭa, he offered him words of comfort and consolation. He also expressed his admiration for the extraordinary poetic genius (*pratibhā*) with which Keśava Bhaṭṭa was endowed^{lxiii}. Addressing the *digvijayī* with studied humility, Caitanya submitted that, overcome by the natural impulsiveness of youth, he had engaged in a certain degree of presumptuous prattle in his presence, and had had the audacity to pass critical judgement on the merits and defects of a verse composed by so eminent a poet. He further submitted that he himself did not in reality possess the qualification or competence for such an undertaking, and that he was, in truth, not even worthy to be counted among the disciples of Keśava Bhaṭṭa. In both learning and age, Keśava Bhaṭṭa was his superior in every respect, and he therefore earnestly entreated him to pardon this childlike and presumptuous conduct on his part.

After this exchange, both parties returned to their respective residences. That night, Keśava Bhaṭṭa worshipped Devī Sarasvatī and laid before her feet the anguish that weighed upon his heart. Devī Sarasvatī, pleased with his devotion, appeared to him in a dream and imparted to him the counsel he needed. The Devī declared that Śrī Caitanya Deva is the lord of infinite universes, and that she herself is but an eternal handmaid residing at his lotus feet^{lxiv}. Before that supreme Bhagavān—he who expounds the Vedas through a thousand tongues—it is simply not possible for her own power to exercise any efficacy whatsoever^{lxv}. It was through the Devī's counsel that Keśava Bhaṭṭa came to understand that Nimāi Paṇḍita was no ordinary human being but was in truth the Lord himself—the Supreme Bhagavān in person. Through the grace and guidance of Devī Sarasvatī, all the impurities of pride and arrogance that had accumulated within the heart of Keśava Bhaṭṭa were entirely and completely dissolved^{lxvi}. The following morning, he came before Caitanya and surrendered himself at his feet, taking refuge in him with wholehearted submission. Caitanya, in turn, was pleased with him and bestowed his grace upon him, granting him shelter at his own feet. It was in this manner that a profound spiritual transformation came about in the life of the *digvijayī* scholar Keśava Bhaṭṭa, and he advanced upon the path towards liberation from the bonds of worldly existence^{lxvii}.

4. Conclusion

Śrī Caitanya Deva descended upon this earth in the combined form (*yugala rūpa*) of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa and his eternal consort and companion in divine play, Śrī Rādhā. The movement of devotion (*bhakti āndolana*) that he inaugurated brought about a truly epoch-making transformation in the religious and cultural life of contemporary India. As the propounder of the path of *bhakti*, he is venerated across the entire world, and this aspect of his identity is universally known and widely acknowledged.

However, the dimension of his profound scholastic learning is not as widely familiar to the general reader. At the time of Caitanya Deva's appearance, Navadvīpa occupied a position as one of the foremost centres of scriptural learning in the whole of India, distinguished particularly for its cultivation of *nyāya* and *vyākaraṇa*. It is therefore quite natural that Caitanya Deva was an accomplished scholar in both these disciplines, and on this point there exists no disagreement within learned circles. What

constitutes the central concern of the present discussion, however, is his equally profound mastery of Sanskrit *Sāhitya śāstra*—a dimension of his erudition that has received comparatively less attention. In the domain of Sanskrit learning, proficiency in one discipline is often accompanied by a general familiarity with others; but the precise identification of defects, merits, and ornaments at every point within a composition demands a degree of specialised and deep competence in *Sāhitya śāstra* that goes considerably beyond general acquaintance. In the episode under discussion, Caitanya Deva identified five instances of poetic defect and five instances of literary ornament within a single Sanskrit verse—a verse composed, it must be emphasised, by the *digvijayī* scholar Keśava Bhaṭṭa himself. The critical analysis of a verse composed by so eminent a scholar requires extraordinary command over the principles of *Sāhitya śāstra*, and it is this that demonstrates unambiguously that Caitanya Deva was a scholar of the highest order in this discipline as well.

Furthermore, notwithstanding his towering scholarship, the manner in which he consoled Keśava Bhaṭṭa reveals the remarkable magnanimity and largeness of spirit that characterised him. Through this conduct, he appears to have imparted the teaching that even one who has attained the highest pinnacle of learning ought not to harbour pride or arrogance within himself. Caitanya Deva is the *yugāvatāra*—the *avatāra* of the age—and such magnanimity is therefore entirely natural to him. Yet, even so, through this exemplary conduct, he appears to have conveyed to humanity at large the enduring lesson of the renunciation of ego and the abandonment of arrogance.

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End Notes:

i "Rādhā kṛṣṇa-praṇaya-vikṛtir hlādinī śaktir asmād ekātmānāv api bhuvi purā deha-bhedaṃ gatau tau, Caitanyākhyam prakāṣam adhunā tad dvayam caikyam āptam rādhā-bhāva-dyuti-suvalitam naumi kṛṣṇa-svarūpam."—(*Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta*, edited by Radhagovinda Nath, Sadhana Prakashani, 2006, 1.1.5)

The divine love (*praṇaya*) of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī for Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa is a particular manifestation of his innermost potency of bliss—the *hlādinī śakti*. In their essential nature, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are one and the same reality, non-different from one another; yet, from time immemorial, they have manifested in two distinct forms for the purpose of relishing the full flavour (*rasa*) of their divine *līlā*. In a subsequent manifestation, those same Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa reunited in a single form and appeared as Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, resplendent with the luminous spiritual disposition (*bhāva*) of Rādhā.

ii "..., Sannyāsakṛc chamaḥ śānto niṣṭhā śāntiḥ parāyaṇaḥ. Suvarṇavarṇo hemāṅgo varāṅgaś candanāṅgadī..."—*Mahābhārata* 13.149.75, 92

In his commentary on the first of these two verses, Baladeva Ācārya has interpreted all six of the epithets contained therein as referring specifically to Caitanya Deva. His explanations are as follows—"sannyāsaṃ parivrajyaṃ karotīti sannyāsakṛt": he is designated *sannyāsakṛt* because he embraces the life of renunciation (*sannyāsa*) and wandering asceticism (*parivrajya*). "*śamayaty ālocayati rahasyaṃ harer iti śamaḥ*": he is *śama* because he deliberates upon and illuminates the deeper mysteries pertaining to Hari. "*śāmyaty uparamati kṛṣṇānya-viṣayād iti śāntaḥ*": he is *śānta* because he remains entirely withdrawn from all subjects other than Kṛṣṇa. "*nitiṣṭhanty asyām hari-kīrtana-pradhānā bhakti-yajñā iti niṣṭhā*": he is *niṣṭhā* because all devotional sacrifices (*bhakti-yajñā*) centred on the glorification of Hari find their firm foundation in him. "*śāmyanti anayā bhakti-virodhiṇaḥ kevalādvaita-pramukhā iti śāntiḥ*": he is *śānti* because through him, the doctrines opposed to *bhakti*—foremost among which is *kevalādvaita*—are brought to rest and resolution. "*mahābhāvāntānām bhāva-bhedānām parama-mayanam iti parāyaṇam*": he is *parāyaṇa* because he is the supreme resort and culmination of all varieties of spiritual disposition (*bhāva*), up to and including *mahābhāva* itself.

Baladeva Ācārya has expounded upon the second verse in the following manner—"suvarṇasyeva varṇo rūpam asyeti suvarṇavarṇaḥ": Śrī Caitanya Deva is *suvarṇavarṇa* because his bodily complexion is of the hue of refined gold. "*hemavat sprhaṇīyāni varṇādhiṣṭhānāni āṅgāni yasya sa hemāṅgaḥ*": he is *hemāṅga* because his limbs, like gold, are most worthy of admiration and longing. "*varāṇi saundarya-vanti āṅgāni asyeti varāṅgaḥ*": he is *varāṅga* because all his limbs are endowed with the finest beauty. "*candane bhakta-cittāhlādake āṅgade asyeti candanāṅgadī*": he is *candanāṅgadī* because the ornament of sandalwood (*candana*) that adorns his form produces a profound sense of delight within the hearts of his devotees. In sum, the bodily lustre of Śrī Caitanya Deva is comparable to that of gold, his limbs are equally worthy of reverence and admiration, his entire form is of surpassing beauty, and the sandalwood ornament adorning him fills the minds of the devoted with deep and abiding joy.

iii "..., Nimāṇi Paṇḍita hay baṛa vidyāvān.

Digvijayī hāriyā calilā yāmr ṭhāṇi,

Eta baṛa paṇḍita āṛ kathā śuni nāñi.—(Vṛndāvana Dāsa, *Śrī Śrī Caitanya Bhāgavata*, edited by Baridavarān Ghosh, Dey's Publishing, 1995 p. 76)

iv *"Prabhura pāṇḍitya-buddhi śiśukāla haite,"*—(Vṛndāvana Dāsa, *Śrī Śrī Caitanya Bhāgavata*, p. 70)

v *"Tathāpiha hena tāna māyāra baṛāi,*

Bujhibāre pāre tāne hena jana nāi.—(Vṛndāvana Dāsa, *Śrī Śrī Caitanya Bhāgavata*, p. 70)

vi *"Vyākaraṇa-madhye jāni paṛāha Kālāpa,"*—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.30)

vii *"..., Digvijayī kahe, mane avajñā kariyā —.*

Vyākaraṇa paṛāha Nīmāi Paṇḍita tomāra nāma,

Bālyasāstra loka tomāra kahe guṇagrāma.—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.28-29)

viii The title *Ghaṭikāśataka* is a distinction of a particular kind. In ancient times, a special form of examination existed for the purpose of testing the erudition and poetic capacity of learned scholars. In this examination, the designated individual was required to compose one hundred Sanskrit verses within the span of a single *ghaṭikā*—that is, approximately twenty-four minutes.

A scholar who succeeded in composing one hundred verses within this stipulated period was honoured with the title *Ghaṭikāśataka* in recognition of his extraordinary poetic genius (*kāvya-pratibhā*) and breadth of learning. This title was regarded, within the learned communities of the time, as a distinguished marker of three specific and rare intellectual capacities—the power of poetic composition (*kavitvśakti*), the power of retention and recall (*smṛtiśakti*), and the power of instantaneous or extemporaneous composition (*tatkṣaṇa-racanāśakti*). Together, these three capacities represented the highest standard of creative and scholarly accomplishment that the scholarly culture of the period recognised and celebrated.

ix Caitanya Deva was widely celebrated as a *śrutadhara*—a term designating one who is capable of grasping any subject upon a single hearing and retaining it in memory over a prolonged period of time without difficulty. It was by virtue of this particular gift that Śrī Caitanya Deva possessed a faculty of retention and recall of exceptional sharpness and depth. Upon hearing any scriptural text or learned discussion even once, he was able to comprehend it with ease and retain it with fidelity. This capacity of instantaneous comprehension and enduring retention was recognised as a distinguishing characteristic of his intellectual constitution, and it set him apart as a scholar of remarkable natural endowment within the learned circles of his time.

x *"..., Viśmita hañā digvijayī Prabhure puchila —.*

Jhañjhāvāta prāya āmi śloka paṛila,

Tāra madhye śloka tumi kaiche kañṭhe kaila?.—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.39-40)

xi *"Pañca doṣa ei śloke, pañca alaṅkāra,"*—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.51)

xii *"Rasopkarṣako doṣaḥ. Apakarṣakaḥ sthaganakārī."*—(*Kaṇṇapura, Alaṅkāra-kaustubha*, 10.1)

xiii *"Avimṛṣṭavidheyāṁśa dui ṭhāñi cihna,*

Viruddhamati bhagnakrama punarātta doṣa tina.—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta 1.16.52)

xiv The defining characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) of the *Śikharinī* metre is —

"*Rasai rudraiś chinnā yamanasabhalāgaḥ śikharinī*", (Kedārabhaṭṭa, *Vṛttaratnākara*, edited by Baladeva Upadhyay, Chaukhamba Surabharati Prakashan, 2017, 3.123). The *Śikharinī* meter contains 5 gaṇas i.e. *ya* (*laghu-guru-guru*), *ma* (*guru-guru-guru*), *na* (*laghu-laghu-laghu*), *sa* (*guru-guru-laghu*), *bha* (*guru-laghu-laghu*) followed by one *laghu* and one *guru*. The halts will be on the 6th and 17th letters.

xv Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, edited by Krishnamohan Shastri, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, 2015, p. 479.

xvi "*Gaṅgāra mahattva śloke mūla vidheya*,

Idaṃ śabda anuvāda pāche avidhheya."—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta 1.16.53)

xvii "*Vidheya āge kahi, pāche kahile anuvāda*,

Ei lāgi ślokera artha kariyāche bāda."—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta 1.16.54)

xviii For example —

"*Akṛtaṃ sukṛtaṃ kiñcid ataptaṃ ca tathā tapaḥ*,

Bhaveyaṃ yena te nātha karuṇālava-bhājanam."

The meaning of this verse is—O Lord (*nātha*)! Whatever meritorious deed (*sukṛta*) might enable me to become a recipient of even a particle of your grace (*karuṇālava*) remains unperformed (*akṛta*), and whatever austerity (*tapaḥ*) might serve the same purpose remains unpractised (*ataptaṃ*). In this verse, the negatory particle *nañ* ought to hold primary significance, but by virtue of its being absorbed into a compound (*samāsa*), it has been rendered secondary. Similarly, the expression *karuṇālava*—meaning "a particle of grace"—ought likewise to have been accorded primary prominence, but it too has been subordinated through compounding. As a consequence of these inversions, the defect of *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṃśa* has arisen in the verse. Had the verse been composed without recourse to compound formation, this defect would not have occurred. That is to say, had the verse been composed in the following manner —

"*Na kṛtaṃ sukṛtaṃ kiñcin na taptaṃ ca tathā tapaḥ*,

Mayi yena bhaven nātha karuṇāyā lavo'pi te."

— both the negatory sense (*nañārtha*) and the meaning of "a particle of grace" (*karuṇākaṇā*) would have retained their due prominence, and in such a case there would have been no occasion for the defect of *avimṛṣṭavidheyāṃśa* to arise.

It may further be noted that in those instances where it is necessary to convey a specific denotation (*abhidhāna*) of the compounded substance together with the negatory particle *nañ*, the formation of a compound with *nañ* does not give rise to any defect. An illustrative example of this is the following verse —

"*Anāsaktaḥ karma kurvan nasakto viṣayān juṣaṇ*,

Apramatto bhajan kṛṣṇaṃ na sa tais tair nibadhyate."

The meaning of this verse is—one who performs his prescribed duties without attachment (*anāsakta*), who engages with sense objects without being tainted by them (*asaktaḥ*), and who worships Śrī Kṛṣṇa without negligence or inattention (*apramatta*)—such a person is not bound by those very activities. In this verse, the specific denotation of

words such as *āsakta* and related terms in conjunction with the negatory particle *nañ* is indispensable to the intended meaning. It is for this reason that, notwithstanding the formation of a compound with *nañ*, no defect has arisen here.—(Cf. *Karṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha*, pp. 725–728).

xix "Dvitīya Śrī-Lakṣmī ihāñ dvitīya vidheya,

Samāse gauṇa ha-ila, śabdārtha gela kṣaya.

Dvitīya śabda vidheya, tāhā paṛila samāse,

Lakṣmīra samatā artha karila vināśe."—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta 1.16.55-56)

xx "Bhavānī-bharṭṛ-śabda dile pāiyā santoṣa,

Viruddhamatikṛt nāma ei mahā doṣa."—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta 1.16.58)

xxi Viśvanātha, Sāhityadarpaṇa, p.478

xxii "Bhavānī-śabde kahe Mahādevera grhiṇī,

Tāra bhartā kahile dvitīya bhartā jāni."—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta 1.16.59)

xxiii Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta 1.16.61

xxiv For example—

"Samāṃsamīnāvali-cārayadbhir gavāṃ kulam vallava-bāla-vṛndaiḥ,

Vṛndāvane kautuka-keli-lolaḥ punātu vaḥ Śrī-Vraja-rāja-sūnuḥ."

The meaning of this verse is—may the son of the king of Vraja (*Vraja-rāja-sūnuḥ*), who is perpetually eager for playful sport and delightful games (*keli-kautuka*) in Vṛndāvana, in the company of the cowherd boys who tend the herds of cattle endowed with the characteristic of *samāṃsamīnāvali*, protect you all. The expression "*samāṃsamīnāvali-viśiṣṭa*" refers to that class of cows which calves every year without fail—it is in this specific and intended sense that the compound has been employed in the verse. However, upon encountering this expression, the minds of readers naturally tend to receive a quite different meaning—namely, "accompanied by a collection of flesh and fish" (*māṃsa-mīnāvali sahita*)—an entirely unintended and contrary sense that the compound inadvertently conjures by virtue of its phonetic and lexical composition. It is as a consequence of this generation of an unintended and adverse meaning in the reader's mind that the defect of *viruddhamatikṛt* manifests in this verse.—(Cf. *Karṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha*, p. 731).

xxv "Vibhavati kriyāya vākya-sāṅga puna viśeṣaṇa —

Adbhuta-guṇā ei punarātta-dūṣaṇa."—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta 1.16.62)

xxvi Viśvanātha, Sāhityadarpaṇa, p.497

xxvii "Viśāde vismaye harṣe kope dainye'vadhāraṇe,

Uddeśye pratinirdeśye viśaye ca prasādane,

Anukramyādike cāpi paunaruktyaṃ na duṣyatīti."—(Karṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha, p. 792)

xxviii An illustrative example of *uddeśya-pratinirdeśya* is the following verse —

"Na bhajati tapasā klamaḥ klamatvaṃ viśaya-bhavaṃ na sukhaṃ sukhatvaṃ eti,

Viṣam apī ca viśasya nāśakaṃ syān na hi sadṛśe sadṛśatvaṃ eva nityam."

The meaning of this verse is—the weariness (*klama*) born of austerity (*tapas*) can never be regarded as comparable to the weariness arising from worldly engagement; similarly, worldly pleasure (*viśaya-sukha*) can never attain the

status of transcendental bliss (*pāramārthika sukha*). Moreover, even poison may on occasion serve as the antidote to another poison—it is therefore not an invariable rule that things of the same kind always share an identity of nature with one another. In this verse, the subjects (*uddeśya*)—such as *klama* and the like—are first identified, and then properties contrary to what might be expected—such as *aklamatva* ("the quality of not being weariness") and so forth—are predicated (*pratinirdiṣṭa*) of them. In instances of this nature, what appears to be repetition (*punarukti*) functions not as a defect but as a positive quality that contributes to the expressive richness of the composition.—(Cf. *Karṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha*, p. 793).

xxix "Tina-pāde anuprāsa dekhi anupama,

Eka-pāde nāhi-ei doṣa bhagnakrama."—(*Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.63)

xxx Viśvanātha, Sāhityadarpaṇa, p.514

xxxi "Sa ca kāraka-vacana-paryāyādi-kramāṅgāditvena bahudhā bhavati."—(*Karṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha*, p. 790)

xxxii An illustrative example of the disruption of sequential order (*bhagnakrama*) with respect to *kāraka* and *vacana* is the following verse —

"Kācid vīṇaṃ murajaṃ aparā kāpi vaṃśīṃ dadhānā kāścit tālaṃ kara-kiśalaye tāla-dhāritvaṃ āptāḥ, cakruḥ saṅgīta-viracanaṃ rāsa-madhye kayācid gānaṃ nānā-svara-parimalaṃ modam uccair vitene."

The meaning of this verse is—in the midst of the *rāsa* dance, some of the women took up the *vīṇā*, others the *muraja*, and yet others the *vaṃśī*; some, having taken to striking time with their tender hands, attained the quality of time-keepers (*tāla-dhāritva*), and together they created a musical ensemble. Through the singing of one among them—replete with the fragrance of varied musical notes (*nānā-svara-parimalā*)—a profound sense of delight was abundantly diffused all around. In this verse, at the point where "*kayācid*" occurs, a disruption in the *kāraka*—that is, in the grammatical case relation—has taken place; and at the point where "*kāścit*" occurs, a disruption in *vacana*—that is, in grammatical number—has been introduced. It is these two irregularities that constitute instances of *bhagnakrama* with respect to *kāraka* and *vacana* respectively.—(Cf. *Karṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha*, p. 790).

xxxiii "Yatra tu ārambha eva kramo nāsti tatra bhagnakrama-doṣo nāsti."—(*Karṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha*, p. 793)

xxxiv "Yadyapi ei śloke āche pañca alaṅkāra,

Ei pañca doṣe śloka kaila chāra-khāra."—(*Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.64)

xxxv "Daśa alaṅkāre yadi eka śloka haya,

Eka doṣe saba alaṅkāra haya kṣaya.

Sundara śarīra yaiche bhūṣaṇe bhūṣita,

Eka śvetakuṣṭhe yaiche karaye bigīta."—(*Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.65-66)

xxxvi "Pañca alaṅkāre ebe śunaha vicāra,

Dui śabdālaṅkāra, tina artha-alaṅkāra."—(*Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.67)

xxxvii "Śabdālaṅkāra,—tina pāde āche anuprāsa,"—(*Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.68)

xxxviii "Anuprāsyata ityarthe'nuprāso varṇa-sāmyataḥ.

Sajātīyaṃ varṇam anu sajātīya-varṇāntaraṃ prakarṣeṇa asyata iti vyutpattiḥ."—(Kārṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha, p. 454)

xxxix Viśvanātha, Sāhityadarpaṇa 10.

xl An illustrative example of *chekānuprāsa* is the following verse —

"Dhāma śyāmam idaṃ śrīdaṃ jagato viratodayam,

Dhyeyaṃ geyaṃ ca sarveṣāṃ dṛśoḥ prema yaśomayam."

The meaning of this verse is—this dark and beautiful abode (*śyāma-dhāma*), which is the source of all splendour and glory for the three worlds and which is ever resplendent, is worthy of meditation (*dhyeya*), worthy of being sung (*geya*), replete with renown (*yaśomaya*), and the very dwelling place of love for all eyes. In this verse, the consonants "ma" and "ya" each recur only once—the consonant "ma" appearing in "*śyāmam*" and "*śrīdam*", and the consonant "ya" appearing in "*dhyeyam*" and "*geyam*". Since the recurrence of each consonant occurs only a single time and not repeatedly, the variety of *anuprāsa* that has manifested here is *chekānuprāsa* rather than *vṛtṭyanuprāsa*.—(Cf. Kārṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha, p. 455).

xli *"Mādhurya-vyañjakatvena sa eva hy upanāgarah."*

That is to say, when *chekānuprāsa* is realised through consonants that are expressive of the quality of sweetness and grace (*mādhurya*), it is designated as *upanāgarikā vṛtti*. An illustrative example of this is the following verse —

"Anaṅga-maṅgalārambhe sambhedaḥ sveda-kampayoḥ,

Śaṅke paṅkeruha-dṛśo na rasyānanda-mattatā."

The meaning of this verse is—at the very auspicious commencement of Anaṅgadeva's (*kāmadeva*'s) activity, when I observe the simultaneous manifestation of perspiration (*sveda*) and trembling (*kampa*) together, I apprehend that this state of joy-intoxication (*ānanda-mattatā*) of the lotus-eyed one may perhaps not yield a pleasing and relishable aesthetic experience (*rasa*). In this verse, the consonants "ṇa", "ga", "da" and related sounds each recur once, thereby producing *chekānuprāsa*. Furthermore, since these particular consonants are expressive of and conducive to the quality of *mādhurya*—sweetness and grace—the *chekānuprāsa* manifesting in this verse is to be designated as *upanāgarikā vṛtti*.—(Cf. Kārṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha, p. 455).

xlii "Sa ca dvedhā cheka-vṛtti-bhedāt. Ekavārānunyāseṇa chekaḥ syāt.... ekasyāpy athavānekasyāmreḍitatayā yadi nyāsaḥ syād vṛtṭyanuprāsaḥ."—(Cf. Kārṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha, p. 454).

xliii "..., Śrī-Lakṣmī-śabde punaruktavadābhāsa.

Śrī-śabde Lakṣmī-śabde eka vastu ukta,

Punaruktaprāya bhāse, nahe punarukta."—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta 1.16.68,71)

xliv *"Punaruktavadābhāsaḥ punaruktavad eva yaḥ."*—(Cf. Kārṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha, p. 503).

xlvi Viśvanātha, Sāhityadarpaṇa, p. 607

xlvii *"Ayaṃ śabdārtaniṣṭho'pi bhavati."*—(Cf. Kārṇapura, Alaṅkāraustubha, p. 503).

xlviii For example —

"Tava tanu śarīra-sadrśīm kāñcana kanakasya vīrudhaṃ nekṣe,

Rādhe sumukhi bhavatyā mukha-vad anāṅko'pi śubhrāṃsuḥ."

The meaning of this verse is—O fair-faced Rādhā (*sumukhi Rādhā*)! I have nowhere beheld a golden creeper (*kanaka-vīrudh*) that resembles the slender grace of your form, nor have I anywhere perceived a moon (*sudhāṁśu*) as spotless and unblemished as your countenance. In this verse, the two words "*mukha*" and "*vadana*"—both of which are commonly recognised as synonymous terms for "face"—appear at first glance to have been used in repetition of one another, giving the impression of semantic redundancy. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that the correct parsing of the compound is "*mukha-vat anan̐kaḥ*"—meaning "the moon (*anan̐ka*) that is like (*vat*) the face (*mukha*)"—rather than a compound formed by the juxtaposition of two synonymous words. With this parsing in view, it becomes evident that no actual repetition has in fact occurred; the words "*mukha*" and "*vadana*" are not being used in the same syntactic position or with the same referential function.—(Cf. *Karṇapura, Alāṅkāraustubha*, p. 503).

xlvi "Lakṣmīr iva arthālaṅkāra upamā prakāśa, ..."—(*Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.73)

xlix "Yathākatañcit sādharṇyam upamā."—(Cf. *Karṇapura, Alāṅkāraustubha*, p. 507)

l Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, p. 652

li An illustrative example of *luptopamā* is the following verse —

"Vyūḍhorasko vṛṣaskandhaḥ śālaprāṁśur mahābhujah,

Ātma-karma-kṣamaṁ dehaṁ kṣātro dharma ivāśritah."—[*Raghuvamśa* 1.13]

The meaning of this verse is—his (King Dilīpa's) chest was broad and expansive, his shoulders were massive like those of a bull, his arms extended down to his knees, and his stature was as lofty as the *śāla* tree; upon beholding him, one was left with the impression that the very embodiment of the *kṣatriya* code of duty (*kṣātra dharma*), having assumed a physical form fit for the discharge of its own functions, had appeared upon the earth in person.

In this verse, the compound "*vṛṣaskandhaḥ*" is to be resolved as—"*vṛṣasya skandhaḥ iva skandho yasya saḥ*"—meaning "he whose shoulders are like the shoulders of a bull." An examination of this *vigrahavākya*—the expanded or dissolved form of the compound—reveals that the similarity-marker "*iva*" as well as the expression of the *sāmānadharmā*—the common property, such as "*balavatva*" ("possessing strength") and the like—have been elided. Similarly, the compound "*śālaprāṁśuḥ*" is to be resolved as—"*śālah iva prāṁśuḥ śālaprāṁśuḥ*"—meaning "one who is as tall as the *śāla* tree." In this instance, only the similarity-marker "*iva*" has been elided, while the remaining elements of the comparison remain intact. Since one or more of the four constituent elements of *upamā* have been omitted in these expressions, they constitute instances of *luptopamā*—the elliptical or incomplete simile.

lii "Sa (sādr̥śya-sambandhaḥ) ca aṁśena na tu sarvair aṁśaiḥ sarvāṁśatvena abhedād upamānopameya-bhāva eva na bhavañīti."—(*Karṇapura, Alāṅkāraustubha*, p. 507)

liii "... , Āra arthālaṅkāra āche, nāma virodhābhāsa.

Īśvara-acintyaśaktye Gaṅgāra prakāśa,

Ihāte virodha nāhi virodha-ābhāsa."—(*Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.73,76)

liv "Jātiś caturbhir jātyādyair guṇo guṇādibhis tribhiḥ.

Kriyā kriyādravyābhyāṁ yad dravyaṁ dravyeṇa vā mithaḥ,

Viruddham iva bhāseta virodho'sau... ."—(*Viśvanātha, Sāhityadarpaṇa* 10.67-68)

lv *"Virodhaḥ sa virodhābhāḥ jātir jātyādibhir guṇaiḥ."*—(Karnapura, *Alaṅkāraustubha*, p. 315)

lvi An illustrative example of the apparent opposition between *kriyā* and *kriyā*—that is, between action and action—is the following verse —

*"Jīṇayati ca mūrṇhayati ca pīṇayati ca sūkṣmayaty api ca,
Tava muraḷī-rava-khuralī no jāne kiṃ vijānāti."*

The meaning of this verse is—I know not what wondrous knowledge your sharp and piercing flute-sound possesses—at one moment it infuses life and vitality, at another it causes swooning and loss of consciousness, at yet another it renders one expansive and full, and at still another it reduces one to a state of subtle refinement. In this verse, a manifest opposition is apparent between the various *kriyās* or actions described—for the actions of vivifying, causing to swoon, expanding, and rendering subtle are evidently at variance with one another. However, by virtue of the extraordinary and wondrous capacity of the sound of the flute (*veṇu-rava*), all four of these seemingly contradictory actions become possible simultaneously. Consequently, although an apparent contradiction presents itself between the actions, no genuine opposition exists in reality. It is precisely on this ground—that the contradiction is one of appearance rather than of substance—that the ornament of *virodhābhāsa* is held to have manifested in this verse.—(Karnapura, *Alaṅkāraustubha*, p. 316)

lvii *"Gaṅgāra mahattva sādhyā, sādhana tāhāra —,
Viṣṇupādotpatti— anumāna alaṅkāra."*—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.77)

lviii *"Sādhyā-sādhana-sadbhāve'numānam anumānavat,
Anumāne yathā trividho hetus tathātrāpi."*—(Karnapura, *Alaṅkāraustubha*, p. 625)

lix *Viśvanātha, Sāhityadarpaṇa* 10.63

lx *"Pratibhā-kavitva tomāra devatā-prasāde,
Avicāra-kavitve avaśya paṇe doṣa-vāde."*

*Vicāri kavitva kaile haya su-nirmala,
Sālaṅkāra haile—artha kare jhalamala."*—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.79,80)

lxi *"Paṇyā bālaka kaila mora buddhi-lopa,
Jāni Sarasvatī more kariyāchena kopa."*

*Ye vyākhyā karila, se manuṣyera nahe śakti,
Nimāira mukhe rahi bole āpane Sarasvatī."*—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.83,84)

lxii *"Digvijayī yadi parābhava praveśilā,
Śiṣyagaṇa hāsibāre udyata hailā."*

*Sabhārei Prabhu karilena nivāraṇa,
Vipra-prati balilena madhura vacana."*—(Vṛndāvana Dāsa, *Śrī Śrī Caitanya Bhāgavata*, pr. 70)

lxiii *"Śāstrera vicāra bhāla manda nāhi jāni,
Sarasvatī ye bolāya, bali sei vāṇī."*—(Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.16.88)

lxiv *"Sarasvatī bolena śunaha vipravara!,
Veda-gopya kahi, ei tomāra gocara."*

*... yāra ṭhāṇi tomāra haila parājaya,
Ananta-brahmāṇḍa-nātha tihom suniścaya."*—(Vṛndāvana Dāsa, *Śrī Śrī Caitanya Bhāgavata*, pr. 73)

lxv *"Āmi se baliye vipra! tomāra jihvāya,*

Tāhāra sammukhe śakti nā base āmāya.

Āmāra ki dāya Śeṣa-deva Bhagavān,

Sahasra-jihvāya Veda ye kare vyākhyāna."—(*Vṛndāvana Dāsa, Śrī Śrī Caitanya Bhāgavata, pr. 74*)

lxvi *"Sarasvatī svapne tāre upadeśa kaila,*

Sākṣāt Īśvara kari Prabhuke jānila."—(*Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta 1.16.100*)

lxvii *"Prāte āsi Prabhu-pade laila śaraṇa,*

Prabhu kṛpā kaila, tāṁra khaṇḍila bandhana.

Bhāgyavanta digvijayī saphala-jīvana,

Vidyābale pāila Mahāprabhura caraṇa."—(*Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Śrī Caitanyacaritāmṛta 1.16.101,102*)

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Critical & Analytical Essays

Nature in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*: A Critical Ecolinguistic Study

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Abstract:

Ecolinguistics, a relatively new sub-discipline of linguistics, is mainly based on the Sapir-Whorfian ideology of linguistic determinism which claims that the way we use language shapes our interactions with the environment. It is the study of "the life-sustaining relationships of humans with other humans, other organisms and the physical environment, with a normative orientation towards protecting the systems that humans and other forms of life depend on for their well-being and survival" (Alexander and Stibbe 105). The relations of humans with other species and the physical environment are of great importance, since the continuation of all life depends on these ecological relationships. T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) is a frantic sincere expression of an agonized poetic soul to find out the means of getting rid of the mechanized stony cruelty-ridden modern life. The poem begins with a shocking sentential expression 'April is the cruelest month breeding,' but ends with the three-time asyndetic repetition of noun 'shantih' which a human being desires most. The present paper is a preliminary attempt to analyze and explore the poem from the perspective of ecolinguistics and to exhibit how poetic expression takes turns in depicting the integral relationship between all the constituents of environment affected by the 'cruelest' materialism and repaired by the peace-giving spiritualism.

Key Words: Nature, linguistics, ecolinguistics, language, ecology, modernism,

Linguistics is generally defined as the scientific study of language. Language as a means of creative means of communication used by human beings has the structural, socio-cultural, psychological and geographical aspects or factors affecting its use and function. The linguistic system of any language is the outcome of the evolution in close association with both its native users and society or Nature or area where it existed, exists and will exist. It is evident that Nature and society jointly contribute in the health of the language i.e., its constituents. Hence language study has given birth to the several branches of linguistics like structural linguistics, sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics, psycholinguistics, ecolinguistics, etc. Among these, ecolinguistics is a relatively new sub-discipline of linguistics which got concrete shape in the last decade of the twentieth century. It is mainly based on the Sapir-Whorfian ideology of linguistic determinism which claims that the way we use language shapes our interactions with the environment. In 1972 Einar Haugen strongly argued and projected the need for ecological study of language and linguistic study of ecology and consequently showed the symbiosis and synthesis between ecology and language. The following quote from Haugen (1972/2001) substantiates his clear-cut views on the environment of languages:

The true environment of a language is the society that uses it as one of its codes. Language exists only in the minds of its users, and it only functions in relating these users to one another and to nature, i.e., their social and natural environment. Part of its ecology is therefore psychological: its interaction with other languages in the minds of bi- and multilingual speakers. Another part of its ecology is sociological: its interaction with the society in which it functions as a medium of communication. The ecology of a language is determined primarily by the people who learn it, use it, and transmit to others. (57)

Haugen's ecology-centric linguistic perspectives i.e., language-ecology interactions made a scope for the study of language in relation to ecology giving birth to ecolinguistics as a

sub-discipline of linguistics. Ecolinguistics can therefore be claimed to be the study of “the life-sustaining relationships of humans with other humans, other organisms and the physical environment, with a normative orientation towards protecting the systems that humans and other forms of life depend on for their well-being and survival” (Alexander and Stibbe 105). The relations of humans with other species and the physical environment are of great importance both locally and globally, since the continuation of all lives immensely depends on these deeply integrated ecological relationships. Steffensen and Fill (2014) in their insightful article ‘Ecolinguistics: state of the art and future horizons’ have argued in favour of the coordinated intense relation between all components of ecological world including humans and the importance of language in sustaining this already existing relation for the benefit of all concerned. Here let us quote the relevant portion from Steffensen and Fill (2014) to drive home the idea:

. . .the extended ecology hypothesis links realms that have hitherto been separated: the domain of human agents enacting small-scale cognitive events through which our lives, projects and aspirations flow, and that of large-scale societal arenas structuring the sociocultural and technological resources at our disposal. It thus offers an explanatory framework for understanding, not just sociocultural resources (be they lexico-grammatical structures, discourses, communicative technologies, media, etc.) but, just as crucially, how such structures are integrated in what human agents do in their lived environments, the extended ecology. Thus, the extended ecology model sets out to overcome the ‘paradox of aboutness’ (i.e. the view that language is about nature, but not of nature) because it transcends the structuralist and post-structuralist appeal to self-sufficient languages and discourses *sui generis*. Finally, a naturalised language view may actually be better equipped for an ecological linguistics that contributes to critical studies. (157)

Steffensen and Fill (2014) also further argue unambiguously that the critical stance of ecolinguistics studies “how human practices impact on ecosystems” (21) and the Extended Ecology Hypothesis – or a similar approach – might be useful in coming to terms with how second order phenomena (discourses, grammar, wording) impact on our ecosystemic existence (21).

It is evident that a nature-centric view on language use at different levels and situations provides us with a solid basis for the critical study of language use and functions in nature and society. Further, it is generally assumed that there are no local truths, and so Steffensen and Fill (2014) claim that “truth about what language is and does cannot be separated from the truth about how we are living creatures on a blue planet in a dark and light universe” (21). Language devices exercise influence on the world giving space to different individuals in different contexts. The in-depth investigation of productions of language devices can be the litmus test of the ‘truth’ working behind the ecological enterprise of linguistics (see Fettes 2003). In *Handbook of Ecolinguistics* Fill and Penz (2015) have listed the three fundamental levels on which the future of ecolinguistics must be seen:

- (1) The level of language diversity and all related topics, including minority languages, language endangerment and language death. The link between the loss of languages and the loss of species will provide further insights into language diversity and environmental diversity. Language diversity will also be looked at in areas of the Earth which have not yet been in the center of linguistic research.
- (2) The level of language, discourse and the environment, where the role of language and discourse in describing, creating, aggravating, but more importantly helping to solve environmental problems will have to be discussed in more detail. On the level of discourse, both negative and positive aspects should be considered, and future investigations should increasingly consider different media (images, film, social media) and how they are combined with language in the traditional sense. In addition, the focus should lie on analyzing and enabling participatory

discourses which allow the affected public to contribute their perspectives to those of science and politics.

(3) Ecolinguistics as a transdisciplinary science (or a dialectical philosophy) which transcends traditional linguistics and creates an awareness of the interdependency of all things and ideas (cf. Finke, 2014). Ecolinguistics, on this level, will be seen by many scholars as a philosophy of interaction and harmony. In this context, the development of ecolinguistics in China will deserve particular attention as there appear to be rapid developments in this country. (441-442)

From the above discussion we can safely state that one of the objectives of ecolinguistic analysis is to show how linguistic features or devices come together to form the particular worldviews or cultural codes, the sets of “shared values, norms, ethos and social beliefs” which reflect the community’s common sense (Gavriely-Nuri 80). Stibbe explains that ecolinguistics analyzes language with a view to revealing *the stories we live by*, “the mental models that influence behavior and lie at the heart of ecological challenges” (2). These are the cognitive, mental structures denoting “the secret reservoir of values” (un)consciously in the minds of multiple individuals in a particular socio-cultural context. The ecolinguistics as a scientific enterprise or discipline is thus concerned with the insights from the naturalized and realist philosophy of science and thereby with the various ecological dimensions projected in this state of the art. It attempts to look into the properties of language and to raise reflective consciousness about the existence of the interrelatedness and interdependence between discursive practices and ecological devastation. The famous linguist Michael Halliday’s keynote paper “New Ways of Meaning: the Challenge to Applied Linguistics”, delivered at the 9th World Conference of Applied Linguistics in 1990, is considered to be a crucially critical turn for Ecolinguistics. In this paper, Halliday arguably claims that “classism, growthism, destruction of species, pollution and the like [...] are not just problems for the biologists and physicists. They are problems for the applied linguistic community as well” (199). In this way

Michael Halliday had unfolded up the channel for linguistics to care about the environment in which language occurred and immensely contributed to the emergence of Ecolinguistics by raising a few but very relevant questions: “Do linguistic patterns, literally, affect the survival and wellbeing of the human species as well as other species on Earth?” (qtd. in Stibbe: 8).

To sum up, ecolinguistics assumes that the environment can be affected by the very use of language items such as vocabulary, sentences, text and discourse. It can lead to forest-desertification or desert-aforestation, killing or saving of living species, etc. Ecolinguistics strongly believes that people’s approach to languages, culture and (non-)biological surroundings is shaped by the stories or discourses they encounter in their day-to-day lives and language used helps them tell and retell these and influence the beliefs. It explores with scientific insights the crucial role of language in the causes and solution of the ecological problems. Ecolinguists are in favour of positive discourse analysis and critical of anti-ecology language. It denounces or discards those anti-ecology linguistic discourses that ignite anthropocentrism and grant humans the legitimacy to dominate or destroy other non-human species. Thus, ecolinguistics supports efforts for sustainable development and straightway denounces those moves leading to climate change, language endangerment, disappearance of species, imbalance in biodiversity, endangerment of nature-dependent cultures and heritage and in all, the death of ecosystems.

Now let us proceed to analyze T. S. Eliot’s masterpiece *The Waste Land* (1922) from the theoretical perspectives of ecolinguistics, discussed so far. *The Waste Land* is a frantic sincere expression of an agonized poetic soul to find out the means of getting rid of the thoroughly mechanized stony cruelty-ridden modern life as developed during and after the World War I (1914-1919). The poem begins with a shocking sentential expression ‘April is the cruelest month breeding,’ but ends with the three-time asyndetic repetition of noun ‘shantih’ which a human being desires most. Here as claimed above, we venture a preliminary attempt to analyze and explore the poem from the perspective of

ecolinguistics and to exhibit how poetic expression takes turns in depicting the integral relationship between all the constituents of environment affected by the 'cruellest' materialism and repaired by the peace-giving spiritualism. Russell Elliott Murphy in the paper titled "*The Waste Land* and the Pedagogy of Tolerance" argues that the poem *The Waste Land* composed of plurality of voices upholds consistently one central point above all others and:

That point is the paradoxical and thereby ennobling commonality of human experience in the midst of each person's sense of individual emotion and moral uniqueness to his or her own experiences. All human experiences are, to some degree, the same, particularly when we seek to categorize them into what Eliot calls art emotions or into moral imperatives. But no one has ever thought of his own most degrading or exalting experiences as run of the mill, and there hangs the tale of all tales. (111)

The Waste Land is, according to Murphy, "a memento vitae of everyday experience" (112) which has developed with a series of broken images in the five inherently and ideationally connected sections: 'The Burial of the Dead', 'A Game of Chess', 'The Fire Sermon', 'Death by Water' and 'What the Thunder Said'. The Waste landers are grappling with the inhuman, cruel hostile situations created and nourished by their own acts on Nature and society as traced in every bit of expression beginning with "April is the cruellest month breeding...". Consequently, they have lost their ability to say or guess as their experiences of deep spiritual emptiness are centred in and round the "heap of broken images". The second section 'A Game of Chess' the title of which has been taken from Thomas Middleton (1580-1627)'s play of the same name dealing with the seduction of a young girl in the background of the stage projecting the progress of a game of chess suggests that the relationships of men and women wearing masks in all spheres of modern urban mechanized life are nothing but the moves and countermoves in a game of chess, each of the parties trying to win over the other.

The third section 'The Fire Sermon' proceeds with the same vein of describing the aridity and inhumanity of contemporary urban life. The title 'Fire Sermon' borrowed from the Buddhist philosophy indicates the burning of lust and desire affecting natural life and this section attempts to give us some clear sermon-like allusions, much needed to overcome the mechanized life. The short section 'Death by Water' mainly upholds the contrast between the fire symbol with water one. The drowning Phoenician sailor recalls the fertility cult god. This hints at the hope of the spiritual rebirth through the burning of lust-and-sterility of the body and soothing by life-giving water. In the last section 'What the Thunder said' three themes such as the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous and the present decay of Eastern Europe which remain unresolved in this discourse. The poem ends with the Upanishadic expressions 'Datta (to give) Dayadhvam (to surrender) Damyata (to control)' which can bring 'Shantih shantih shantih' to this human world. And make it liveable and loveable. It is worthy to note here that Eliot with his intellectual, artistic intuition has made an extensive use of scriptural writings including the Bible, the *Book of Common Prayer*, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, and the Buddha's *Fire Sermon*, and of anthropological, cultural studies such as Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. In addition, Eliot has deftly quoted from or alluded to the works of great authors belonging to several languages like Homer, Sophocles, Petronius, Virgil, Ovid, St. Augustine, Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, Kyd, Shakespeare, Donne, Middleton, Webster, Milton, Marvell, de Nerval, Tennyson, Wagner, Whitman, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Conrad, Hesse, Huxley and Shackleton. This undoubtedly substantiates the poet's vast range of scholarship and a rare capability to handle such vast range of materials and to give a creatively rich shape of poetic unity to the poem of epical height.

In the sterility-dominated world there is as yet no room for faith, reason and conscience much needed for beatitude or the rituals of salvation. Eliot's subject, as we see, is suffering in all

spheres of life. By describing the modern arid world through the language and associations of a past time rich in spiritual insight, Eliot has tried to show his technique of analyzing the present Waste Land through contact with tradition which was governed by the fertility cults of ancient cultures, the rituals of the vegetation cults, closeness to Nature, love for all living beings, and the sense of cooperation, empathy, spirituality. The change from eco-centric past life on the Earth, a state closer to *Paradiso*, to the present Hellish urban life devoid of traditional values has been foregrounded by the skilful use of materials and ideas of both past and present.

In the Epigraph of the poem Cumaean Sybil's expression of wish to die as sets the tone of the poem dealing with the barren waste land and its inhabitants cultivating greed, hypocrisy and cruelty. The idea of the man-made waste land has been projected in the poetic discourse with the language, myths, allusions and other devices. Hence Murphy argues:

The situations of the Sibyl and Marie, like those to come, of Lil and Albert or of the typist and the house agent's clerk, or of Elizabeth and Leicester or of Ferdinand and Miranda, tell a commonplace story in particularized details that may change it with a certain sort of dramatic energy but cannot remove the tale from the universal and commonplace once that dramatic energy dissipated. The Sibyl is just another personality worn down by life; Marie is just another peer-pressured young person dropping names amid hints of high, perhaps even seamy, adventure. (111)

Again, in the poem the physical landscapes as depicted with help of names of places (like Holfgarten), streets (like King William Street), locations (like the Church of St. Mary Woolnoth), and more specifically, the Old Testament desert of ll. 19-36, the river banks of ll. 173-196, the mountainous or rocky space of ll. 331-394 and their atmosphere as a whole symbolically and ironically represent the modern world as arid desert full of 'cactus' as well as its stage of emotional and spiritual bankruptcy. Michael Thorpe in his article

“Reading Spatially: *The Waste Land* and Spatial Form” aptly argues, “The reader must think ironically, aware of the great contradictions: between faith and illusion, ideal and reality, hope and despair, between the claims of western civilization and its failure: ‘Jerusalem Athens Alexandria/ Vienna London/ Unreal’ — not, we may note, New York or Washington” (122). Such poetic representation is undoubtedly the outcome of the poet’s deep ecological consciousness which has evidently governed his comprehensive, allusive and indirect language use in exposing the disintegration, dislocation and complexity of urban imperialistic civilization and time marked by faithlessness, loneliness, envy, anarchy, hypocrisy, death of innocence, commercialized life, loss of creativity, etc. This is markedly evident in the projection of the pub culture development in a city like London. Here the relationships, be it conjugal, friendly, or some other social, are governed not by traditional human values but by wealth, status, external beauty and the like. In this context we can refer to a very poignant illustration made by Michael Thorpe in his article ‘Reading Spatially: *The Waste Land* and “Spatial Form”:

A running motif (*leitmotif*) in *The Waste Land* is that of time: time past, time present, the meaning and uses of time. At the close of the only passage that explicitly refers to the Great War, at the end of part 2, following the conversation in the pub about homecoming Albert, who’s ‘been in the army four years’ (148), the publican (or bartender) calls, HURRY UP PLEASE IT’S TIME! While this is the common call at closing time in an English pub, it resonates strikingly against the previous passage where a middle class couple, not communicating, live in separate bondage in a time they cannot kill (which will kill them). The male, whose interior consciousness we register (an interior monologue) thinks ‘we are in rats’ alley/ Where the dead men lost their bones’ (116). Eliot’s note points us forward to another allusive layer of meaning (Pt. 3, 195), we may also think of the trenches in the recent war’s battle fields, which the troops christened with the names

of streets or alleys, and where the very ramparts were buttressed with the corpses of the dead, whose flesh the swarming rats gnawed clean. 'We' are enveloped by that experience, and we too shall die—but how shall we meanwhile resume life and make it meaningful? (122)

The whole representation of the poetic discourse of *The Waste Land* reflects the undercurrent of thought and language in the deeper level of the poet's mind where ideas or thoughts are given linguistic shapes. Here Eliot having been conversant with the knowledge of both past and present situations due to his wide range of reading and experience and having been endowed with the highly insightful pragmatic poetic soul has easily reached his desired goal in representing the present situation in contrast with the past. Due to the space limitation some illustrations are being given for substantiating our claim. One glaring instance is the first four lines which describe the month April as 'cruellest':

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (ll. 1-4)

in contrast with first four lines of Chaucer's Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* which project soothing and productive April:

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote,
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour; (ll. 1-4)

The city space does not provide freedom to the narrator and so he expresses:

And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter. (ll. 16-18)

The present death-in-life situation of modern urban man has been upheld by the language which underlyingly suggests the opposite i.e., the positive joyful life of love in the lap of Nature.

Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither

Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Oed' und leer das Meer. (ll. 38-42)

In the ancient time the life, be it urban or rural, was nor 'unreal' as well as claustrophobic s perceived the modern man as shown below:

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many. (ll. 60-63)

As the narrator journeys down the memory lane, he can easily identify the development of hypocrisy (in place innocence and simplicity) among his contemporaries including the reader as conveyed by the use of a line from Baudelaire's poem 'Flower of Evils':

"You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!" (l. 76)

The hypocrisy practiced by the urban people takes a vicious shape in the form of deception, vulgarity, seduction and spiritual emptiness as portrayed in the second section 'The Game of Chess'. The references to the mythical story relating Philomela and other are the markers of the existence of the closeness between the man and Nature from the time immemorial and but now man has distanced from the mother Nature in many ways as discussed above.

Buddhism, as we know, is out and out eco-centric or ecosophical religion and Natural resources remain at the centre of human existence. The pleasant landscape dominated by river and its constituents and folktales relating to this (suggested by 'nymphs') has been replaced by cityscape dominated by river polluted by the factory-wastes (e.g., 'oil and tar'), dry rocks, stony rubbish, brown land, and other waste materials of industries and cities. This has been foregrounded by putting the opening line of Spenser's 'Prothalamion': "Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song." in the midst of the following lines:

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf

Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are
departed.

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are
departed.

And their friends, the loitering heirs of City directors;
(ll. 173-180)

That the disappearance of human life in and around Nature has caused the imbalance in the physical, mental, psychological and spiritual aspects of life evidently haunts the poet. In the love poem "To His Coy Mistress" Andrew Marvell, the 17th century poet, conveys the value and swiftness of Time, as captured in the following quote:

But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near; (ll. 21-22)

while Eliot, the 20th century poet, along with other urban people including Mrs. Porter hears the sounds of factory sirens and machines:

But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring. (ll. 196-198)

The factory-based urban life and life-style divorced from the bliss of Nature exercise a telling effect on the individual's mind, as evidenced by the following lines:

My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. (ll. 296-297)

and hence he/she admits his/her miserable inability to do something constructive for the Earth which is 'Burning, burning, burning, burning' (l. 308) at large:

On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing.' (300-306)

The burning individual here frantically prays for 'water' which can only transform the waste land into livable one in close association with Nature. 'Water', as we know, is the one of most vital natural resources for life on Earth and so symbolizes life, life-force, purity, purifying agent, simplicity and innocence, and peace which were very much present in the ancient agrarian society but now absent in the present industrialized and commercialized city called waste land where

He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience (II. 328-330)

In order to overcome this crisis of modern urban civilization, the poet having deep eco-consciousness is seen exploring several alternative means to have water and thereby to reestablish Paradise-like ancient world congenial for all free from stony rubbish and full of fresh healthy air and water. The repeated use of subjunctive mood starting with "If there water - - -" indicates the poet's sincere hope and wish to have water so that Nature can again occupy its old role on Earth and ecological balance is reestablished with fuller strength. It is to be noted that the city life marked by decay, stones, rocks, cracks, fragments, dryness, faithlessness, alienation, boredom, death-in-life state has been projected as 'unreal' time and again. Eliot being a modern progressive thinker believes that the present state of the city life is not the original or fundamental or real one but one imposed by mechanized urban society. Hence Eliot with his sound command over both Eastern and Western knowledge systems seeks the means or ways of bringing back the 'real' and ultimately finds that in the *Upanishadic dictum*: '*Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata*'. If humans rigorously follow this universal bio-centric principle replacing narrow anthropocentric capitalist principles, our Earth is sure to become again an abode of heavenly bliss i.e., '*Shantih*' in integral association and collaboration of Nature which is, William Wordsworth in his poem "Tintern Abbey" (1798) says:

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused (II. 94-96)

Nature possesses immense power to shape the moral, psychological and spiritual consciousness of man generated and nurtured by Nature itself. In his sonnet 'Sobhyotar Proti' composed in 1896, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) also rejects iron-wood-stone-built civilization and craves for getting back life-in-Nature: "Give us back the sylvan past, take away today's cities."

We wish to conclude the present ecolinguistics study by making a very brief observation on the number of occurrence of seven crucial words arranged in ascending order used in *The Waste Land* representing so called urban civilization and Nature. Here is the data given below in the form of table:

Sl. No	Word	Number of Times Repeated	
1	stony	2	
2	unreal	3	
3	city	6	
4	dead	10	
5	rock	12	
6	air	14	
7	water	18	

Notice that the first five words 'stony', 'unreal', 'city', 'dead' and 'rock' used in this poetic discourse in various contexts both denotatively and connotatively represent the urban existence detached from Nature and Nature-centric life of all living beings. Significantly enough, the two words 'air' and 'water' which, as the above table shows, occur fourteen (14) and eighteen (18) times in this poem constitute the most fundamental components for all the healthy and spirituality-rich lives on the Earth. The linguistic data suggest that fresh 'air' and 'water' ONLY can bring back past glorious life, mainly governed by bio-centricity and ecospirituality in place of sterile 'Unreal city' life mainly governed by artificiality, wealth, pollution, faithlessness and inhumanity.

To be precise, the present study shows that this very much modernist writing with linear narrative and varying time, place and setting helps us see connections and get a sense of a larger whole, if not final definition. Following Wordsworth we can say in

the conclusion that there is no other alternative left before us but to ecology-governed civilization and embrace Nature as

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. (Tintern Abbey II. 109-111)

Otherwise, we cannot but remain engulfed in mechanized 'unreal' and 'dead' urbanity represented by Eliotesque noun phrases like 'A heap of broken images', 'The sound of horns and motors', etc. The present ecolinguistic exploration of poetic uses of language dominated by Nature and its soothing effect has foregrounded the suggestion that the poem *The Waste Land* is an ecospiritual journey from an 'Unreal city' to a world in the lap of Nature endowed with all pervading 'Shantih' i.e., PEACE, symbolically represented by 'water'.

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Critical & Analytical Essays

From Sthāna to Samādhi: Reframing Nṛtta in the Nāṭyaśāstra through Yogic and Tantric Frameworks, with Extensions to South-east Asian Dance Traditions

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Abstract

This study proposes that there exists a deeper structural affinity between performance practice and philosophical inquiry than is commonly acknowledged. Grounded in the foundational insights of Piyal Bhattacharya on the metaphysics of embodiment in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, this paper builds upon his framework by drawing upon philosophical systems such as Ashtanga Yoga and Kashmir Shaivism. More specifically, it argues that the process of nṛtta may be understood as analogous to the yogic or tantric progression toward states such as Samprajñāta samādhi. Within this mapping, sthāna (along with sthiti) corresponds to dhāraṇā (focused concentration), karaṇa to dhyāna (meditative absorption), and aṅgaḥāra to samādhi (complete integration). In this context, the paper further argues that the performer employs sthānas as an initial step toward depersonalization—shifting from individual identity toward a structured, archetypal presence. This transformation is not merely aesthetic but contemplative, requiring both technical precision and a deeply internalized state of awareness. Through this lens, Abhinavagupta's engagement with the *Nāṭyaśāstra* can be seen as something that recognizes performance as a valid and potent pathway toward higher states of consciousness.

Keywords: Aṅgaḥāra; karaṇa; sthāna; metaphysics of movement; Nāṭyaśāstra

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made.

Introduction:

In his examination of the metaphysical foundations of embodiment in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Piyal Bhattacharya states:

The entire process of fathoming a mental state and then processing it first occurs in the *cittākāśa* of the actors with supreme awareness, and keeping the bodily action ‘extra-daily’ in the outer space (*bhūtākāśa*) necessitates the presence of a perennially observing self. This ever-observing self is incurred from the ideation of *ātmā* that brings forth the layer of *cidākāśa*. Thus, we can see that Bharata's dynamics of *nāṭya* is founded on a layered ideation of space and metaphysical wisdom of movement rather than just bodily action and/or interaction with other bodies on the stage space. (30)

Bhattacharya's proposition—that *sthānas*, *cārīs*, and *karaṇas* are not mere movements but rather function as psychophysical embodiments of cosmic principles leading to an elevated sense of being—forms the foundation of the questions explored in this paper.

This study also emerges from years of embodied engagement with *karaṇas* and *aṅgaḥāras*. For a long time, the author held the conviction that a thorough physical understanding of the *karaṇa* would unlock the essence of dance articulated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The author's approach was highly technical and largely *karaṇa*-centric. At a crucial point in this journey, Bhattacharya redirected the author's attention away from *karaṇa* and *aṅgaḥāra* toward *sthāna*, insisting that it held the key to the questions being pursued. This intervention proved transformative. What follows in this paper is, in many ways, an extension of that guidance.

Through sustained experimentation in practice, *sthāna* gradually revealed itself not merely as a bodily position but as both a mental and physical ground—an essential canvas without which entry into dance is impossible. While the transformations within the body–mind complex were partially experienced on the dance floor, the metaphysical mechanics underlying the process of *nṛtta* remained difficult to articulate. The structural relationships between *sthāna*, *cārī*, *nṛtta-hasta*, *karaṇa*, *aṅgaḥāra*, *maṇḍala*, and

piṇḍibandha as well as their true purpose had yet to be fully conceptualized and articulated.

A critical insight emerged through a deeper engagement with Aṣṭāṅga Yoga and Kashmir Śaivism. This inquiry led to the possibility that sthāna may be understood as analogous to dhāraṇā ; the sequential execution of karaṇas may be viewed as a form of dhyāna; and the sustained performance of an aṅgahāra may culminate in an experience analogous to samprajñāta samādhi. While these correspondences are exploratory rather than definitive, they provide a productive framework through which to examine the psychophysical dynamics of movement described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Section 1 examines the concepts of dhāraṇā , dhyāna, and samādhi as understood within Patañjali's Aṣṭāṅga Yoga and Kashmir Śaivism. It also introduces the concept of upāya in Kashmir Śaiva thought. Although each of these topics constitutes a vast field of inquiry, the discussion focuses on those aspects most relevant to the present study.

Section 2 investigates key concepts from the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, namely sthāna, sthiti, gati, cārī, karaṇa, and aṅgahāra.

Section 3 proposes a conceptual mapping between sthāna and dhāraṇā , karaṇa and dhyāna, and aṅgahāra and samādhi, examining the implications of these parallels for understanding the metaphysics of movement.

Finally, Section 4 offers examples of dance traditions in Southeast Asia where meditation still continues to be the main technique of the dance form and samādhi the highest goal. In doing so, this section highlights areas for future research.

Section 1:

Dhāraṇā, dhyāna, and samādhi in Yoga

Yama, niyama, āsana, prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā , dhyāna, and samādhi constitute the eight limbs (Aṣṭāṅga) of Patañjali's Yoga system as seen in the Sūtra below:

यमनियमासनप्राणायामप्रत्याहारधारणाध्यानसमाधयोऽष्टाङ्गानि ॥¹ (Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra* 2.29)

Further, Yoga is defined as the Sūtra below.

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥² (Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra* 1.2)

From this Sūtra it is understood that Yoga is the cessation of mental modifications which highlight the purpose of Yoga where the body is used purely as a tool to condition the mind³. For the purposes of this paper, attention will be restricted to the final three limbs of the aṣṭāṅga system—dhāraṇā, dhyāna, and samādhi—also known as Samyama⁴, as they are most relevant to the present inquiry.

In the Yoga tradition, dhāraṇā is defined as:

देशबन्धश्चित्तस्य धारणा ॥⁵ (Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra* 3.1)

Dhāraṇā is the binding of the mind to a particular place or locus⁶. The mind ordinarily shifts continuously from one object to another; dhāraṇā interrupts this movement by fixing attention upon a single point⁷. This idea will later prove central to the concept of sthāna. Initially, such fixation requires effort, as attention must be repeatedly redirected. Gradually, however, the effort diminishes and awareness begins to flow continuously toward the object. This continuity is described as dhyāna⁸.

तत्र प्रत्ययैकतानता ध्यानम् ॥⁹ (Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra* 3.2)

The distinction between dhāraṇā and dhyāna is therefore one of continuity: what begins as deliberate fixation matures into an

¹ Patañjali. *Pātañjalayogadarśana*. With the Vyāsabhāṣya and the Yogasiddhi Hindi commentary of Suresh Chandra Shrivastava, 2nd ed., Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, 1988. 265

² Patañjali, *Pātañjalayogadarśana*, 9

³ Patañjali, *Pātañjalayogadarśana*, 9

⁴ *Ibid.*, 324

⁵ *Ibid.*, 320

⁶ *Ibid.*, 320

⁷ *Ibid.*, 320

⁸ *Ibid.*, 322

⁹ *Ibid.*, 322

effortless flow of attention. This concept will later be employed in analyzing the sequential execution of karaṇas.

तदेवार्थमात्रनिर्भासं स्वरूपशून्यमिव समाधिः ॥¹⁰ (Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra* 3.3)

According to *Pātañjalayogadarśana*, as dhyāna deepens, the distinction between observer and observed begins to dissolve. The object alone shines forth, while awareness of the meditator recedes. In other words, the cognition that ‘I am meditating on this object’ fades. This state is termed samādhi¹¹. Thus, dhāraṇā is not merely a preliminary stage but the beginning of a progressive transformation in cognition that culminates in meditative absorption.

Classical Yoga recognizes two broad forms of samādhi: Samprajñāta and Asamprajñāta. Asamprajñāta samādhi implies a state where there is a complete lack of both gross and subtle thoughts¹². This is not relevant to our present study because dancing would be impossible in a pure state of thoughtlessness. Therefore, this study focuses exclusively on Samprajñāta samādhi, a state of deep absorption where only subtle thoughts exist while gross thoughts have fully dissolved¹³.

वितर्कविचारानन्दास्मितारूपानुगमात् सम्प्रज्ञातः ॥¹⁴ (Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra* 1.17)

According to *Pātañjalayogadarśana*, Sūtra 1.17 states that Samprajñāta samādhi unfolds through four progressively subtler stages. Vitarka denotes reasoning and focused inquiry, wherein the mind engages with a gross object through analysis and reflection. Vicāra represents a more refined contemplation directed toward subtler aspects of the object¹⁵. Ānanda refers to the experience of inner bliss that arises as the mind becomes increasingly tranquil and concentrated¹⁶. Finally, Asmitā is the subtle awareness of pure

¹⁰ Patañjali, *Pātañjalayogadarśana*, 322

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 322

¹² *Ibid.*, 324

¹³ Patañjali, *Pātañjalayogadarśana*, 324

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 63

“I-am-ness” that remains after grosser mental activities have subsided.¹⁷ Together, these stages describe a movement from conceptual engagement toward progressively subtler modes of meditative absorption. The paper will later explore how each of these stages may be discerned within the sustained execution of an aṅgahāra.

Dhāraṇā in Kashmir Śaivism:

At the outset, it is important to note that the term Kashmir Śaivism functions as an umbrella term for several interconnected philosophical traditions. The literature of the Trika system of Kashmir falls under Agama Śāstra, Spanda Śāstra and Pratyabhijña Śāstra¹⁸. A comprehensive examination of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* through the lens of each of these systems would be beyond the scope of the present study. Rather, this paper draws selectively from these literary works in an attempt to illuminate the metaphysical processes experienced by the actor-dancer. Abhinavagupta’s commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *Abhinavabhāratī* serves as the primary motivation for undertaking an inquiry along these lines.

A second caveat is equally important. Many of the concepts discussed within Kashmir Śaivism are best understood through lived practice under the guidance of a competent guru and, traditionally, through initiation (dīkṣā)¹⁹. Consequently, there are limitations to deriving theoretical models from Śaiva texts and applying them directly to a practical discipline such as nāṭya. The interpretations proposed here should therefore be viewed as exploratory. A practitioner who has undergone dīkṣā within a Śaiva lineage would be in a better position to confirm, refine, or challenge the conclusions advanced in this paper. The author is not directly aware of a study along these lines and hope that this will serve as a starting point toward an inquiry that is more practical in nature.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 63

¹⁸ Singh, Jaideva. *Shiva Sūtras: The Yoga of Supreme Identity*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1979, p. 15.

¹⁹ Abhinavagupta. *Tantrasāra* of Abhinavagupta. Translated with introduction and notes by H. N. Chakravarty, edited by Boris Marjanovic, preface by Swami Chetanananda, Rudra Press, 2012. p. 33

Finally, although both Patañjali's Yoga and Kashmir Śaivism employ the language of Yoga, their objectives differ significantly. As discussed earlier, Patañjali's system seeks the cessation of mental modifications as a means to liberation (mokṣa). Kashmir Śaivism, by contrast, emphasizes pratyabhijñā—the recognition of one's essential identity with Śiva as central to the idea of mokṣa as seen in the Sutra below²⁰.

मोक्षो हि नाम नैवान्यः स्वरूपप्रथनं हि सः।²¹

स्वरूपं चात्मनः संविन्नान्यत्तत्र तु याः पुनः॥१५५॥

(Abhinavagupta, *Tantrāloka* 1.155)

The question then arises as to how self-recognition can be achieved. The answer to this is beautifully encapsulated in the opening verse (maṅgalācaraṇa) of Abhinavagupta's *Gītārthasaṅgraha*:

य एव विततस्फुरद्द्विविधभावचक्रात्मकः
परस्परविभेदवान्विषयतामुपागच्छति ।
यदेकमयभावनावशादेत्यभेदान्वयम्
स शम्भुरशिवापहो जयति बोधभासां निधिः ॥²²

That Śiva—who, in the process of manifestation, unfolds into diverse forms and becomes the multitude of objects experienced as mutually distinct; and who, through one-pointed contemplation, returns once again to the state beyond differentiation—that Śambhu, destroyer of inauspiciousness and repository of illuminating consciousness, is ever victorious. (Abhinavagupta, *Gītārtha Saṅgraha*, 1.0)

This verse succinctly expresses a central Śaiva insight: One-pointed awareness is a crucial means of self-recognition.

²⁰ Singh, Jaideva. *Shiva Sūtras: The Yoga of Supreme Identity*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1979, p. 30.

²¹ Singh, Jaideva. *Shiva Sūtras: The Yoga of Supreme Identity*, p. 30.

²² Abhinavagupta. *Abhinavagupta's Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita: Gītārtha Saṅgraha*. Translated by Boris Marjanovic, Indica Books, 2004. p.25

Whereas Patañjali presents an eightfold path (aṣṭāṅga yoga), Kashmir Śaivism describes a sixfold system known as ṣaḍaṅga yoga. (Grönbold 3-9) As with the previous discussion, the present study focuses only on the final three limbs—dhāraṇā, dhyāna, and samādhi—which are common to both systems but are understood differently due to their differing philosophical goals.

Within the Śaiva framework, dhāraṇā is not merely a technique of concentration but the beginning of the dissolution of subject-object duality²³. A common example that stems from a dhāraṇā mentioned in the *Vijñāna bhairava tantra*²⁴ illustrates this process: if one contemplates an object such as a pot with sustained attention, one eventually ceases to cognize it merely as an external object. The object's individuality recedes, while the essence or "pot-ness" (ghaṭatva) becomes the dominant experience. What began as an objective perception gradually becomes a subjective realization.²⁵

In Chapter 5 of *Tantrasāra*, Abhinavagupta explains the dissolution of subject-object duality. H. N. Chakravarty in his translation and notes of the *Tantrasāra* writes:

In the beginning, one remains steadily established in one's own innate consciousness; then by repose in the object (prameye viśramya), one fills the knowable. Then he quickly dissolves the distinctions of subjectivity and objectivity, and takes rest. (84)

In addition, Ananda Coomaraswamy provides various instances²⁶ in his essay the 'Hindu view of Art' where he discusses the important role of art as yoga in Indian speculative thought. He observes that a work of art is inwardly completed before its external execution, echoing the idea that artistic creation arises

²³ Abhinavagupta. *Tantrasāra* of Abhinavagupta. Translated with introduction and notes by H. N. Chakravarty, edited by Boris Marjanovic, preface by Swami Chetanananda, Rudra Press, 2012. 84

²⁴ Singh, Jaideva. *Vijñānabhairava, or Divine Consciousness: A Treasury of 112 Types of Yoga*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1979.

²⁵ Lakshmanjoo, Swami. *Vijñāna Bhairava: The Manual for Self Realization*. See commentary on Sutra 62.

²⁶ Coomaraswamy in his essay 'Hindu view of Art' states the instance where Śaṅkarācārya cites the arrow-maker as a classical example of one-pointed concentration: though wholly absorbed in his work, he retains full awareness and control, illustrating a state akin to yogic attention. Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. *The Dance of Śiva: Fourteen Indian Essays*. Sunwise Turn, 1918. p. 21

from contemplative vision and sustained awareness. In Kashmir Śaivism, this transformation is understood through the concept of *māṭṛkā*, the principle that structures ordinary cognition. Jaideva Singh explains:

The *māṭṛkā* becomes the basis of all limited knowledge. *Māṭṛkā* means unknown, unrealized mother. So long as the mystery of *māṭṛkā* is not realized, she is a source of bondage or limitation. When her mystery is realized, she becomes the source of liberation. (172) ²⁷

Abhinavagupta similarly discusses the notions of *mamakāra* and *ahaṅkāra* in the *Gītārthasaṅgraha*, both of which arise through the operation of *māṭṛkā*:

‘ममामी’ इत्यादिः ममकारः, ‘अहमुदारोऽहं तेजस्वी अहं सहनः’ इत्यादिरहङ्कारः । एतो यस्य न स्तः ।²⁸

‘Mamakāra is the feeling of possession, expressed through notions such as "this belongs to me." Ahaṅkāra is the sense of selfhood expressed through ideas such as "I am generous," "I am powerful," or "I am forgiving." One who is free from both possessiveness and egoic identification is described as *nirmama* and *nirahaṅkāra*.’ (265)

Thus, *dhāraṇā* may be understood as a means of reducing the activity of *māṭṛkā* by stabilizing awareness and weakening habitual distinctions between self and object. To facilitate this process, Kashmir Śaivism prescribes several *upāyas* (means of realization). We begin with *āṇavopāya*, considered to be the lowest path of all. As Swami Lakshmanjoo explains, *āṇavopāya* employs

²⁷ Jaideva Singh in his book on the Siva Sutras writes : “... as ascertained in *Malini-vijaya*, the Divine *Paravak* expands, having recourse to the forms of *iccha* (will) *jnana* (knowledge) and *kriyā* (action); assuming the forms of vowel and consonant, group and the letters pertaining to the groups, Siva, Sakti, Mahesi and other deities, she becomes *matrka* in the form of letters from 'a' to 'ksa'. In all the experients, she brings about, on the occasion of knowledge with thought-constructs and knowledge without thought-constructs, the application of gross and subtle words by means of inner awareness. By means of the deities presiding over the groups and the letters, denoted by those groups, she exhibits in various ways wonder, joy, fear, attraction, aversion etc., and by concealing the un-limited independent nature of consciousness, she brings about limited, dependent embodiment.” Singh, Jaideva. *Shiva Sūtras: The Yoga of Supreme Identity*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1979, p.172

²⁸ Abhinavagupta. *Abhinavagupta's Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita: Gītārtha Saṅgraha*. Translated, with introduction and notes, by Boris Marjanovic, Indica Books, 2004. p.265

external support or actions (kriyā) to stabilize attention upon a particular locus.

Āṇavopāya is defined as that upāya where mystical entry takes place through concentration on parts of the body (sthāna-prakalpanā), contemplation (dhyāna), recitation (varṇa), support of the breath (uccāra), and mantras. It is also called kriyopāya, the path of action. (xxxii)

The next stage is śāktopāya:

In śāktopāya, the aspirant achieves absorption in God-consciousness by concentrating on the Supreme Being as found in the junction between any two successive thoughts or any two successive actions. (xxxv)

A central practice within śāktopāya is awareness of transitional moments—the gap between experiences. Examples include the interval between inhalation and exhalation, between two thoughts, or between successive actions. As Swami Lakshman Joo further explains:

"Madhyam dhyātvā: concentrate on that center, and while concentrating on that center, be established in that center . . . and in making yourself established in that center, the reality of God consciousness is revealed." (xxxvi)

The *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, a foundational text of Kashmir Śaivism, presents 112 dhāraṇās. These contemplative practices are generally understood as belonging to āṇavopāya, śāktopāya, or sām̐bhavopāya (the latter lying beyond the scope of this study). A recurring theme throughout many of these practices is the injunction to focus awareness on the center (madhya). As will become evident later, this notion of centering provides an important key for understanding the experiential dynamics of karaṇas and āṅgahāras.

Section 2

In this section, we shift our attention to several key terms employed by Bharata in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and elaborated upon by Abhinavagupta. A deeper understanding of these concepts is necessary before attempting to map dhāraṇā, dhyāna, and samādhi onto the execution of an āṅgahāra. Here, the author would like to highlight for the reader Bhattacharya's paper on "The Metaphysics of 'Embodiment' in Bharata's System of Nāṭya, for a deeper understanding of some of these concepts."²⁹

Karaṇa:

Bharata defines karaṇa in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as:

हस्तपादसमायोगो नृत्तस्य करणं भवेत् ॥³⁰ (4.30)

At a superficial level, this definition appears to describe a coordination of the upper and lower limbs. However, Abhinavagupta's commentary reveals that a karaṇa is not merely an aggregate of movements; it is a single, unified kriyā strongly suggested by the word Samāyoga (union). The term used to describe it is 'Ekā kriyā'.³¹

This understanding is central to the present study. A karaṇa is constituted by what may be termed its karaṇa-mātrkāś: cārīs, nṛtta-hastas, and sthānas³². While cārīs govern the movements of the lower body and nṛtta-hastas those of the upper body, sthāna provides the foundational basis upon which these movements unfold.

Sthiti, gati, and sthāna:

Abhinavagupta comments:

²⁹ Bhattacharya, Piya. "The Metaphysics of 'Embodiment' in Bharata's System of Nāṭya: The Dynamics of 'Extra-Daily.'" pp. 9–31.

³⁰ Bharata Muni. *Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni: With the Commentary Abhinavabhāratī by Abhinavaguptācārya*. Vol. 1, edited by M. Ramakrishna Kavi, revised and critically edited by K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, 2nd ed., Oriental Institute, 1956. Chapter 4.

³¹ Bharata Muni. *Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni: With the Commentary Abhinavabhāratī by Abhinavaguptācārya*. Chapter 4.

³² *Ibid.*, Chapter 4

तेन गतिस्थितिसंमिलिते करणमित्यनन्त्यम् ।³³

Therefore, because movement (gati) and position (sthiti) are combined in it, it is called a karaṇa.

This commentary describes the karaṇa as arising from the conjunction of gati and sthiti. To understand this formulation more fully, however, we must first examine another important term: sthāna.

A common understanding of sthāna is that it refers to a bodily position assumed by the actor (naṭa) before initiating movement. While useful as a preliminary description, this interpretation can be limiting. For many years, the author understood sthāna solely as a physical posture from which a karaṇa or other movement begins. Owing to the guidance from Bhattacharya and a closer examination of the terms sthāna and sthiti, however, suggested a more nuanced interpretation.

Both terms are derived from the verbal root √स्था (sthā), "to stand", "to fix the mind on" or "to remain established,"³⁴ yet they carry distinct meanings. sthāna refers primarily to a place, position, or locus, whereas sthiti denotes a state, condition, or mode of being established.

³³ The term 'sthiti' has been translated as 'a fixed position' while gati as 'motion' by scholars in the past. Dr. Subrahmanyam in the *Common dance codes of India and Indonesia*, equates sthiti to sthāna and gati to cārī within the execution of a karaṇa. This paper takes a slightly different approach in saying that sthiti is a reference to mental stability which is sustained through the movement and is therefore executed simultaneously with gati whereas sthāna is more indicative of a location and placement of the body which is lost once gati unfolds. Subrahmanyam, Padma. *karaṇas: Common Dance Codes of India and Indonesia. Vol. I: A Dancer's Perspective*. Nrithyodaya, 2022. p.88

³⁴ Monier-Williams, Monier. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*. New ed., greatly enlarged and improved, Motilal Banarsidass, 1986.

Table 1: Sthāna and Sthiti

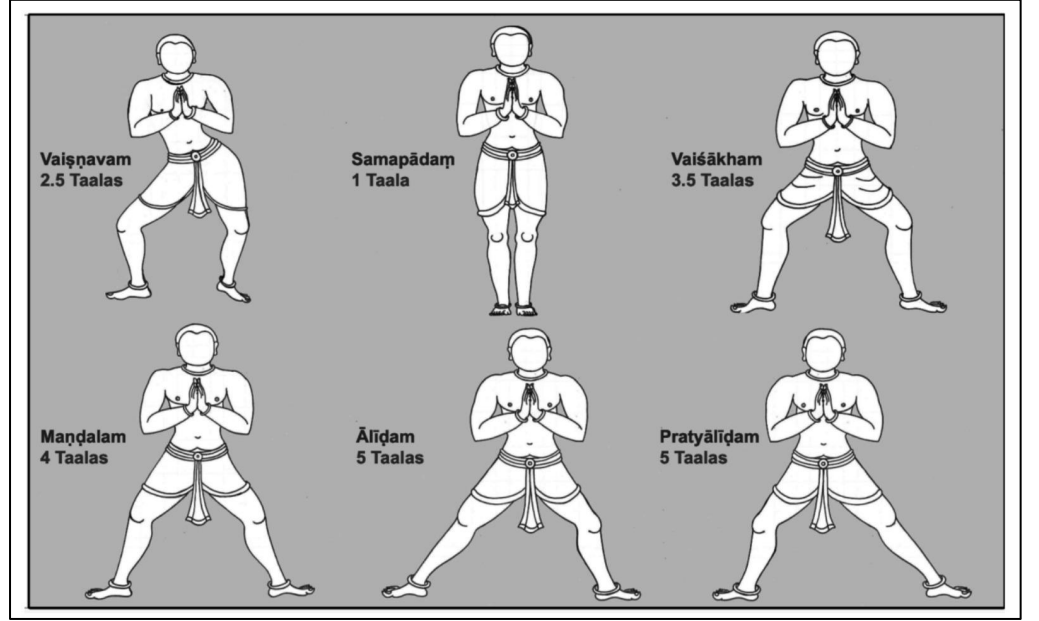
Term	Sanskrit	Derivational Suffix	Primary Meaning
Sthāna	स्थान	ल्युट् (lyut) → -ana	Place, position, location; act of standing. Intentionally standing ³⁵
Sthiti	स्थिति	क्तिन् (ktin) → -ti	State, condition, existence; stability, continuity ³⁶

Viewed through this lens, sthāna is more than a bodily posture. It is a locus in which body and mind are situated. When a dancer assumes a sthāna, she is not merely arranging the body in space; she is simultaneously placing and orienting the mind. Sthiti, by contrast, points less to location and more to a state of steadiness or stability. While it may manifest outwardly as physical stillness, its deeper significance lies in mental stability.

This distinction invites a reconsideration of the relationship between stillness and movement. If sthiti is understood primarily as a condition of mental steadiness, then movement does not negate it. Rather, gati unfolds within sthiti. Sthiti is a more permanent condition whereas sthāna dissolves once gati begins. In this sense, sthāna may be understood as a state that contains within itself the potentiality of movement while sthiti is a more permanent state that remains undissolved through gati.

³⁵ Monier-Williams, Monier. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*

³⁶ *Ibid.*,



PC: Sreeja Krishnan

Figure 1: Six male Sthānas in Nāṭyaśāstra

The six male sthānas described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are illustrated below. The measurements presented in the illustration tally with the measurements described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Aṅgahāra

Śārṅgadeva, in the *Saṅgītaratnākara*, defines the term aṅgahāra as follows:

एवं विशिष्टमङ्गानां हरणमङ्गहार इति सनिरुक्तिकं लक्षणम् । निरुक्त्यन्तरं दर्शयति – यद्वेति । हरस्यायं हार इति प्रयोगविशेषणम् । सोऽपि प्रयोगोऽङ्गैर्निर्वर्तित इत्यङ्गैर्हरोऽङ्गहार इत्यर्थः ॥³⁷
-Śārṅgadeva, *Saṅgītaratnākara*, Chapter 7

The term aṅgahāra literally means a “garland of limbs” (aṅga + hāra). In practice, it refers to a prescribed sequence of karaṇas arranged in a particular order, as described in the fourth chapter of

³⁷ Śārṅgadeva. *Saṅgītaratnākara* of Śārṅgadeva with Two Commentaries. Vol. 4, edited by S. Subrahmanya Shastri, general editor Alain Daniélou, The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1953.

the *Nāṭyaśāstra*³⁸. Here, the metaphor of a garland is significant. Just as flowers may be strung together in different ways to form a garland, Karanas are strung together to form an angahara. Equally important are the points of transition between karaṇas. These transitional joints function much like the knots that bind a garland together and play a crucial role in shaping the overall structure and continuity of the movement sequence. To understand the nature of aṅgahāra more fully, it is necessary to first examine Bharata's concept of the nṛtta mātrkā.

Nṛtta mātrkā

द्वे नृत्यकरणे चैव भवतो नृत्यमात्रिका ।
द्वाभ्यां त्रिभिश्चतुर्भिर्वाप्यङ्गहारस्तु मातृभिः ॥ ३१ ॥

त्रिभिः कलापकं चैव चतुर्भिः शण्डकं भवेत् ।
पञ्चैव करणानि स्युः सङ्घातक इति स्मृतः ॥ ३२ ॥

षड्भिर्वा सप्तभिर्वापि अष्टभिर्नवभिस्तथा ।
करणैरिह संयुक्ताः अङ्गहाराः प्रकीर्तिताः ॥ ३३ ॥³⁹

-Bharatamuni, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 4.31–4.33

According to Bharata, when two distinct karaṇas unite, they give birth to what is called a nṛtta mātrkā. When three karaṇas unite, they give birth to a kalāpakam; four unite to form a Śaṇḍakam; while five karaṇas unite to form a Saṅghātakam. Only the execution of 6, 7, or 8 karaṇas in succession qualifies as an aṅgahāra.

The term Mātrkā, as seen earlier within the Kashmir Śaivite tradition, is the "unknown mother." nṛtta mātrkā signifies the birth of nṛtta when two karaṇas harmoniously merge⁴⁰. This fusion serves as the generative force, or utpādaka, of the aṅgahāra.

³⁸ Bharata Muni. *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharatamuni: With the Commentary *Abhinavabhāratī* by Abhinavaguptācārya. Vol. 1, edited by M. Ramakrishna Kavi, revised and critically edited by K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, 2nd ed., Oriental Institute, 1956. Chapter 4.

³⁹ Bharata Muni. *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharatamuni: With the Commentary *Abhinavabhāratī* by Abhinavaguptācārya. Vol. 1, edited by M. Ramakrishna Kavi, revised and critically edited by K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, 2nd ed., Oriental Institute, 1956. Chapter 4

⁴⁰ Bharata Muni. *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharatamuni: With the Commentary *Abhinavabhāratī* by Abhinavaguptācārya. Vol. 1, Chapter 4.

In the table below, the etymologies reveal an important conceptual progression. Kalāpaka denotes a cluster or bundle, while Śaṇḍaka suggests a grouping of elements. Saṅghātaka, however, implies something more than a collection. Derived from the notion of joining and integration, it indicates the formation of a unified composite from multiple constituent parts. Five karaṇas no longer remain merely juxtaposed; they begin to function as an integrated whole. Sequences consisting of three, four, or five karaṇas remain within the categories of Kalāpaka, Śaṇḍaka, and Saṅghātaka respectively. Only when the sequence extends beyond these preliminary formations does it assume the status of an aṅgahāra. This distinction becomes central to a later argument in the present study.

Table 2: Etymology of the terms Kalāpaka, Śaṇḍaka and Saṅghātaka

Term	Root Component s	Formation	Literal Meaning	Alternate meanings
Kalāpaka (कलापक)	Kalāpa = bundle, cluster, collection	Kalāpa + -ka	“That which is a bundle”	kalāpaka — a band, bundle, string of pearls, or grouped arrangement. ⁴¹
Śaṇḍaka (शण्डक)	Śaṇḍa	Śaṇḍa + -ka	Traditionally, a grouped formation	śaṇḍa — a group of trees, plants, wood, or thicket. ⁴²
Saṅghātaka (सङ्घातक)	sam (together) + √ghaṭ (to join)	Saṅghāta + -ka	“That which is joined together”	Related to ghaṭana — connection, union, formation of a constituent whole; saṅghāta denotes an aggregate or integrated composite. ⁴³

⁴¹ Monier-Williams, Monier. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*. New ed., greatly enlarged and improved, Motilal Banarsidass, 1986.

⁴² Monier-Williams, Monier. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Next, we look at the following passage from Abhinavagupta's commentary *Abhinavabharati* on the concept of *nṛtta māṭrkā*:

करणद्वयप्रयोगेण च विनिवृत्तनृत्ताभिमानो नास्ति ।
ततः परं तु नृत्यतीत्यभिमानात्करणद्वयं नृत्तमातृकेत्युक्तम् ।

-Abhinavagupta, *Abhinavabharati*

Abhinavagupta explains that when two *karaṇas* are brought together, the dancer begins to experience the awareness, “I am dancing” (*nṛtyatīty abhimāna*). This marks the emergence of a subtle sense of agency or self-identification within the act of dance. It is precisely this arising of the “I”-sense (*aham-bhāva*) that leads to the designation of the pair of *karaṇas* as a *nṛtta māṭrkā*. This relationship between movement, the emergence of the sense of self, and the generative function of *Māṭrkā* will become important later in this paper when mapping the progression from *aṅgahāra* to *samādhi*.

The purpose of *aṅgahāra* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*

While individual *karaṇas* belong to the domain of *nṛtta*, *aṅgahāras* are composed from *nṛtta māṭrkās* and occupy a distinct ritual function within the *Pūrvaraṅga*, the ceremonial performance that precedes the dramatic presentation.

Bharata states: “*pūrvaraṅge prayoktavyān dr̥ṣṭādr̥ṣṭaphalān api*”⁴⁴ - Bharatamuni, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Chapter 4. This states that in the *Pūrvaraṅga*, those rites that yield both visible and invisible fruits should be performed.

Similarly, Kallinātha, in his commentary *Saṅgīta-Kalanidhi*, explains:

⁴⁴ Bharata Muni. *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharatamuni: With the Commentary *Abhinavabhāratī* by Abhinavaguptācārya. Vol. 1, Chapter 4.

अदृष्टं फलं तु देवताप्रीतिजनकत्वेनापूर्वसाध्यं लोकान्तरसुखम् ।
तदुभयमप्येतैः सिध्यतीत्युक्तं दृष्टादृष्टफलानपीति ॥⁴⁵

The invisible fruit (adr̥ṣṭa-phala) is the happiness experienced in another realm (lokāntara-sukha), brought about through the accumulation of merit (apūrvā) generated by pleasing the deities. Thus, both visible and invisible fruits are accomplished through these rites.

-Kallinātha, *Saṅgīta-Kalanidhi*

The aṅgahāra, therefore, is not merely an aesthetic arrangement of movement. It is embedded within a ritual framework and is intended to generate effects that extend beyond the immediate performance context.

Abhinavagupta further deepens this understanding in his commentary:

...अङ्गानां देशान्तरं प्रापणप्रकारीऽङ्गहारः । हरस्य चायं हारः प्रयोगः ।
अङ्गनिर्दिष्टो हारोऽङ्गहारः । यदुक्तिः— “महेश्वरस्य चरितं य इदम् इति ।

He offers several complementary explanations of the term aṅgahāra. At the technical level, it denotes the process by which the limbs are moved from one position to another. Etymologically, it is a hāra or sequence constituted by the limbs. At a deeper symbolic level, however, he associates it with Hara (Śiva), describing it as an embodiment of the activity of Maheśvara. This interpretation is reinforced by the statement⁴⁶: “महेश्वरस्य चरितं य इदम्” which translates to, “This is the activity of Maheśvara.” The implication is profound. The aṅgahāra is not simply a dance sequence but a ritual enactment that participates in a larger cosmological framework. Its purpose extends beyond artistic expression toward the realization of adr̥ṣṭa-phala and the embodiment of divine activity.

⁴⁵ Sārṅgadeva. Saṅgītaratnākara of Sārṅgadeva with Two Commentaries. Vol. 4, edited by S. Subrahmanya Shastri, general editor Alain Daniélou, The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1953.

⁴⁶ Bharata Muni. *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharatamuni: With the Commentary *Abhinavabhāratī* by Abhinavaguptācārya. Chapter 4

Abhinavagupta strengthens this interpretation further when he notes:

“अन्ये तु योगात्समाधेरप्ययं भगवतः प्रीतये इति व्याचक्षते”⁴⁷. This observation is particularly significant for the present study. The above statement translates to, “Other paramparas explain that this is performed for the pleasure of the Lord through yoga and samādhi.” It establishes an explicit connection between aṅgahāra, yoga, and samādhi, suggesting that the movement sequence was once practiced by some paramparas not merely as choreography but as a contemplative and transformative practice. This connection forms the basis for the mapping of aṅgahāra to samādhi developed later in Section 3.

Section 3

In this section, the author will attempt to demonstrate why sthāna is analogous to dhāraṇā, karaṇa to dhyāna, and aṅgahāra to samādhi, using the various references presented in Sections 1 and 2.

Sthāna, sthiti, and gati as dhāraṇā

If sthāna is to be understood as analogous to dhāraṇā, it becomes necessary to examine more closely what exactly is being “held” in a sthāna. It cannot be reduced to a mere bodily position. Rather, it must be understood as a precise alignment of body, space, and attention.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself does not present sthānas as arbitrary positions. They are highly structured configurations, each defined through specific measurements, expansions, and orientations of the body. As Bhattacharya points out⁴⁸ sthāna is the first stage in which the actor begins to embody rūpa through the expansion of

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter 4

⁴⁸ Bhattacharya, Piya. "The Metaphysics of 'Embodiment' in Bharata's System of Nāṭya: The Dynamics of 'Extra-Daily.'" *Poorvam International Journal of Creative Arts and Cultural Expressions*, vol. 1, no. 2, Dec. 2025, pp. 9–31. DOI: 10.63752/pijcace.0102W01.

space. The actor's body, which already possesses a familiar and habitual form, is reorganized in order to take on another form—one that is not part of everyday experience which he terms 'extra-daily'.

In order to make the body extra-daily, an extreme degree of concentration is required. The dancer's attention is therefore directed toward different parts of the body and toward very specific ways of holding it. This may be understood as parallel to the practice of *sthāna-kalpanā*, which forms part of *āṇavopāya*⁴⁹, as discussed earlier.

However, it is important to note that concentration on the body alone is not sufficient. The *sthānas* are not arbitrary. Each *sthāna* has a particular impact upon the mind. To understand this more deeply, it is useful to look beyond the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and into related śāstric traditions such as *Śilpa Śāstra* and the *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*. These traditions are concerned with form, proportion, and the geometry of embodiment. They offer a framework through which we can better understand why *sthāna* is constructed in the way that it is.

The *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad* makes a striking observation⁵⁰:

तेजांशि सरलरेखाः — Light expresses itself through straight lines.

तिर्यग्रेखा मरुत् रूपा — Air manifests through oblique or diagonal lines.

These statements suggest that different orientations of form correspond to different energetic qualities. A straight, vertical line carries a different energy from a diagonal one. When this idea is

⁴⁹ It is important here to note that *sthāna Kalpana* emphasizes concentrating certain parts of the body. "In Kashmir Shaivism, there are three main places for concentration: between the eyebrows, the pit of the throat, and the heart. In the higher, more refined practice of *sthāna prakalpanā*, the aspirant must see the vastness of this universe represented in the span of a single breath. Swamiji explains that, in this higher form of *āṇavopāya*, the aspirant must discover where each aspect of reality is found in the span of one breath". While holding a particular *sthāna* in the performance of *angahara*, focus typically has to be placed simultaneously in different parts of the body. While this does not directly fit the technical definition of *sthāna Kalpana* given by Swami Lakshmanjoo, it certainly involves a great amount of focus on one's own body. Lakshmanjoo, Swami. *Vijñāna Bhairava: The Manual for Self Realization*. Edited by John Hughes, 2nd ed., Lakshmanjoo Academy, 2015.

⁵⁰ Boner, Alice, Sadasiva Rath Sarma, and Bettina Bäumer. *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad: The Essence of Form in Sacred Art*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1996.

applied to the body, it becomes clear that alignment is not merely static and aesthetic—it is energetic and psychological.⁵¹

Each *sthāna*, therefore, may be understood as a geometric–energetic configuration. The manner in which the body expands in space—whether along vertical, horizontal, or diagonal axes—directly influences the quality of energy being embodied. This, in turn, affects the mental state of the performer.

For instance, in *samapāda*, where the body is held in near equilibrium, the expansion of space is minimal and symmetrical. This produces a sense of balance and neutrality. As the space expands further in *vaiṣṇava*, *vaiśākha*, and *maṇḍala* *sthānas*, the body begins to occupy more area and engage more horizontal space. This creates a shift in energy. The body becomes more dynamic and more charged. The emotional possibilities expand correspondingly. *Bhāvas* such as *vīra*, *adbhuta*, and even *bībhatsa* begin to find appropriate expressions within these expanded configurations.

By the time we reach *ālīḍha* and *pratyālīḍha*, the body has reached its maximum expansion. The stance becomes asymmetrical, directional, and forceful. The lines of the body strongly emphasize diagonals, often associated with attack and projection. It is therefore not surprising that these *sthānas* are used for expressions of *vīra* and *raudra*.

What emerges from this analysis is a clear correlation between the form of the *sthāna*, the amount of space occupied by the body, the direction of expansion, and the resulting emotional state. This relationship is not symbolic in a loose sense; it is structural. The body does not merely represent emotion—it generates the conditions in which a particular state of mind becomes possible.

This has direct implications for the actor. In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the actor is not expected to rely on personal emotion or memory; such reliance is, in fact, discouraged. Instead, the actor is trained to enter into the appropriate state through embodied means. *Sthāna*

⁵¹ Bhattacharya, Piya. "The Metaphysics of 'Embodiment' in Bharata's System of Nāṭya: The Dynamics of 'Extra-Daily.'" *Poorvam International Journal of Creative Arts and Cultural Expressions*, vol. 1, no. 2, Dec. 2025, pp. 9–31. DOI: 10.63752/pijcace.0102W01.

becomes the first and most crucial tool in this process. When an actor assumes a *sthāna*, he is not expressing an already existing emotion; rather, he is creating the conditions for that emotion to arise. The alignment of the body shapes the alignment of the mind, and the geometry of the form reorganizes attention.

This understanding becomes even more nuanced when we consider the role of *cārīs* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. *Cārīs* are described as lower-body movements involving the thighs, shanks, and feet, typically with one leg moving at a time⁵². At a functional level, they are associated with ‘*gamana*’—the displacement of the body in space. This definition, however, can create the impression that a *cārī* is merely locomotion. A closer examination of the term reveals a deeper significance.

The word *cārī* is derived from the root *car* (to move)⁵³, but in this context it is understood through the application of a *ñijanta-pratyaya*, which introduces the sense of causation. This suggests that a *cārī* is not simply movement, but movement that is brought about—movement that is produced by an underlying cause.

This raises an important question: what is the producer of a *cārī*? In performance, one might identify this as *vibhāva*, the stimulus that gives rise to action. This allows us to consider another possibility—that the *sthāna* itself functions as the *vibhāva* for the *cārī*.

Sthāna, in this sense, is not merely a position but a condition of potential. It represents the will to move held in a state of containment. It is movement in its latent form. According to Coomaraswamy, artistic creation begins with an inner vision already realized in the mind, while the physical act of creation serves as its external manifestation⁵⁴.

⁵² Bharata Muni. *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharatamuni: With the Commentary *Abhinavabhāratī* by Abhinavaguptācārya. edited by M. Ramakrishna Kavi, revised and critically edited by K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, 2nd ed., Oriental Institute, 1956. Chapter 11.1

⁵³ Monier-Williams, Monier. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*. New ed., greatly enlarged and improved, Motilal Banarsidass, 1986.

⁵⁴ Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. *The Dance of Śiva: Fourteen Indian Essays*. Sunwise Turn, 1918. p.23

This idea finds a strong parallel in the Śaiva conception of icchā, jñāna, and kriyā śaktis mentioned in the Siva Sūtras⁵⁵. Within a properly assumed sthāna, one may identify icchā śakti—the will to move or create; jñāna śakti—the knowledge of how that movement must unfold within a trained body; and kriyā śakti—the actual capacity for that movement to manifest.

This idea is also reflected in the very origin of Nāṭya as described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. In the first chapter, when Brahmā is approached for the creation of a form of audio-visual expression, he does not respond immediately with action. Instead, he enters into a deep state of meditation before bringing forth the Nāṭya Veda⁵⁶. This moment is significant. It suggests that creation itself—whether of a text, a form, or a movement—must arise from a state of concentrated awareness. Action does not precede stillness; it emerges from it.

In the context of nṛtta, this concentrated state is established through sthāna. What appears outwardly as a physical stance is, in fact, an internal condition of focus. In yogic terms, this corresponds to dhāraṇā. Just as dhāraṇā provides the necessary ground from which meditation can arise, sthāna provides the ground from which movement and a particular emotion unfolds.

From this point, a deeper process begins—that of depersonalization. In everyday life, the body is deeply tied to identity. One stands, walks, and moves in habitual ways that reinforce a sense of “I.” The *Nāṭyaśāstra* deliberately disrupts this. By requiring the body to enter into unfamiliar geometries, it weakens habitual patterns of identity.

Bhattacharya describes this as the movement from the “daily” to the “extra-daily.” The actor no longer moves as himself, but begins to inhabit forms that are structured, codified, and archetypal. This is not imitation; it is transformation. The actor does not pretend to be a character. Instead, through sthāna, hasta, and karaṇa, he

⁵⁵ Singh, Jaideva. *Shiva Sūtras: The Yoga of Supreme Identity*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1979.

⁵⁶ Bharata Muni. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Sutra 1.13

gradually replaces his own bodily identity with another structured form. The personal “I” is not expressed—it is set aside.

In this sense, *sthāna* becomes a means of becoming. This brings us back to the central argument of the paper. If *sthāna* functions as *dhāraṇā*, then it is through *sthāna* that the actor first learns to hold attention, reorganize identity, and enter into a different mode of being. From this point onward, *karaṇa* and *aṅgaḥāra* do not merely extend movement—they deepen absorption.

The journey from *sthāna* to *samādhi*, therefore, is not merely metaphorical. It is experienced physically and mentally within the very structure of *nṛtta* itself.

Karaṇa as ekā-kriyā: Movement as dhyāna

If *sthāna* may be understood as analogous to *dhāraṇā*, then the *karaṇa* can be understood as analogous to *dhyāna*. This transition is crucial because it marks a shift from holding attention to sustaining it. Viewed through the lens of Patañjali Yoga, it is sustained focus that involves repeatedly redirecting one's wavering attention back to the chosen object.

Returning to the definition of *karaṇa* discussed earlier, we can understand that a *karaṇa* is not a collection of movements; it is a single, integrated *kriyā*. Each *karaṇa* must be understood as an *ekā-kriyā*, a singular action that unfolds as one continuous unit. This is not simply a theoretical assertion but emerges from Abhinavagupta's own elaboration, where he describes *kriyā* as a movement from one state to another, passing through a process of transition without fragmentation⁵⁷.

This has an important implication. If a *karaṇa* were to consist of multiple independent actions, then each of those actions would introduce a potential break. Wherever there is a break, there is the possibility of a loss of attention. In contrast, when a *karaṇa* is

⁵⁷ Abhinavagupta defines a *kriya* as follows ‘*Pūrvakṣetrasamyogatyāgena samuchitakṣetrāntaraprāptiparyantatayā- Ekā kriyā tatkarāṇamityarthaḥ | Uttarasamyogāntam hi sarvatra karma | Sa cāpyabhilaṣitottarasamyoga*’. In essence, an *Ekā kriyā* involves relinquishing a specific position (*Pūrvā Kṣetra*) to attain a desired position (*Samucita Kṣetra*) in order to reach a final position (*Uttara Saṃyoga*). Bharata Muni. *Nāṭya Śāstra with the Commentary Abhinavabhāratī* by Abhinavaguptācārya. Edited by K. Krishnamoorthy, Gaekwad Oriental Series, no. 36, Oriental Institute, 1992. p.90

executed as a single, continuous kriyā, it naturally supports a state of uninterrupted focus. In this sense, the structure of the karaṇa itself provides the necessary conditions for dhyāna.

This becomes even clearer when we consider the role of ‘athruti’, a term emphasized by Abhinavagupta⁵⁸. Athruti literally means “unbroken” or “without interruption.” He uses this term to describe the quality that distinguishes a karaṇa from an ordinary, laukika movement. A karaṇa must not be “cut” or segmented; it must flow seamlessly. The absence of breaks is not merely an aesthetic requirement—it is what allows the movement to carry a certain grace, or vilāsa⁵⁹, and more importantly, what allows the mind to remain absorbed.

This is where the connection to dhyāna becomes very direct. Just as dhyāna is defined by the uninterrupted flow of attention, a karaṇa is defined by the uninterrupted flow of movement. The two are structurally parallel. The body sustains continuity in space, while the mind sustains continuity in awareness. When these two align, movement itself begins to take on a contemplative quality.

However, this raises a practical question: how is such continuity achieved, especially when a karaṇa often involves multiple components such as cārīs and nṛtta hastas? This continuity is made possible through the use of rechakas—the movements of the kaṭi, pāda, hasta, and grīvā. Rechakas function as connectors. They do not merely decorate the movement; they fuse its components into a single, flowing action.⁶⁰ For example, in the case of the Svastika-recita karaṇa⁶¹, the movement appears, at first glance, to involve multiple nṛtta hastas—recita, āviddhavaktrau, svastika,

⁵⁸ Bharata Muni. *Nāṭya Śāstra with the Commentary Abhinavabhāratī by Abhinavaguptācārya*. Chapter 4

⁵⁹ Abhinavagupta starts his commentary on a Karana in this manner: ‘kriyā karaṇam | kasya kriyā | nṛtyasya | gātrāṇām hastopalakṣitasya vilāsakṣepasya’. This translates to “A karaṇa is an action belonging to dance.. It is the graceful projection of the limbs”. The term ‘Vilasa’ specifically emphasizes aesthetic beauty through extraordinary grace. *Ibid.*, Chapter 4.

⁶⁰ Dr.Subrahmanyam discusses the role of the rechakas at length. Subrahmanyam, Padma. *karaṇas: Common Dance Codes of India and Indonesia. Vol. II: A Dancer's Perspective*. Nrithyodaya, 2022.

⁶¹ The ‘svastika recita’ karana is defined by Bharata as ‘स्वस्तिकौ रेचिताविद्धौ विश्लिष्टौ कटिसंश्रितौ ॥ यत्र तत्करणं ज्ञेयं बुधैः स्वस्तिकरेचितम् ।’ However, it is Abhinavagupta’s commentary that sheds light on the exact nṛtta hastas to be used in this karana which includes the 6 nṛtta hastas listed. *Nāṭya Shastra of Bharatamuni, with commentary Abhinavabhāratī by Abhinavaguptacharya*, Chapter 4

viprakīrṇa, pakṣavāñcita, and pakṣapradhyotaka. However, these are not to be executed as separate actions. We know this because of this definition of a karaṇa as a single kriyā given by Abhinavagupta. Hence, they must be fused into a single kriyā through a carefully structured use of rechakas, following the chronological order prescribed in the śāstra. The karaṇa, therefore, is not a sequence but a synthesis.

This idea is critical for understanding how karaṇas function within an aṅgahāra. An aṅgahāra is a combination of karaṇas, and the transitions between karaṇas are where the greatest risk of fragmentation arises. If each karaṇa itself is not internally unified, then the transition between karaṇas will inevitably introduce breaks. However, when each karaṇa is performed as an ekā-kriyā, the gap between two karaṇas becomes perceptible and can be consciously managed.

It is precisely here that rechakas play a second, equally important role. While they fuse the internal components of a karaṇa, they also serve as bridges between karaṇas. They allow the dancer to sustain attention even during the transition, preventing the mind from slipping out of its focused state. In this sense, the rechaka becomes the locus of continuity—not merely of movement, but of awareness. The rechakas also serve the dual purpose of adding vilāsa, or extraordinary grace, to the movements.

At this point, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that in the *Tantrasāra*, the word karaṇa is used with reference to an arrangement of body parts in the context of āṇavopāya⁶². While one cannot conclusively state that this refers to the exact same karaṇas discussed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the parallel is compelling. Further evidence connecting the two would add a great deal of clarity to this topic.

Returning to the larger framework of this paper, we can now observe a clear progression. Sthāna establishes the ground of attention and corresponds to dhāraṇā . Karaṇa sustains that

⁶² Abhinavagupta. *Tantrasāra* of Abhinavagupta. Translated with introduction and notes by H. N. Chakravarty, edited by Boris Marjanovic, preface by Swami Chetanananda, Rudra Press, 2012. p.80

attention through continuous movement and therefore corresponds to dhyāna. The uninterrupted nature of the karaṇa, athruti, is what enables this transition. The dancer is no longer merely holding a position; rather, they are maintaining a stream of awareness through movement.

Aṅgahāra as samādhi:

The culmination of the fourth chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* offers a statement that has often been read devotionally, but whose deeper implications may be philosophical:

महेश्वरस्य चरितं य इदं सम्प्रयोजयेत् ।
सर्वपापविशुद्धात्मा शिवलोकं स गच्छति ॥ (Sutra 4.319)

Earlier, we saw that Mahēśvarasya caritam refers to the Aṅgahāra as an activity of Mahēśvara himself. The dancer is not merely representing Śiva, nor imitating Śiva, but entering into a mode of activity that is identified with Śiva.

The second line states that one who practices this attains Śivaloka. The abode of Lord Śiva, also known as Śivaloka, carries various connotations within the Śaiva traditions. The *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* contains the following description:

dikkālakalanonmuktā deśoddeśāviśeṣiṇī
vyapadeṣṭumaśakyāsāv akathyā paramārthataḥ ॥ १४ ॥

antaḥ svānubhavānandā vikalponmuktagocarā
yāvasthā bharitākārā bhairavī bhairavātmanaḥ ॥ १५ ॥

- *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, Sutra 14-15

According to Swami Lakshmanjoo⁶³:

This state of Bhairava is beyond the limitations of space, time, and form. It has no space, it has no time, it has no form. Do you know where Lord Śiva resides? In Śivaloka. The residence of Lord Śiva in this universe is

⁶³ Lakshmanjoo, Swami. *Vijñāna Bhairava: The Manual for Self Realization*. Edited by John Hughes, 2nd ed., Lakshmanjoo Academy, 2015.

said to be Mount Kailāsa. This is all humbug! There is no designation of the seat of Lord Śiva. Vyapadeṣṭum aśakyāsau—this state is, in fact, indescribable. It cannot be described. Akathyā paramārthataḥ—in reality, it cannot be spoken of. Antaḥ—it happens internally; it is filled with one's own ecstasy, one's own ānanda. It is beyond the apprehension of vikalpa (vikalponmuktagocarā), beyond thought. (21)

If aṅgahāra is understood as the embodiment of the activity of Śiva and its practice ultimately leads one to Śivaloka, then Śivaloka need not be interpreted merely as a physical abode. Rather, it may be understood as a state of consciousness that transcends the limitations of space, time, and form.

This interpretation becomes especially significant when viewed through the framework developed in this paper. If sthāna corresponds to dhāraṇā and karaṇa to dhyāna, then aṅgahāra may be understood as corresponding to samādhi. Just as samādhi culminates in the dissolution of ordinary distinctions and the absorption of awareness into a higher state of consciousness, aṅgahāra represents the culmination of nṛtta—a state in which individual movements cease to be experienced as separate actions and become integrated into a continuous, unified flow.

From this perspective, the promise of attaining Śivaloka is not merely an eschatological reward but may also be read as a description of an altered state of consciousness. Through the sustained practice of aṅgahāra, the performer gradually moves beyond ordinary bodily identity and enters into a mode of awareness associated with Mahēśvara himself. The dancer is no longer simply performing movement; rather, movement becomes the vehicle through which a transcendental state is approached.

Aṅgahāra within the Yogic framework:

Now let us break down the various concepts discussed within the Ashtanga Yoga and Kashmir Yoga philosophies with respect to samādhi. First, let us take a look at Sampragyata samādhi.

This is a very interesting line of inquiry because it allows us to move beyond a purely structural comparison and examine the inner phenomenology of performing an aṅgahāra.

वितर्कविचारानन्दास्मितारूपानुगमात्सम्प्रज्ञातः ॥ १.१७ ॥
vitarkavicārānandāsmitārūpānugamāt samprajñātaḥ ॥ 1.17 ॥

-Patanjali, *Yoga Sutras*, 1.17

The above Sutra translates to: "Samprajñāta samādhi is accompanied by (or follows) the forms of vitarka (reasoning), vicāra (subtle reflection), ānanda (bliss), and asmitā (pure I-ness)."

We first examine the phenomenon of samprajñāta samādhi through the example of a lotus flower. The sādhanika first concentrates on the gross form of the lotus—the petals and visible structure. Gradually the attention moves inward to subtler aspects such as its fragrance, essence, and even its constituent particles. From there the sādhanika begins to perceive the beauty and purpose inherent in creation itself. This gives rise to ānanda (bliss). Finally, beyond the object and beyond the bliss, there remains a subtle awareness of the conscious principle that experiences it—this is asmitā. Thus vitarka, vicāra, ānanda, and asmitā are not four unrelated states but successive refinements of attention moving from the gross to the subtle.

Applied to the context of nṛtta, a similar progression may be observed. At the outset, the dancer's awareness is occupied by the concrete details of execution. Attention is directed toward the precise placement of the feet, the alignment of the torso, the positioning of the hands, the trajectory of movement, and the transitions prescribed by the śāstra. The mind repeatedly checks, corrects, and re-establishes itself upon these technical details. This corresponds closely to vitarka. Just as the meditator begins with the gross form of the lotus, the dancer begins with the gross architecture of the body. One may even compare this stage to sthāna-kalpanā discussed earlier in relation to āṇavopāya, where attention is deliberately placed upon specific bodily configurations.

As execution deepens, however, attention gradually shifts away from the mechanics of the movement. The dancer no longer thinks primarily about whether the hand is exactly in the correct position or whether the foot has landed at the prescribed angle. Instead, awareness becomes absorbed in the inner quality or "subject-ness" of the karaṇa or aṅgahāra itself. The movement ceases to be experienced as a collection of parts and begins to reveal an underlying continuity. This stage may be understood as vicāra. Here attention moves from the gross form to the subtle principle embodied within the movement. The names, labels, and technical descriptions begin to recede into the background, while the essence of the movement becomes more prominent.

As this absorption becomes more complete, the dancer may experience a sense of ease, expansiveness, and joy. The effort that characterized the earlier stages begins to diminish. The movement appears to unfold of its own accord. This is not merely the pleasure of successful execution but a more subtle delight arising from sustained concentration itself. Just as the contemplator of the lotus eventually wonders at the beauty of creation, the dancer experiences the inherent joy of movement. This corresponds to ānanda. The movement is no longer something being performed; it becomes something being lived.

Beyond even this joy lies a more subtle state. As one karaṇa reaches completion and the transition to the next karaṇa presents itself, there emerges a moment that is neither entirely one movement nor the next. If attention remains uninterrupted, the dancer may encounter a heightened awareness of presence itself. At this point, the mind is no longer occupied with technique, nor even with the joy arising from execution. What remains is a simple and luminous sense of being—the awareness that underlies the entire process. This may be compared to asmitā in Patañjali's description of samprajñāta samādhi. It is not the ordinary egoic sense of "I am performing," but a more refined experience of "I-am-ness" itself.

Seen in this way, an aṅgahāra can be understood as a progressive inward journey. It begins with vitarka, where attention is fixed upon the gross details of bodily execution. It deepens into vicāra, where awareness becomes absorbed in the subtle essence of the

movement. From there arises ānanda, the joy born of sustained concentration and integration. Finally, in the seamless transition between karaṇas, there emerges asmitā, a pure sense of presence that remains when technical concerns and even delight have subsided. The aṅgahāra thus becomes not merely a sequence of movements but a vehicle through which the performer traverses the very stages of samprajñāta samādhi described by Patañjali.

This interpretation is admittedly exploratory, yet it offers a compelling framework through which the inner experience of performing an aṅgahāra may be understood. If Abhinavagupta's assertion that the aṅgahāra embodies Mahēśvarasya caritam is taken seriously, then the progression through vitarka, vicāra, ānanda, and asmitā may represent the gradual movement from technical action toward a state of consciousness in which the performer transcends ordinary bodily identity and approaches the contemplative state associated with Śiva himself.

Aṅgahāra within the Tantric framework:

Earlier, we looked at the aṅgahāra as a garland of limbs—a particular sequence of karaṇas strung together in a prescribed order. The knots in a garland were compared to the joints or gaps between movements. We also saw how Abhinavagupta, while discussing nṛtta māṭrkā, notes that when two karaṇas are combined, a sense of “I am dancing” arises. This emergence of self-awareness is significant because it introduces the notion of individuality into the otherwise continuous flow of movement.

A related explanation is provided by Jaideva Singh in his discussion of the Śiva Sūtras. According to him, the five kañcukas emerge from Māyā⁶⁴ and progressively contract the infinite powers of Śiva into the finite experience of the individual. Māyā generates the perception of separation and individuality. Kalā limits infinite agency into restricted capacity for action; Vidyā limits omniscience into partial knowledge; Rāga transforms fullness into desire and attachment; Kāla introduces temporal succession; and Niyati imposes limitation through circumstance, causality, and location.

⁶⁴ Singh, Jaideva. *Shiva Sūtras: The Yoga of Supreme Identity*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1979. p.XXIV

Together, these coverings explain how Universal Consciousness comes to experience itself as a finite individual.⁶⁵

Viewed through this lens, *māṭṛkā* may be understood as reinforcing the structures that sustain individuality. Abhinavagupta's observation that the union of two *karaṇas* gives rise to the awareness "I am dancing" can therefore be interpreted as the emergence of a subtle *ahaṃkāra*, born from the differentiating power of *Māyā*. The dancer is no longer merely moving; a sense of agency arises, accompanied by the recognition that "I" am the performer of the action.

If this interpretation is accepted, an interesting possibility emerges. The purpose of sustained concentration within an *aṅgaḥāra* may be understood as gradually transcending this very sense of individuality. Bharata states that combinations of two *karaṇas* form a *nṛtta māṭṛkā*, three form a *Kalāpaka*, four a *Śaṇḍaka*, and five a *Saṅghātaka*. Only when six, seven, or eight *karaṇas* are performed in an uninterrupted sequence does the composition qualify as an *aṅgaḥāra*.

Neither Bharata nor Abhinavagupta explicitly connect this progression to the doctrine of the *kañcukas*. However, the first five stages culminate in *Saṅghātaka*, a term whose etymology suggests the formation of an integrated composite. One may therefore view the progression from *Kalāpaka* to *Śaṇḍaka* to *Saṅghātaka* as reflecting an increasing degree of integration and continuity. The performer moves from discrete units toward a unified flow.

Within such a reading, the requirement that an *aṅgaḥāra* consist of at least six *karaṇas* becomes particularly suggestive. The uninterrupted succession of movements may represent a gradual transcendence of the limitations imposed by the five *kañcukas*. As attention becomes increasingly one-pointed, the sense of

⁶⁵ The five *kañcukas*—*kalā*, *vidyā*, *rāga*, *kāla*, and *niyati*—along with *māyā*, provide the framework within which the *jīva* experiences itself as a distinct being. In their absence, individuality would dissolve into the undifferentiated reality of *Śiva*. *Dhāraṇā*, therefore, denotes that which supports and maintains the very possibility of embodied existence. Swami Lakshmanjoo explains that the limitation for *Niyati* would be experienced as 'I love beautiful things' while the limitation imposed by *Rāga* would be a more specific type of attachment such as 'I love Denise'. In this manner each of the *Kañcukas* impose a limitation which is experienced in the form of 'I am'. Lakshmanjoo, Swami. *Light on Tantra in Kashmir Shaivism: Abhinavagupta's Tantrāloka*. Vol. 4, Chapter Five. Lakshmanjoo Academy, 2025.

separation generated by Māyā begins to weaken. The awareness “I am dancing” gives way to a more expansive state in which the dancer is absorbed into the movement itself.

Whether Bharata consciously intended such a correspondence cannot be established with certainty. Nevertheless, the structural parallels are striking. The progression from Kalāpaka, Śaṇḍaka, and Saṅghātaka to aṅgahāra appears to mirror a movement from multiplicity toward unity, from fragmented action toward uninterrupted flow, and ultimately from individuality toward a more universal mode of consciousness. This possibility is especially significant when we examine the relationship between aṅgahāra and samādhi from a Kashmir Shavism point of view.

Section 4

Evidence of Meditation in Ritual Dance Traditions of Southeast Asia:

The cultural and artistic links between India and Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, are well established and require little introduction. While numerous studies have confirmed these connections, much of the scholarship has focused primarily on demonstrating historical and artistic continuity. One of the most significant contributions in this regard is Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam’s *Common Dance Codes of India and Indonesia*,⁶⁶ which not only establishes shared artistic foundations but also identifies the presence and use of karaṇas in ancient Indonesia. Through a correlated study of sculpture, śāstra, and commentary, Dr. Subrahmanyam demonstrated striking parallels between the sculptural depictions found in the Prambanan temple complex in Java and her own reconstruction of the karaṇas based on South Indian temple sculptures and textual sources. Dr. Alessandra Iyer’s research⁶⁷ has further contributed to the validation and expansion of these findings.

⁶⁶ Subrahmanyam, Padma. *karaṇas: Common Dance Codes of India and Indonesia. Vol. I: A Dancer’s Perspective*. Nrithyodaya, 2022.

⁶⁷ Iyer, Alessandra. *Prambanan: Sculpture and Dance in Ancient Java: A Study in Dance Iconography*. White Lotus Press, 1998.

However, there remains considerable scope for research that goes beyond merely establishing connections. An equally important question is how different components of these knowledge systems have survived in various parts of the world and how they may contribute to a richer understanding of contemporary practice. Such an inquiry requires looking not only at movement vocabulary, but also at the philosophical, linguistic, and ritual frameworks within which these traditions evolved.

One of the most important insights to emerge from the author's own study is that artistic and ritual practice exists at the intersection of philosophy, language, and regional cultural traditions. In Indonesia, artistic practices continue to exist against a backdrop shaped by Śaiva, Buddhist, and later Sufi influences⁶⁸. These influences are neither incidental nor superficial; they remain embedded within the aesthetic and ritual life of both Balinese and Javanese performance traditions. Even to an untrained observer, the contemplative and esoteric dimensions of many of these traditions are immediately apparent.

The author's research into ritual dance practices in Java and Bali has led her on a deeply rewarding journey, one that has strengthened her conviction that many of the principles articulated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* continue to survive in different forms within Southeast Asia. These traditions have undoubtedly undergone centuries of cultural transformation, requiring careful study to separate older strata from later accretions. Yet the underlying principles often remain remarkably intact.

Andrea Acri's study of the *Dharma Pātañjala*⁶⁹ explores a pre-fifteenth-century Old Javanese-Sanskrit Śaiva text that offers valuable insight into the transmission of Śaiva theology in pre-Islamic Indonesia. The work is particularly significant for its adaptation of Pātañjala *aṣṭāṅgayoga*—rather than the more common Śaiva *ṣaḍāṅgayoga* (referenced in many Javanese Saivite texts)—

⁶⁸ Javanese mysticism (*Kejawen*) is a syncretic spiritual tradition that blends indigenous beliefs with Hindu-Tantric Shaivism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Islamic Sufism, and continues to influence Javanese cultural and artistic practices. Rahapsari, Satwika. "The Quest of Finding the Self in the Bedhaya: Unravelling the Psychological Significance of the Javanese Sacred Dance." *Culture & Psychology*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2022, p. 415.

⁶⁹ Acri, Andrea. *Dharma Patañjala: Śaiva Scripture from Ancient Java Studied in the Light of Old Javanese and Sanskrit Texts*. International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 2017.

within a Śaiva doctrinal framework, reflecting a Yogasūtra commentarial tradition closely related to the Pantanjali's *Yogasūtras*.

Just as Kūṭiyāṭṭam preserves some aspects of Sanskrit theatre and performance practice that illuminate ideas mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*⁷⁰, ancient Javanese court dances⁷¹ appear to preserve dimensions of performance that can help us understand aspects of the text that are otherwise difficult to access. Since the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is fundamentally concerned with the metaphysics of movement and embodiment, rooted in broader cosmological principles, it is not surprising that many of its underlying ideas find resonance in ritual performance traditions across Asia. Specifically, the Bedhaya court dance of Java embodies elements of ritual and meditative dance that in the author's view can easily be viewed as parallel to ideas expressed in this paper. The concept of *Sawiji* bears a striking resemblance to dhāraṇā, as both emphasize one-pointed concentration and total presence⁷². Similarly, *Greged* may be understood as a consequence of sustained dhāraṇā, through which the dancer learns to regulate passion, master the ego, and maintain self-control⁷³. Furthermore, Bedhaya dancers often describe their psychological state during performance as one of "Semedi (Javanese cognate of samādhi)"⁷⁴, a conception that bears remarkable similarity to Abhinavagupta's interpretation of the dancer's state of absorption discussed earlier.

Suamba observes⁷⁵ that within Indonesian Śaiva Siddhānta, yoga occupies the highest spiritual position, serving as both the path and

⁷⁰ Gopalkrishnan, Sudha. *Kutiyattam and Its Correspondence to the Nāṭyaśāstra*. Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1988.

⁷¹ In particular, Bedhaya - a sacred court dance from Java - has a contemplative character, evident in the continuous and restrained flow of movement. This unbroken chain of movements resembles the execution of an *aṅgahāra*, where awareness of the transition between movements is emphasized. Equally noteworthy is the prominent use of grīvā and hasta rechakas in Bedhaya, which parallels the role of rechakas within the structure of *aṅgahāras*. These correspondences suggest deeper affinities between Bedhaya practice and the meditative dimensions of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, warranting further investigation. Supriyadi, Matheus Raoul, and Satwika Rahapsari. "The Psychological Aspects within the Yogyakarta Bedhaya: An Exploratory Study on Royal Court Dancers." *Culture & Psychology*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2023, pp. 607–643.

⁷² Rahapsari, Satwika. "The Quest of Finding the Self in the Bedhaya", p. 417

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 417

⁷⁴ Supriyadi, Matheus Raoul, and Satwika Rahapsari. "The Psychological Aspects within the Yogyakarta Bedhaya", pp. 611

⁷⁵ Suamba, Ida Bagus Putu. "Yoga Tradition in Bali-Hinduism." *Global Spiritualism*, edited by B. P. Siddhashrama, vol. 6, no. 2, Siddhaprakashna, 2007, p. 289

goal of liberation through the union of the *jīva* with *Paramaśiva* via *Ṣaḍaṅga Yoga*. Citing the Old Javanese *kakawin Arjuna Wiwāha* (1035 CE) by Mpu Kāṇva, he notes that *Paramaśiva* reveals Himself to the practitioner whose mind has been purified through knowledge and steadied through yoga. The text likens this state to calm, clear water capable of reflecting the moon. Significantly, *Arjuna Wiwāha* continues to influence Javanese dance traditions and is frequently adapted in *Bedhaya* performances, underscoring the enduring mystical and contemplative dimensions of the form⁷⁶. The broader philosophical correspondences between *Bedhaya* practice and yogic concepts are extensive enough to warrant a separate study and form an important foundation for future research.

What unites many of these traditions is that their primary purpose was never entertainment alone. Rather, performance functioned as a vehicle for self-transformation and spiritual realization. Dance and theatre served as disciplines through which the practitioner engaged with deeper philosophical truths. It is precisely this dimension that deserves greater attention in contemporary scholarship and practice. A more sustained study of Southeast Asian ritual dance traditions may provide valuable clues for understanding *karaṇas* and *aṅgahāras* not merely as aesthetic units of movement, but also as meditative and transformative practices.

Conclusion:

In recent years, there has been a growing interest among dancers and scholars in the study and reconstruction of *karaṇas* and *aṅgahāras*. Much of the contemporary practice, however, has focused primarily on questions of physical accuracy—whether a particular *karaṇa* is being executed correctly or incorrectly from a technical standpoint. While such inquiry is undoubtedly important, this paper has attempted to demonstrate that the mental and contemplative dimensions of these practices are equally significant. By examining references from the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *Abhinavagupta*, the *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali, and the Kashmir Śaiva tradition, this study has proposed that *karaṇas* and *aṅgahāras* may

⁷⁶ Marwanto, Endraswara, S., and Kuswarsantyo. "Cultural and Artistic Dimensions in Javanese Traditional Dance: Comparative Case Studies of *Bedhaya Mintaraga* and *Bedhaya Arjuna Wiwaha*." *Research in Dance Education*, 2025, pp. 1–15.

be understood not merely as physical units of movement but also as meditative structures capable of transforming consciousness.

At present, karaṇas are largely explored within the domains of performance and entertainment. If further research can shed greater light on the meditative dimensions of karaṇa practice, it may open new avenues through which these traditions can be approached—not only as artistic forms but also as spiritual disciplines. Such a perspective has the potential to enrich both scholarship and practice.

The present study is only a preliminary step in this direction. Several related concepts remain to be investigated in greater depth. In particular, Piṇḍibandhas and Maṇḍalas still await systematic study and articulation beyond their performative applications. Like karaṇas and āṅgahāras, these too may preserve traces of a larger ritual and spiritual framework that has yet to be fully understood.

Finally, the author believes that a deeper engagement with Southeast Asian traditions can contribute significantly to the study of karaṇas and āṅgahāras. Regions such as Indonesia and Thailand continue to preserve ritual dance traditions that have remained closely connected to their sacred and ceremonial contexts. Comparative research in this area has the potential to broaden our understanding of nṛtta as a system of embodied meditation and spiritual practice.

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A Conversation Wrought in Loss: Exploring the Magical Reality of Rabisankar Bal's Dozakhnama

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made.

Abstract:

Historically, Bengali literature has been acclaimed for its richness of fiction as well as poetry. However, not many Bengali authors have been found to be experimenting with the narrative forms. As far as themes and content of fiction were concerned the Bengali authors abundantly experimented; however, the same cannot be said in terms of the narrative style. For example, a widely accepted style like the magic realism was quite underexplored in the oeuvre of Bengali literature. Even when it is employed, as we can see in the works of Nabarun Bhattacharya, it seldom complicates the story-telling by bringing together historiography and magic realism. Rabisankar Bal precisely does that in his work, the *Dozakhnama* or *Conversations in Hell* (2010). Bal dexterously handles two different characters, namely Ghalib and Manto, belonging to two separate time periods, and retells the stories of immense historical significance. His narration provides a unique lens to look at the non-linearity of time and synthesizes discrete historical events of India that happened ninety years apart, namely in 1857 and 1947. This paper analyses some salient features of magic realism and shows how Rabisankar Bal appropriates them in his novel *Dozakhnama*, and in the process, creates a unique work that seldom finds any parallel in the literary realm of Bengali Literature.

Keywords: Magic realism, Bengali literature, Ghalib, Manto, historiography.

On his quest to create the 'opposite utopia', Marquez in his Nobel prize speech had hoped for a 'second opportunity on earth', perhaps to recreate or rewrite history to make amends for what has been lost in the lapses of dictatorial time. The literary identity of Marquez's fiction becomes attached to Magic Realism irrevocably and in the field of world literature, Latin American literature becomes synonymous with Magic Realism. Despite the popular association of the term 'Magic Realism' with Latin America, it originated in Weimer Germany, a term officially introduced by Franz Roh in 1925, in the domain of art. Roh insisted upon devising a new category of art that would be emancipated from the strict guidelines of realism. In his book *After Expressionism: Magical Realism: Problems of the Newest European Painting* (1925), Roh expressed his concern about the pertinent need of revising the representational politics of art to appropriate an objective understanding of life and art (Gale 11). In literature, there were traces of magic realism in various ages, but the narrative style of intertwining of the realist and the elements of fantastic was associated with Latin American writings, where Alejo Carpentier was taken to be a pioneer in the 1940s. It was a trend as identified by Angel Flores who realised that simplistic categorisation of genres or styles that defines reality was not quite possible in the ever-changing dynamics of Latin America. In her essay "Magical Realism in Spanish America" she writes:

...I shall endeavour to suggest the general trend in which these and other brilliant contemporary Latin American novelists and short story writers are located. This trend I term "magical realism". (111)

The trend however has been ever elusive and inconsistent in its own way, carefully evading closure, yet ascribing to the art of recreating history of varied places. According to Julian Barnes, fiction born out of the quarters of magic realism, "...moves back and forth...between the disparate worlds of what we might call the historical and the imaginary...Contradictions stand face to face, oxymoron march in locked step...and politics collide with fantasy" (Zamora and Faris 1). There cannot be any one-

dimensional definition of magic realism because it negates fixities and consistencies of representation altogether. It has often been marked for its blurred departure from the realms of realism to that of the magical. However, to understand magic realism, the best way is to approach it from its point of deviations from realism. While for realism, the possibility to represent the world as an ideological singular version stands tall, magic realism celebrates plurality, negates universal metaphors of representation and invites the readers to challenge the text in and out. The purpose of the former is to induce stability while the later attempts to disrupt the construct of reality altogether. Amidst the web of contradictions, something that is found to be common in the realm of magic realism across the world is that it is always born out of a prolonged crisis of an incurable past. It is often associated with the colonial history that has obliterated the regional histories over centuries. Also, in certain cases the political instability of countries has been manifested in works of magic realism. It has the ability of representing the most haunting and horrible things in an objective way by devising a distance between the reader and the text. The politics of such representation is closely intertwined with non-western socio-cultural structures and deeply values the regional aesthetics. Although the most reliable non-western representations could be found in myths, local legends, oral traditions, and community practices, an unprompted recognition of them was scarcely facilitated within the western cultural paradigm.

...primary narrative investment may be in myths, legends, rituals- that is, in collective (sometimes oral and performative, as well as written) practices that bind communities together. (Zamora and Faris 3)

Often the history that is in the process of being rewritten is most specifically channelized through non-western teleology. So, one may say that magic realism is also used as an instrument of constructing social realism, an offbeat paradigm of history hitherto unacknowledged by the colonial school of history. With the rise of postcolonial studies, magic realist authors have been

recognised as masters of both the categories of literature as well as history. Indian postcolonial critic Ramchandra Guha admits the dynamics of 'itihasa', an absolutely regional construct of history, much needed to understand postcolonial India in *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (2007). Guha's reading suggests the irrelevance of a universal acceptance of the westernised idea of world history and also advances towards pronouncing the recurring necessity of adapting the regional historiographies (23). As a country with a colonial past, India too has its own share of fissures within the larger construct of its national history. Of course, the representation of it, therefore, is a huge challenge. Several authors have succeeded in presenting the chronological history of India; however, the representational methodology had been western and hence dependent upon facts. The unresolved knots have therefore remained as they were in the colonial times, ignored and unacknowledged. It is for a different kind of representation of Indian history that the need of a counter discourse was sought after, although with little success initially. Almost three decades after the Indian independence, it was in 1981 that Salman Rushdie explored the trope of magic realism and wrote *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie's text challenged the existing pattern of the reading of Indian history and allowed the readers to look for alternatives, to explore and even accept the possible counter histories.

Magic realism as a genre has been appropriated by several authors across the globe, and almost each of them has risen from a point of crisis: be it historical, political, religious or social. The aftermath of partition in India is analysed as one of the most violent moments of socio-political history which was also the final blow to its colonial past. However, there are multiple narratives of discontent in the Indian subcontinent involving the natives and their protests against the colonial power which though documented, was seldom highlighted. To begin with, the first organized and armed resistance against the advances of British colonisers in India was the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. It is also considered as the first independence movement

of India where the Indian soldiers collectively fought against the East India Company with the intention of reinstating Bahadur Shah Zafar at his throne in Delhi. Robert McNamra in his article, "The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857" writes that when the struggle for independence gained momentum, the mutiny was glorified as the 'early battle of independence' (1). There has been historical as well as literary representations of the battle of 1857. *The Sepoy Mutiny* (1973) by V.A. Stuart, *Mutiny Memoirs: Being Personal Reminiscences of The Great Revolt of 1857* (2009) by Alfred Robert Davidson MacKenzie and several historical narratives have successfully presented before the readers a chronological account of facts. However, most of these accounts were from people belonging to the British East India Company and it is quite an accepted fact that history indeed is the chronicle of the victor, a timeless anecdote popularly credited to former British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. However, then the structure of history does by no means hold the potential of being the ultimate metanarrative. Of course, the advent of postmodernism after the World War II had already pronounced the ultimate collapse of the metanarratives of the world leaving no room for their constructed grandness. Rather the call of the hour was to acknowledge and accept the micro narratives which appeared far more useful in understanding the world which was abruptly transformed as an aftermath of the Second World War. So, the micro narratives could be found in endless things which were formerly not considered of much importance (Lyotard 2).

In the context of Indian struggle of independence, chronological history often ignored the subjective history that accommodates lived experience. Hence, a lot is often lost and in not accounted for in the process of history making. Also, the coloniser's documentation allows the possibility of select facts being carefully removed. A comparative analysis of the coloniser's history and the local subjective history constructed by oral accounts of lived experience often reveals the fissures within the representation itself. The available history most often has been the account of the coloniser where the voices of the colonised are barely considered. From the very beginning of

human civilization, literature has been considered as an important instrument of documentation and several literary texts have been marked for its authentic or semi-authentic capture of the reality concerned, even often allowing room for plural readings. Therefore, there remains a possibility that regional literature can function as effectively as history, giving voice to the colonised.

History by no means should be separated from its cultural identity; however, it has been observed that the historical documents are bereft of it, especially when it's sourced from the colonial quarters. So, the native authors have been found locating their histories elsewhere, in genres like magic realism that twirls between the reality of the coloniser and that of the colonised. It is a literary way to rediscover and recreate the past, to unearth stories and images, symbols and metaphors of the space concerned to which western idea of history has not been able to do much justice. In the realm of postcolonialism, magic realism is extremely crucial for it not only limits itself to the historiography of colonialism but also addresses issues such as displacement, cultural distortions and erasure of marginal experiences. According to Elleke Boehmer the association of postcolonialism and magic realism is of utmost importance:

Drawing on the special effects of magic realism, postcolonial writers in English are able to express their view of a world fissured, distorted, and made incredible by cultural displacement...[T]hey combine the supernatural with local legend and imagery derived from colonialist cultures to represent societies which have been repeatedly unsettled by invasion, occupation, and political corruption. Magic effects, therefore, are used to indict the follies of both empire and its aftermath. (235)

The prolonged distortion of history is one of the many reasons that postcolonial authors have sought refuge in genre of magic realism. In this context, Stephen Slemon's assertion needs mentioning. Although his primary emphasis rests on

postmodernism, he allows himself to extend his argument by considering Bakhtin's idea of dialogic discourse and suggests three ways in which postcolonialism can be appropriated by the genre of magic realism. First, magic realism has a dual narrative structure which allows the reader to have a wider spectrum of themes accommodating the perspectives of the colonised people and of the coloniser. Second, it allows the text to unveil the fissures and representational gaps that usually exists in a complex postcolonial situation. And third, magic realism dispenses certain ways in which the interstices of cultural representations in a postcolonial situation can be revived by supporting the voices of the forgotten and ignored marginal colonised. In postcolonial texts which plays upon the trope of magic realism, there exists a narrative tension at the core of the text between the real and the magical as a result of incorporating multiple voices, each holding on to its particularities, often overlapping each other's voices and blurring the distinctions at times (410).

It is in this interplay of real and the magical that a Bengali writer has been found to have woven a tale of history across centuries of human civilization. Rabisankar Bal, a journalist turned author has penned a novel titled *Dozakhnama or Conversations in Hell* (2010) where he has played with the time and history of the Indian subcontinent. Although the novel has been written in Bengali, it has been translated in English by Arunava Sinha to cater to a wider audience across the subcontinent and beyond. In the novel, Bal has further triggered the discord between the ideas of *itihasa* and history which becomes only too alive in his novel for which he has been awarded with the *Bankim Puroskar* in 2011 which is the highest literary award given by the Government of West Bengal in memory of the nineteenth century Bengali literary stalwart Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay.

Bengali literature has championed various genres and has timelessly displayed an inclination towards the representation of the social reality. Several Bengali classics have been marked because of their regional finesse in representing

Bengal and its socio-cultural nuances. Historical fiction writers like Saradindu Bandyopadhyay or authors like Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay and Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay have been much appreciated for their socio-cultural novels. In the domain of Bengali literature, however, a shift has been observed in the contemporary period. Although realist fiction is still in vogue, kept much alive by the writers like Prachet Gupta, Sangeeta Bandyopadhyay, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay and many, alternative fiction has also started appearing. The publication of Rabisankar Bal's *Dozakhnama* has challenged the existing literary styles of Bengal and has presented before the readers a literary canvas too huge and complex for a pleasure read. Yet, the disturbance has been sensational and alluring as the novel plays with history in a dangerously transgressive way, disrupting familiarity and comfort for the readers.

The stark distinction between history and poetry, as made by Aristotle in *Poetics* asserted that while history recorded what has happened, poetry foretells the things that might happen (6). In the later period, in select contexts 'poetry' could be interchanged with other literary genres. However, there has always been a distinct difference between the roles and responsibilities of the poet and the historian. While the historian is only allowed to deal with date, time and event without the slightest room for imagination, the poet is comparatively allowed a dynamic space for exercising his or her creative faculties.

Bal begins his work by challenging this concept and takes as his protagonists, his working historians, two poets from two different centuries. The first one is Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869), the sixteenth century poet from the Mughal era and the second one is the infamous Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955), the rebel writer of twentieth century. Bal infuses into the story the fine trope of time travelling, only with a small twist, that is the medium of travel here, is death. It is from their respective graves that the two authors converse across the centuries about episodes of history and chronicles of destruction. Bal invites the readers to perceive history as framed by two literary craftsmen.

Moving across centuries within the confines of a text is a challenge for any author but Rabisankar Bal's wife Seema Bal says, "he was always fond of questioning time and space for he believed that they could not be defined in terms of their specificity. What matters is how they contribute to shape the greater picture of human civilisation" (Seema Bal Interview). Although magic realism as a genre has not been widely practiced in the literary spheres of Bengal except in the works of select authors such as Nabarun Bhattacharya and Jibanananda Das. Bangladeshi authors such as Syed Waliullah, Akhteruzzaman Elias have also worked with this genre while representing the grotesqueness of human existence in their respective works of fiction.

The novel *Dozakhnama* chronicles the personal histories of both the writers and the socio-political histories of their corresponding times. There is a linear narrative with which the novel begins to unfold itself, only to quickly engage into multiple *dastans* or stories in order to completely do away with the slightest possibility of a unidimensional textual frame. We are introduced to a journalist who visits Lucknow to conduct research on the courtesans of the old city and meets a feeble old man named Farid Mian in a mansion which is falling apart. Farid Mian claims to be a writer himself and gives him a manuscript written by none other than Saadat Hasan Manto in Urdu as he is no longer able to live with the burden of an unpublished manuscript. An interesting comment is added at this point by a minor character, a servant of the house, who inhabits the same mansion that Farid Mian is mad, "Don't you know Mian went mad once?...Mian will go mad again...He will start talking to himself again...Whenever anyone talks about stories..." (Bal 7).

Although exploration of the trope of madness has been often found in literature, sometimes psychological instability also allows a certain freedom from commitment to accuracy and veracity. The journalist receives the manuscript, and the author invites the readers to delve deeper into the web of complications from the moment the manuscript is opened. First, the termite eaten old manuscript is completely written in Urdu, the

language not known to the author, second it is only Farid Mian who is confirming that the text has been written by Manto, a source that cannot be verified by any means. Also, Farid Mian himself says that even the handwriting does not match that of Manto's as he had consulted with many people regarding the manuscript. So, even before the formal inception of the novel within the novel, the author gives his characters and the readers to make a choice of consciously or willingly suspending their disbelief (Coleridge 208) for the sake of the text and the pleasure that might come out of it or to abandon the matter altogether. Mian extends this a little further and conveys to the journalist that although he might look at Manto's work as a novel, but it is a dastan after all. The difference as he suggests is that "In a dastan the story never ends, whereas a novel has a beginning and an end" (8). Through Mian's affirmations, Bal tries to release the author of the manuscript from all the possible responsibilities that the readers might subject him to, holding him as the omniscient signifier of the text. As Barthes suggests in *Death of an Author* that for the growth of the modern text, the author must disappear, the author must die.

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to 'close the writing'. (Barthes 147)

The structure of a story within a story had been appropriated by authors like Italo Calvino whose *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979) is famous for its frame structure. Bal slowly leaves the thread of his narrative to burgeon into a Chinese box structure where multiple stories intersect with each other without the faintest ambition for an absolute closure, leaving the readers as perplexed as ever. In an interview, Bal had acknowledged his personal aversion towards linear narratives. It was very important for him to deconstruct it and reject it as he believed that mere characterisation and a supporting plotline limits the prospect of the text altogether. At the same time, he did value the human hunger for stories and that is probably one

of the reasons that makes it a point to never deny that to his readers (Bal Interview).

Although not many biographical accounts of Rabisankar Bal are available, but as per the account of the author himself, it was while writing a novel titled *Chayaputuler Khela* (2007) that he first brought Mirza Ghalib as a part of it, not as a great poet but as an unfortunate victim of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 bereft of financial resources, friends and peers. It was during this period that Bal was intensely reading Ghalib, his biographies, verses and letters and somehow, he could identify with the court poet. Like Ghalib's world changed rapidly with the advent of the colonial regime, Bal was also able to perceive how his own city, Kolkata, formerly Calcutta was transforming abruptly.

While coming to terms with the degeneration of the city in which he has lived since childhood, Bal rediscovered Ghalib and started writing a novel on him. Probably he would have been able to finish it, only if he had not started reading Saadat Hasan Manto all over again. The apparent diversion however worked in his favour for he found out from Manto's biography that Ghalib was one of Manto's favourite poets and he had written a screenplay on Ghalib's life for an Indian film production which had also received a national award. Bharat Bhushan had played the role of Mirza Ghalib and the character of his courtesan lover was played by Suraiya. Unfortunately, by the time the film was released, Manto had left India for Pakistan. The biographical reading of both Manto and Ghalib motivated the author to think of a work of fiction which would bring together both the writers across centuries. He says, "It came to my mind, if it was possible to think of something like, as if Manto is writing a novel about Ghalib and I am writing it for him. So, whatever I had written so far, had to be abandoned" (my trans.; Bal Interview).

In her account on the author, Seema Bal has also affirmed that her husband, Rabisankar Bal was passionately involved into the life-sketches of Mirza Ghalib and Saadat Hasan Manto (Seema Bal Interview). There is a possibility that this

involvement went to an extreme level during his stay at a rehabilitation centre to cure him of his excessive drinking problem. Rabisankar Bal had spoken about it openly, “It was during my stay at the rehabilitation centre that I came to understand the loneliness of authors like Ghalib and Manto, through my lived experience” (my trans.; Bal Interview).

This honesty of Rabisankar Bal however does not make any space for an omniscient author in his novel, *Dozakhnama*. Rather, he blurs the idea of the author altogether from the paradigm of his fictional narrative. The decisive disappearance of an omnipotent author allows a larger space for the characters to indulge into dialogues across several layers, involving life, death and several other things. Spirits and supernatural beings inhabiting in a real setting is not uncommon in the sphere of magic realism. Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* (1955) is one of the earliest works of the genre that initiates a literary communication between the living and the dead. Marquez too does similar things in his timeless tale of the Buendia family in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967).

The gypsy was inclined to stay in the town. He really had been through death, but he had returned because he could not bear the solitude. (16)

The association of death and magic realism implores us to question the degree to which it is significant or necessary. Is death something that allows a fairer chance of representing timelessness? The obliteration of the chronological frame of time is guaranteed in the magical representation of death. The first feature that helps in identifying Rabisankar Bal’s *Dozakhnama* is his interplay between death, life and of course time. Bal carefully dismantles the barrier between the living and the dead from the moment the journalist decides to carry forward the manuscript ascribed to Manto and eventually publish it. First, he finds his Urdu instructor in a woman named Tabassum Mirza and embarks on a journey to translate the manuscript, to complete the unfinished task of Manto. Gradually he gives it up and suggests that Tabassum read it for him, and he copy the words

on paper, in order to hasten the process of completing the task. Like Plato's statement that art is twice removed from reality (*The Republic* Book X), here the authors get removed in a similar way, for every single person who becomes a part of the novel, writes it, even tries to rewrite it through translation, "What you will read hereafter is the translation of Manto's novel about Mirza Ghalib. Tabassum and I might return now and then" (12).

Second, as the novel unfolds, the journalist discovers that the date under the signature of Manto at the bottom of the introduction is the day on which he had died and argues with his Urdu teacher if it was a work of forgery. Her response, however, triggers the contest of ideas involving the classical position of author or the relationship between the author and the text altogether once again, as her casual remark enthralls with the deep understanding of meaninglessness that pervades human existence.

Do you know for sure that everything Manto wrote was really his? Maybe someone just claimed they were written by Manto. Just the way I'm telling the story and you're writing it. You, I, Mirza Ghalib — one day none of us will be here, not even our names, but the stories will still be floating about. That's not insignificant, is it? Now come on, start writing. (14)

As the journalist begins to write or rewrite Manto's novel, he conjures the author in a different language, thus leaving the readers wonder, how much has already been lost in translation. Similarly, Manto too, conjures Mirza Ghalib from his grave so that they may begin their conversation. In his conjuring, one can also see how beautifully the personal histories of both Manto and Ghalib is in the process of being weaved. The reader is however made to wonder, exactly who is the conjurer and what exactly is being conjured, only to accept the impossibility of finding a single answer resembling a closure. Although writing is a personal act, however it also allows the author a chance to evade the omniscient position that comes traditionally with authorship. In *Dozakhnama*, through the multiplicity of voices,

the author makes his escape, leaving the text at the mercy of the readers but not altogether erasing his literary trace in the work. In *Intimations*, writes Zadie Smith, “Talking to yourself can be useful. And writing means being overheard” (xii). Borrowing the idea of Smith, one can then say that the multiple voices which have spoken throughout the novel has been betrayed by the author Bal as he becomes the agent who allows the larger body of readers to overhear the conversation of the dead and the alive. Nevertheless, the act of overhearing too is no less participatory and thus the conjuring of the novel becomes an absolute act of collective participation.

The strange intertwining of multiple histories, a prominent feature of magic realism is beautifully crafted by Bal which makes *Dozakhnama* a classic tale of time and timelessness written in Bengali. Critics have considered the genre of magic realism to be unique in its feature of being able to be understood from multiple critical and theoretical standpoints. It is primarily because the genre precisely does not belong to a single era and therefore does not adhere to any particular critical school of theory. The ease with which magic realist fiction toys with the ideas of postmodernism, postcolonialism and heteroglossia confirms that as a narrative structure it is ‘transgressive and subversive’ in its own right (Bowers 66). In this context, Zamora and Faris writes:

Magical realist texts are subversive: their in-between-ness, their all at oneness encourages resistance to monological political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures... (6)

Therefore, it can be said that the subversion of normative history is possibly best appropriated by the genre of magic realism. Bal plays with two different kinds of history in his novel. The first one is the chronological history of Indian independence and the second that of the personal histories of two different poets across centuries. The author adjures promiscuously prominent similarities between Manto and Ghalib. Of the many shared

behavioural traits between the two, drinking was the most visible. They were both fascinated by the company of fallen women and responded to them in unorthodox ways. Their love for literature bound them to their respective fates as with that also came their disgust for conformism and the zest to stand out in the crowd. Also, they both had their share of humiliation in their respective eras. While Ghalib could not be Manto's guide in reality, as a classic predecessor, the later deeply adored him. In the novel *Dozakhnama*, Bal often blurs the centuries in between and implores the readers to imagine if Manto was the refreshed memory of Ghalib or to question if Manto's voice was that of time oscillating between the ages in the cycle of decay.

The history of Indian independence has been discussed by multiple historians and most of them readily offers informative facts. Their documentations are mostly correct but they do not prefer to accommodate subjectivity in their approach in order to maintain their classical loyalty to the subject. Ghalib's story as he casually tells Manto offers a different kind of socio-political history that comes along with his detailed personal account. As time does not move chronologically in the novel, the readers are made to understand that Ghalib's time had come to an end with the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, "...I wasn't asleep, I had merely shut my eyes. I didn't feel upto talking. After 1857 I didn't feel the urge to stay awake..." (Bal 89).

The effect of the social epoch on one's personal life is something that magic realism portrays in a most unusual manner. The subversion of chronology, as one may say, begins with the dialogues exchanged between Ghalib and Manto. The fearful predictions of history as initiated by Ghalib in the novel is actually an attack on the colonial regime which wrecked the Indian sub-continent for centuries. We do not conclude that the novel has the trait of being identified as a text with political merit; nevertheless, it bears a political commentary on the colonial history of India.

Magic realist fiction also points at the impossibility of absolute representation and in its acceptance of fragmented and intertwined versions of reality, it is also possible to anticipate the crisis that triggers such literary creations. Now, what crisis did Bal have in mind when he intended to write *Dozakhnama* was never directly mentioned by him; but in an interview he had confessed that his sympathies for the marginal people had always stayed along. In his understanding, both Ghalib and Manto, were poets of the margins: they were neglected by the institutions, penalised and disrespected in their own times. Bal goes beyond their humiliations and celebrates their works and creativity. Hence, in spite of Ghalib's reckless drinking and womanising as confessed by the character himself in the novel, the readers seldom condemn him. Bal deconstructs a larger than life image often bestowed upon the authors as bearers of moral and social obligations, through the portrayal of Manto; the readers too are able to look beyond the community's standardized image of Manto as a drunkard, and as a writer of obscene things.

As a journalist himself, Bal also takes into account the crisis of Urdu language in the Indian subcontinent. Under the oppressive colonial regime, the language which resided at the core of Islamic culture in India slowly corroded away. The attention which Urdu as a language had received in the eighteenth century waned away in nineteenth century for various reasons. The rise of Anglicist educational model in India overshadowed the existing models of Oriental education and along with it languages such as Urdu, Persian and Sanskrit slowly became 'subjects of lesser importance' (Sarma 63). Through Ghalib's personal account the readers come to understand the socio-cultural shift which primarily disturbed the consistent status of a language and all that has been associated with it. There was an erosion in the Urdu culture due to the expansion of colonial power. The final proverbial nail in the coffin was the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 that saw the fall of Urdu speaking Islamic aristocracy in Delhi and its neighbouring areas.

It was not that the Urdu as a language disappeared completely from the country; but its former grandeur and usage were heavily affected. The fall of the Mughal Empire marked by the exile of the last Nawab Bahadur Shah Zafar had made Ghalib realise that the future of Delhi was doomed and with that all that it stood for. A language lives and is also preserved at the centre of a culture. Ghalib's depiction of the wreck caused by the colonial army in Delhi during the Sepoy Mutiny in his personal letters not only provides an alternative history of the first war of independence where personal losses are taken into account along with the morbid degeneration of a culture. Again, with the advent of the Indian independence in 1947, which also witnessed the partition of the sub-continent based on religion, we see how Manto was worried about the future of the Urdu language in India. He was anxious if Urdu would become extinct in India and as a premonition, over the years, it has been partially true. Urdu continued to lose its importance through the subsequent years. Bal identified this act of marginalising of a language as nothing less than linguistic violence that has contributed to the destruction of a linguistic lineage.

Through Ghalib's reminiscences of Delhi, one can travel back to the past for his works are rich in poetic essence and faithfully reflects the *tehzeeb* or the culture of the era to which the poet belonged. Manto's recklessness with fiction, on the contrary, lays threadbare the raw and gory pictures of the partition of 1947 and beyond. Manto's fascination towards the underbellies of the society triggered his literary whim from an early period of his life. His choice of subject was most of the time disturbing and often unacceptable for many of his readers. He often had to face legal trials for his writings. The condition of writers across ages disturbed Bal. Their helplessness, vulnerability, and abuse at the hand of political oppression triggered his imagination. In his exclusive interview to Jahid Sohag he had confirmed that it was the helplessness of the two creative artists, Ghalib and Manto that had moved him. He had wanted to understand how both were victims of the political centre of power, each in his own time and how they individually

confronted their respective oppressive power structures. Behind this, Bal also had his own intention of probing closer into this vicious game of power so that he may be able to deal with his own demons, the real ones of his contemporary times which engulfs the authors in varied ways but also without such institutions it is not possible for them to survive (Bal Interview) [Self Translation]. In the interview, his careful choice of words further suggests his continuing displeasure with the contemporary politics which marginalises the authors. His own dissatisfaction with his reality also contributed towards his literary engagement with the history of the two fellow artists.

The condition of authors as perceived by Bal invites us to revisit the question of art as a commodity, a perpetual debate which has been ongoing since the 1930s. According to Gyorgy Markus, as he writes in his essay “Walter Benjamin or The Commodity as Phantasmagoria” that former authors such as Adorno and Brecht had asserted that the form of the commodity “not only affects its potential recipients and fundamentally influences its content, but also determines the fate of art under capitalism” (3). At the same time, it was more important to perceive the conditions of modern capitalism as it would directly influence art as specific marketable products (3). Rabisankar Bal is a product of this line of capitalist progression where an author cannot evade the loop of capitalism in order to ensure his survival as an author. The same crisis was faced by Mirza Ghalib and Manto as well. In spite of both being brilliant in their respective works, both of them dealt with severe financial difficulties throughout their lives. Ghalib had to constantly borrow from his friends and he only became the court poet towards the end of his life. But of course, his lifestyle was also quite extravagant owing to his title of ‘Mirza’. Surrounded by friends and followers, he would often indulge in gambling too along with constant drinking, “The gambling session was in full swing in my devil’s chamber that day. We used to gamble with dice. Several rich businessmen were present. Luck was running my way...” (189). However, to maintain this kind of a lifestyle, he had to depend on royalty and nobilities, many of

whom he secretly despised and who also did not support him all the time, "I was preparing myself mentally...It was the behaviour of Aminuddin Sahib, the nawab of Loharu, which surprised me the most. How friendly we used to be. And now he disowned me completely. His brother Ziauddin also moved away" (190).

Manto too had his share of difficulties in surviving as an independent voice in a world that was in transition. He started as a writer in his early days for a regional magazine and over the years made his way to the Bombay film industry as a screenplay writer. He could live with a meagre salary but could not abide by the regular rules of working, something that Bal recreated in his novel through the character itself: "I won't take more than sixty. But I can't follow a routine. I'll come to work as I please. All you want is that the magazine should be published on time, right?" (184). Manto's disregard for conventions made him infamous. When Bombay did not suit him well, for a brief period of time he tried his luck at Delhi where he found work at the radio station. However, even that did not work for him and he left the job.

In 1941 I went to Delhi with a job at the radio station. The salary was a hundred and fifty rupees a month. But I couldn't survive more than a year and a half. Government jobs weren't for me, Mirza Sahib. (185)

Rabisankar Bal makes his protagonists tell their stories of individual rise and fall and excites the readers to the taste of biographical details, mostly authentic, and yet leaves room enough for multiple realities to question historiography itself as they also talk about civilisations in transition. Bal's mockery of institutionalized history takes the penultimate form through the tongue-in-cheek humour of Ghalib as the court poet address history as food for termites, "History is for termites to destroy, isn't that so, Manto bhai?" (205). Bal's conscious disregard for the metanarrative of history becomes evident in his novel as he engages in strengthening of the bridge between postmodernism and magic realism in the context of Bengali literature. History in

the Indian subcontinent has long been monopolised by colonial institutions and hence they tend to cater to a monolithic reading of the incidents. Bal's revision of the history can only come through magic realism as it opens up several possibilities of interpretations of the same events. For Bal, magic realism is the technique to engage with the genre by constantly playing upon the idea of reality and illusion. Works of magic realism allows us to understand how the alternate appropriations of reality which often appears delusional also manifests reality, nevertheless. From the perspective of Bowlers, Rabisankar Bal's *Dozakhnama* can surely be read as a work of postcolonial magic realism, one of the first of its kind in the literary sphere of Bengali literature.

The majority of magical realist writing can be described as postcolonial. That is to say much of it is set in a postcolonial context and written from a postcolonial perspective that challenges the assumptions of an authoritative colonialist attitude. (Bowlers 95)

The evolution of Bengali literature that could be noticed from the early decades of twentieth century consistently used realism as a favoured form of literary style and mostly social issues were taken into account as major themes. A similar pattern followed in the awake of the postcolonial era with select variations in the works of authors such as Nabarun Bhattacharya whose work *Herbert* remains a classic in its own merit. Although it has been suggested by select critics that Nabarun was the harbinger of magic realism in Bengali literature, but Rabisankar Bal's work offers an absolutely fascinating experience of understanding magic realism in the context of contemporary Bengal. The language that he uses easily travels across centuries and it overpowers the readers to an extent where the gaps between Urdu and Bengali culture is blurred. In twists and turns of the work of fiction, Bal plays with the characters and the readers at the same time, making the work elusive as ever.

Who's telling stories here?

Oh I come here every day. And I inevitably find a dastango. There he is. (273)

A Dastango, a storyteller, never really finishes the story and only travels from one tale to another. Towards the end of the novel, the voice of Bal comes alive through the character of a journalist and he suggests the impossibility of a closure in such a narrative. He writes: "We have crossed successive rings of fire on this journey...My search for them is propelling me towards a new novel" (278). In his suggestion of travelling to one narrative from the other, he becomes a dastango himself, probably one of the last torchbearers of a disappearing art of storytelling. In his exhibition of the past, Bal reveals the fissures within the past itself and the impossibility of a holistic exhibition altogether. He consciously avoids to delve into the narrative styles explored in Latin American or any other European literary rendition of magic realism and attempts to present a novel work of Bengali magic realism, by the means of his choice of theme and the treatment of narrative structure. Bal's text makes room for the literary junctions of uncertainty and thus changes the course of the novel; at any moment, appears a new story teller with a new story, where Ghalib and Manto are sometimes present or even absent. In this negation of the historical absolute is born the new fiction of Bengali magic realism and Bal remains its pioneering advocate.

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Critical & Analytical Essays

Interpretation of Desireless Action in Śrīmadbhagavadgītā

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on Niṣkāma karma or desireless action in the light of Śrīmadbhagavadgītā. Gītā, despite being a holy book, is an ethical handbook as well. So Niṣkāma karma or desireless action truly brings out the essence of the *Gītā* and revolves around the notion of desire and human agency in action. The paper first introduces what desireless action is and how it becomes a central question in the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā. The problem lies in the very core of the concept of desirelessness in action, which is surprisingly the slogan of Anāsakta karma or Niṣkāma karma. The paper gradually progresses towards bringing a solution to the apparent contradiction that follows if 'desireless action' is considered in the literal sense of the term. Why Niṣkāma karma becomes the point of question is due to the very word 'niskama', which seems to be in an apparent contradiction with the word 'karma' or action. It is either Niṣkāma karma is possible, or it is not. But following Gītā, Niṣkāma karma is possible and becomes an ethical dictum mostly throughout all the chapters. To support the idea that desireless action is possible, I will provide three accounts of non-literal senses of the term Niṣkāma karma and will try to provide which of these three accounts gives the most plausible explanation. All the interpretations mentioned require explanations separately, and at the conclusion, I will provide my stand towards which interpretation is the most plausible one.

Keywords: Nişkāma karma, Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, action, desire, fruits, dharma.

The *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* revolves under the context of Nişkāma karma or desireless action. The term Nişkāma karma is a combination of ‘nih’ and ‘kāma,’ where “nih” means “without” and “kāma” can be understood as “desire” in a specific sense. This desire can be any desire. And, the term “karma” means action. So, the term Nişkāma karma means desireless action. While discussing the *Bhagavadgītā*, certain essential questions evolve again and again, which are-

1. What is to be done? Or, to say differently, what should be the duty of a person? This is the deontological perspective, meaning focusing on the action itself in the purest form and not the consequences that follow from it.
2. How to perform that duty? This talks about the regulative principle, where a guideline or a standard is given that sets the boundaries of an acceptable action or behaviour.
3. The last is, why is the action or duty performed? This is the meta-ethical question.

All these three questions can be philosophised and can be evaluated in different ways and through different perspectives. Here, this meta-ethical question needs to be distinguished from the normative question. In normative ethics, the concern is with what is morally right and wrong. However, the meta-ethical question is a higher-order question that verifies the moral standards or criteria of action and not the action itself. This explores the status, foundations, and scope of moral values of that action or behaviour. Meaning, that the questions raised are “Is this criterion correct?” or “Can there be any criteria at all?” etc. This meta-ethical question is found in all thirteen chapters of the *Gītā* in one form or another, but significantly, the question finds its true colour in the discussion of

karmayoga. What seems essential here is the grand scheme, which includes Dharma, Niṣkāma karma, svadharma, fruits of action, and renunciation of that fruit of action. The connection of Niṣkāma karma and Svadharma is of quite an importance and has to be dealt with separately.

Niṣkāma karma is a very remarkable conception as it is a synthesis of two opposite morals in life. It is rigorous, as it is performing an action or any action without having any desire, which at once seems impossible and unacceptable. One cannot remain without engaging in activity at any time, and for that, a desire towards the activity is necessary to execute it. In various verses of Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, it has been duly mentioned that no man can stay without performing any action, and without performing any action, no man can be free.

*na hi kaścit kṣaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhaty akarma-kṛt
kāryate hy avaśaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛti-jair guṇaiḥ
(B.G. 3.5)*

This verse states that there is no man who can remain without action, even for a moment. Man, being bound by their inherent nature, is always engaged in some action. Not only that, following different schools of thought, and even as the central point of the *Gītā*, liberation or mokṣa becomes the ultimate goal. But, also for that goal, action is required, without which liberation cannot be attained. Yet again, this notion stumbles upon another contradictory notion, which is regarding- 1) having no desire while performing the action, and 2) this leads to no desire towards the fruits that the action is going to yield. Desires like thought, hope, belief, etc., are intentional mental states. These states have content and have intentionality or ‘directedness’. Why it is important here can be understood by following an instance. Say I have a desire to have an ice cream. So, there is an ice cream truck on the road. Therefore, to fulfil the desire, I will perform an action that will satisfy a certain desire: getting a cone of ice cream for myself. Here, the content of my desire is that ‘I want a cone of ice cream’. So, my desire for

a cone of ice cream is propelling me to that action and my walk or my action towards the ice cream truck is not dispositional. It is intentional. Now, understanding this in the context of *Gītā*, desire or *ichha* or will has to be a causal factor towards any action. Not all actions are dispositional. There are certain desires that propel us towards actions. But we find the 47th verse of the 2nd chapter in the *Gītā*, which states-

karmaṇyevādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana...(B.G. 2.47)

This means having no desire for the fruits of the action or not acting with the desire of enjoying the fruits of action. This suggests that both *kṛtṛtvābhimāna* (pride of doership) and desire are unacceptable, and this points to a contradiction. Then arises the question regarding the desire for the action, agency, and fruits that action yields, as well as the enjoyment of that fruit of action. Therefore, this means acting without having a desire towards the action. But action without desire seems apparently unacceptable. Hence, the basic arguments are-

- 1) Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to act without desire.
- 2) Following orthodox philosophy, desire is the necessary condition for action.
- 3) Hence, Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna against acting.
- 4) Kṛṣṇa's advice leads to a contradiction.
- 5) Kṛṣṇa's advice does not lead to absurdity.

Here, we get three possible conclusions and will deal with each separately.

Now, the question that follows is whether the moral injunctions provided in the *Gītā* are contradictory to each other. Is Kṛṣṇa really pointing at non-action? To answer the second question first, Kṛṣṇa can be seen, from the very beginning, pointing to action rather than non-action. This seems to add to the contradiction that has been stated.

*niyataṁ kuru karma tvaṁ karma jyāyo hy
akarmaṇaḥ*

śarīra-yātrā 'pi ca te na prasiddhyed akarmaṇaḥ
(B.G. 3.8)

Lord Kṛṣṇa states that Arjuna should perform his obligatory duties, for action is superior to inaction. And through inaction, the maintenance of his own body will not be possible. Therefore, action is inevitable. This can be said to be the central theme of the *Gītā*, in which Arjuna refuses to take part in the war and Kṛṣṇa motivates him to do otherwise. Taking part in the war means performing an action. Not only that, such an action bears consequences that Arjuna fears can be detrimental to himself as well as society. Still, Kṛṣṇa proposed that Arjuna's moral dilemma was the result of the illusion of attaining 'adharmā' by taking part in the war.

atha cet toam imam dharmyam saṅgrāmaṁ na
kariṣyasi
tataḥ sva-dharmaṁ kīrtim ca hitvā pāpam
avāpsyasi (B.G. 2.33)

The verse states that if the righteous battle is not fought by Arjuna, then, by forsaking his own duty and fame, he will incur sin. Thus, under any circumstances, one has to perform duty, which is an action.

But, as the Lord suggests, one has to perform their Svadharmah, which means the action assigned for them and themselves only, following different verses in the *Gītā*, but most prominently in the 35th verse of the 3rd chapter.

śreyān sva-dharmo viguṇaḥ para-dharmāt sv-
anuṣṭhitāt
svabhāva-niyataṁ karma kurvan nāpnoti kilbiṣam
(B.G. 3.35)

The Svadharmah is determined by the varna and ashrama. But behind the four varnas and ashrama dharma lie the three gunas- sattvah, rajah, and tamah or the prakṛti. But it has to be noted that this prakṛti is dependent on karmaphala or the fruits of action from the previous birth. This refers to janmāntaravāda or the chain of rebirth,

which is the immortality of the soul. So, in short, Kṛṣṇa is not pointing to non-action, but action in a specific sense. But the first question raised regarding the contradiction found in the framework of the *Gītā* is left to be discussed. In Indian philosophy, the value system is very much associated with the theory of Puruṣārtha. There are primarily four puruṣārthas. Each puruṣārtha is to be attained or realised for a virtuous life. One of these is mokṣa. Therefore, even for such an objective as mokṣa, one has to perform an action. The soul is trapped through the chain of rebirth in samsara, and the soul can be liberated only through mokṣa. But even performing an action, like attaining mokṣa, presupposes desire as a causal factor. So, following this, even mokṣa or liberation would not be possible if there is no desire towards it. Therefore, the question can be modified as to whether desireless action is possible in the framework of the *Gītā*.

To answer such a question, the non-literal interpretations of the *Gītā* can be taken into account. The interpretations will be discussed as follows: 1. The No-action interpretation, [as found in the article by Simon Brodbeck 'Calling Kṛṣṇa's Bluff: Non-Attached Action In the "Bhagavadgītā"' (published in the Journal of Philosophy, February 2004, vol 32).] 2. The Some Desire Interpretation [as found in the writing of Christopher G. Framarin in his article 'Good and Bad Desires: Implications of the Dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna' (which was published in the 'International Journal of Hindu Studies,' August 2007, Vol 11).] And lastly, 3. The No-Action Interpretation [which is an understanding of an article by Arindam Chakrabarti, 'The End of Life: A Nyāya Kantian Approach to the Bhagavadgītā' (published in the Journal of Indian Philosophy, 1988)]. Hence, these three views are relevant in understanding the thesis of Niṣkāma karma in the *Gītā*.

1. The No-Action Interpretation (as found in the writing of Simon Brodbeck) –

If the conclusion is that Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to take no action, then this leads to a contradiction in the *Gītā*'s structure. But such cannot be the case. This no-action can be said in the non-literal meaning of the term. *Gītā* disapproves of no action, and the main advice is to take action. But such action is not 'paradharma' or anyone else's. This leads to the behavioural take on *Gītā*'s dictum "karmaṇyevādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana." Following Simon Brodbeck and George Teschner, here 'action' in a sense lies more under the paradigm of behavioural science and less under moral philosophy. According to this interpretation of the no-desire action of the *Gītā*, the explanation can be provided based on an action being 'intentional' or 'non-intentional'. When the action has a certain intention towards 'I', the actor is performing depending on an incentive. Then the sense which dawned on the person is that 'I am the doer'. So being the doer, the person awaits the fruits of action. But when a person is performing the action non-intentionally, the action is mechanical. The term 'mechanical' has to be understood as a disposition. Just like it is the disposition of sugar to dissolve in water, similarly, it is the disposition that is driving the person towards the action. So, in disposition, there is no desire involved, and it is more like a behaviour. This can be an account of 'non-attached' action or Anāsakta karma. There exists no intention of the performer, and so the action can be considered desireless and the actor as a non-performer. This can be an approach in which the notion of Niṣkāma karma, as provided by Lord Kṛṣṇa, fits in the grand scheme of actions outside the ethical system of the *Gītā*. Seen in the light of the *Gītā*, the actor does not and should not have any adhikāra or agency on the fruits of his actions. Like behaviour, the person will perform the action and will not think that 'I am the doer' of the action.

This interpretation has found its way in the Sāṅkhyan analysis of the interaction of trigunas or the distinctive three gunas in prakṛti or the material world. The prakṛti is composed of these three gunas, and so,

humans also have these three gunas in them. There are alterations in the composition of the gunas in each person, and that varies from person to person. Such gunas are Sattah, Rajah and Tamah. The composition of the gunas is inherent to the being. Being such, this composition determines how the person will act, which is similar to behaviour. So, it is something that is instinctive. In the *Gītā*, in various verses, there is mention of different types of doers, namely- sattvik kṛtā, rājasik kṛtā and tāmasik kṛtā. Following such a classification of the doers, these actors or doers or kṛtā perform actions not depending wholly on the fruits of action. So, they do not “act” in the sense we mean as an intentional doer of the action. An analogy can be used in this regard that a sunflower usually moves or faces towards the sunlight. This means the more sunlight, the more it will help in its growth. As we can see, here the movement of the flower is not due to ‘desire of growth’ but performing action as a behaviour, which is instinctive. Similarly, due to the interaction of the gunas, there are the four varnas of the varnāśrama who behave according to the composition of their prakṛiti, making them ‘non-performers’ of the actions. So, their actions are already determined and not intentional following this account of the no-action thesis. Therefore, human behaviour is explained causally and not teleologically, in terms of the agent’s desires and intentions. And so human behaviour becomes instinctive and not intentional.

But the immediate question that follows this account is: Is the ‘no-action’ interpretation of the *Gītā* plausible? Apparently, this interpretation could have been considered convincing enough to support the whole scheme of action in the *Gītā*. Yet there are certain inadequacies in this thesis.

i) If such an interpretation is followed, then the verse that builds the foundation of karma yoga is -

*karmaṇy evādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana
mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr mā te saṅgo ’stv
akarmaṇi,*

which means “never should consequences result, purposes be your motive and also states that there should be no inclination towards ‘akarma’ or no action. The verse itself is going against the no-action interpretation, which regards desireless action as behavioural or instinctive. Now, just like the objections that are raised against behaviourism, similar objections are found against this interpretation as well. If everything is based on behaviour and there is no role of desire or mental processes involved, then that behaviour is nothing but a drill. So, there lies no room for any moral dilemma, which is quite common. A person who is still in the process of karmayoga or is practising, to that individual, there will occur situations that will lead to some sort of dilemma. What is expected of that person is to use their best judgment and, in this case, it is following their Svadharmah. But while following Svadharmah, the individual has to have some kind of awareness. But if that is all instinctive, then there lies no room for such an awareness.

ii) In the verse, it is mentioned ...*mā phaleṣu kadācana-* where the term *mā* can be taken in two ways- first as having no agency in the fruits of the action and second as merely an imperative that one must not have any right over the fruits of action. In this interpretation, the second sense has been granted, which is contradictory to the mechanical interpretation in terms of the tripartite classification of the prakṛti and their influence on human personality and actions. Because if one is always guided under the influence of their prakṛti, then, there the use in the sense of an imperative, the mentioned verse takes an absurd form.

iii) Therefore, having no desire towards an action may be in the literal sense or non-literal sense of behaviour, which is contradictory and leads to difficulty in understanding the meaning of the verse itself.

2) Some Desire Interpretation (as found in the writings of Christopher G. Framarin)-

Gītā stands on the moral dilemma that Arjuna faced during the war of Kurukṣetra, which then leads to this dialogue between the Lord and Arjun. Arjuna gave reasons as to why he should not fight the war, as it would lead to destruction, chaos, and adharmā. Again, on the other hand, he was also going against his Svadharmā of being a kṣatriya. These are subsequently given in verses 1.31, 1.36, 1.32, and from 1.40 to 1.44, respectively. In these verses, Arjuna mentions that no good signs but bad signs will arise if he fights and kills his own people. From killing his own people, no good can possibly arise, and he does not desire victory or kingdom over this. There will prevail only corruption and anarchy after the war, leading to social breakdown, and the security of women and children will be at stake. So, following such overall consequences, his decision not to fight is more justified than the overall consequences of fighting the war. But, to take Kṛṣṇa's advice to act "without desire, having discarded all desires" seems to contradict the general thesis that all actions presuppose desire. Now, if Arjuna is devoid of all desires, then he cannot fight the battle because fighting the battle is an action that has to compulsorily presuppose a desire. So, following Framarin, the arguments can be modelled as follows-

- i) Arjuna can either fight the war or not fight the war.
 - ii) If he fights, certain bad consequences will follow, such as his going to hell, the death of loved ones, chaos, and social breakdown
 - iii) If he does not fight the war, then all these consequences can be avoided
 - iv) The consequences of not fighting are better than the consequences of fighting the war
- ∴ Arjuna should not fight the war.

In this way, his arguments for not fighting the war seem relatively strong. But Kṛṣṇa objects to Arjuna's decision. His point would be to make Arjuna realise that the consequences of fighting the war are better than the

consequences of not fighting it. Quoting Framarin, “Kṛṣṇa cites some consequences that Arjuna has already said he does not desire is important here.” Meaning he should desire those consequences. Therefore, Arjuna cannot fight the battle if he is completely desireless. So, following this, Kṛṣṇa could not prohibit all desires. Here *mā* (in verse 2.47 of *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*) stands for prohibition, but not prohibition of desire towards all fruits of action. So, the distinction here is made between permissible desires and impermissible desires. This can be said to be the ‘some desire interpretation of desireless action’- here it is put in a way to show that desireless action is possible, but not considering ‘desireless’ in the literal sense of the term. Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to give away all the impermissible desires and have the permissible desires only. Hence, there are good desires and bad desires. But what are the criteria for distinguishing between good and bad desires? - The answer to this lies in the distinction between permissible desires and non-permissible desires. If one has to argue regarding the wide range of views found regarding which desires following the *Gītā* are permissible or non-permissible, it can be roughly said that the permitted class is the unselfish desires and the prohibited class is the selfish desires. This is one of the most common and contemporary interpretations of desireless action in the *Gītā*. From *Gītā*’s verses, pieces of evidence can be gathered to support that desireless action is pointing at permitting certain good desires and refraining from having certain bad desires. Kṛṣṇa asked Arjuna to fight the war, and in return, he would receive certain good fruits. So, this raises questions like- a) can svadhārma be considered under Niṣkāma karma? b) and how can Arjuna, without being the cause of the action, be the agent of that action? Here, a distinction between consequences can be made. Consequences can be of two types: one is a causal consequence, and the other is an entailed consequence. To answer the first question raised, if Arjuna acts, that is, keeping in mind, desiring heaven and all the good, then he becomes the actor towards the action and becomes the

cause towards the action. So, the effects are the causal consequences. Thus, that is not Nişkāma karma in any sense. But, if we opt for entailed consequences, where Arjuna is not acting for the desire of all the good but with the desire of performing his duty, which is his Svadharmah. This interpretation of Framarin also takes up the form of 'Mokṣa only Interpretation' where Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to act only with the desire of liberation. One will attain liberation if he performs or even tries to perform his svadharma or duty. And by performing such, liberation will automatically entail. Then that can be said to the entail consequence and the causal consequence. But the question can be that even if one performs his duty, which results in bad consequences like death or killing, then how is that desire towards such an action permissible? This can be answered as these consequences are not a lack of morality but a part of performing the duty. Also, mokṣa will automatically entail as a consequence. The benefit of performing the duty (here, fighting the war) is already entailed, and there lies no scope for causal consequences here. If duty is considered as a causal condition, then that does not satisfy the path towards the achievement of mokṣa.

But, this distinction between good desires and bad desires in the case of Nişkāma karma can face certain objections-

i) This distinction between good and bad desires may sound problematic because for such a distinction, there has to be a general rule. But how can desires have a general rule? There have to be certain exceptions attached to it. Desire is very much subjective, and being so, it cannot have a universal guiding rule. Even if there is one, its application will depend on situation to situation. Again, for exceptions, another solid rule is required, which will have exceptions as well. This will lead to infinite regress, and no such fundamental rule can be provided.

ii) In various verses of the Gītā, the concept of "complete abandonment" of *kāman sarvān*, meaning "all

desires”, as found in the interpretation of Sankara. In verses like 2.55, 2.71, 6.18, etc. So, this interpretation will not suffice as an explanation of desireless action or Niṣkāma karma.

Here, it is necessary to quote John McDowell to understand that codification of moral conduct is not feasible:

If one attempted to reduce one’s conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong...because...one’s mind on the matter was no susceptible of capture in any universal formula. (148)

This process will be infinite according to McDowell.

This brings us to the last non-literal interpretation of the desireless action as mentioned in the *Gītā*. This can be named the No-Desire Interpretation.

3) The No Desire Interpretation (following Arindam Chakrabarti)-

To place this interpretation within the framework of this paper, it is required to discuss a few tenets that have been mentioned in the article ‘The End of Life: A Nyāya-Kantian Approach To The Bhagavadgītā’. What is an end? Is it a thing in itself? Or, the point that marks the end of a process? Professor Chakrabarti here offers many interpretations of what an end means. Just like following the Wittgensteinian approach, death is not an event in itself, but the end of a journey, that is, life. So, from birth to death, life is just a process, and death marks the end of it. Similarly, following this account, Mokṣa, which is one of the Puruṣārthas, can be said to be an end in itself. Following Mill, this can be called “the art of life”, which tells us about the ultimate ends, that is, the *ends-in-*

themselves. A similar interpretation can be found in the Nyāya system through the words of Gadadhara:

An end-in-itself is defined by him as an object of a desire such that the desire is *not* subservient to any further desire. Only happiness, enjoyment or awareness of happiness (these two being distinguished for intricate epistemological reasons), and absence of suffering are said to be possible ends-in-themselves, all other ends being only sunordinate or secondary ends." (Chakrabarti 329)

Another such art of life can be found in the *Bhagavad Gītā* as well. This interpretation, as its premise, acknowledges that the "tension" between Niṣkāma karma and desire is real and cannot be well explained by the distinction between good and bad desires. Whenever Niṣkāma karma is tied to the concept of liberation, the concept "niskama" can be easily questioned. So, the way this interpretation understands Niṣkāma karma is that the desire for 'liberation' or mokṣa is not any ordinary desire. This desire is quite compatible with "desirelessness." Liberation in the *Gītā* has been considered a blissful state. So, following Chakrabarti, the desire for such will be a desire for happiness, without sorrow. Here it can be said that it is not desire as what we mean by 'desire' as such, but motive. The individual, inside and outside the framework of the *Gītā*, should act in a manner that shows disinterestedness, and the action should be prompted by the motive of mokṣa. So, mokṣa is the telos here. The individual is performing duty for the sake of duty, and if such is maintained as a rule, then that will provide him with absolute peace. So, the actor is not acting for the sake of action but ultimately receives it. Thus, Niṣkāma karma or desireless action has to be understood in the strict sense of the term, in an exhaustive manner. But the question arises, where it has been said that ultimate peace will dawn upon the actor as a reward who acts for the sake of

duty? Chakrabarti provides the solution that the *Gītā* has to be treated as an *act-deontologist* and *rule-teleologist*. This means that the actor has to perform the action as prescribed by the scriptures because it has been prescribed to do so, without having any other motive of attaining liberation. The wise actor will act without taking it under consideration whether the action will yield good or bad results.

This interpretation has a Kantian tone to it. Following the Kantian account, if the person performs duty for the sake of duty, then happiness will be granted to him, which is “a demand of pure practical reason.” Similar to Kant’s idea of morality, in the *Gītā*, it can be found that there is an impartial god who sees that the desireless actor is acting without the desire for eternal happiness and that he is bestowed with it at the very end. Here, the goal is not connected to desire. The desire is for the goal or the end, which is the duty. So, desire and the fruits of action are not in causal relation here, but rather entailed from performing the duty for the sake of duty without any desire attached to it. Following Kant, happiness is granted to the virtuous man who performs duty for the sake of duty, and that is the demand of pure practical reason.

Thus, the concept of *Niṣkāma* karma can be understood if the No- Desire interpretation is granted. A good life is not a life that is lived for the sake of eternal happiness that follows from *mokṣa*. But when a moral action is performed as a duty, that is, for the sake of duty, then that eternal bliss automatically follows through *Mokṣa*. In the *Gītā*, in different verses through various chapters, it has been said that the actor has to be endowed with virtues. A virtuous man will perform his or her *svadharma* with sincerity, and *mokṣa* will automatically befall that person. Following Arindam Chakrabarti, “it (a moral action) is causally good for *mokṣa*. But, both causally and morally, *Mokṣa* is strictly good for nothing.”

Here, ending my take on this with a verse of *Gītā* :

*tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samāchara
asakto hyācharaṁ karma param āpnoti pūruṣhaḥ.*
(B.G. 3.19)

Therefore you perform your duties in a non-attached manner, because by acting without concern for the results, a man attains *ultimate Happiness*.

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Critical & Analytical Essays

Inking the Epic: Subversive Aesthetics and Moral Recalibrations in Ramayana Graphic Novels

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Abstract

This research paper analyses how recent Indian graphic novels re-envision the *Ramayana*, not only as mythology but also as an empowering graphic-textual means of grappling with contemporary issues that concern identity, power, gender, and ethics. Using a critical reading of Vikram Balagopal's *Simian* (2014) and Samhita Arni & Moyna Chitrakar's *Sita's Ramayana* (2011), the research explores how the interplay of visual composition, page layout, artistic choices, and narrative voice in both problematizes and reimagines traditional notions of dharma, heroism, and divinity. This research paper also explores how these graphic novels, evaluated through a multidisciplinary framework of graphic narrative theory, comparative mythology, and cultural studies, subvert hegemonic portrayals of Rama and recentre marginalized voices like Sita. These visual reinterpretations are not just retellings; rather, they are also acts of cultural intervention, questioning who is allowed to interpret the epic and for what purpose. By moving the visual perspective and narrative voice, they present readers with a morally nuanced and aesthetically rich encounter, prompting questions about what it means to reinterpret sacred tradition in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: *Ramayana* Graphic Novels, Visual-Textual Narratives, Cultural Reinterpretation, Dharma and Ethics, Feminist Retellings, Subversive Aesthetics, Mythology.

Introduction

Among South Asia's most long-lasting cultural works, the *Ramayana* has been retold, performed, and reinterpreted over ages. Originally conveyed via oral recitations, temple murals, classical drama, and devotional literature, the epic has moulded national moral awareness and cultural memory. But the appearance of the *Ramayana* in comic book form in the twenty-first century not only points to a shift in medium but also a metamorphosis in how the epic is seen and morally interacted with. This research examines how current Indian graphic novels restructure the *Ramayana* by combining visual aesthetics with other ethical readings, particularly in works such as *Sita's Ramayana* by Samhita Arni and Moyna Chitrakar and *Simian* by Vikram Balagopal. They have developed a strong act of narrative reimagination, and these are not religious reproductions nor simplifications for younger viewers. Instead, they serve as visual-critical interventions that call readers to view the epic via new moral and political lenses and challenge conventional hierarchies.

Graphic novels, as a distinct narrative form, evolved from the long-standing tradition of comics, combining sequential art and literary storytelling to produce complex, extended narratives. While comic strips and illustrated stories have existed since the early 20th century, the term "graphic novel" (xviii) gained prominence in the late 1970s and 1980s, particularly with works such as Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978), which demonstrated the potential of comics to engage with mature themes, intricate plots, and deep characterization. Unlike conventional comics, graphic novels offer a sustained narrative structure, blending visual artistry with textual storytelling to create immersive and multilayered experiences. Over time, the form has expanded globally, encompassing diverse genres and styles—from autobiographical accounts and political critique to mythological reinterpretations—establishing itself as a serious medium capable of addressing cultural, social, and ethical issues with nuance and aesthetic sophistication. According to Jan Baetens, "The reader is expected to infer the story not only from the

textual and verbal indications that are given, but also from the internal structure of the image. The story told by visual means should be more than a reduplication of the story told by verbal means" (5). The graphic novel is a hybrid form whereby the visual is constitutive of meaning rather than illustrative. In the framework of the *Ramayana*, the concept implies that using image and space facilitates a different form of narrative that repositions forgotten characters, changes the reader's gaze, and provides polyphonic interpretations of ancient narratives. This reinterpretation runs along with a larger cultural movement in India characterized by passionate arguments about religious identity, political nationalism, and cultural ownership of sacred texts. Employing sequential art as a democratic forum, graphic novels provide a distinctive starting point in these arguments and challenge mythical authority. For example, *Sita's Ramayana* brings a folk-art lens and female narrative voice to a story traditionally told from a masculine perspective.

The attraction of modern Indian visual representations of epics reflects bigger patterns in global youth culture. McCloud's classic work *Understanding Comics* (1993) argues that the visual-verbal synergy of graphic novels produces an engrossing and emotionally charged reading experience especially relevant with younger, digitally native audiences. He states that "An interpretation of the result of a user study we did is that a visually stylized character leaves more for people's imagination and their projections of a fantasy self into the character" (36). This paper aims to investigate how these reinterpretations of the *Ramayana* in graphic novel form do more than modernize the myth; they aesthetically and politically reframe it. By analyzing the subversive narrative techniques and visual vocabularies of selected graphic novels, this paper examines how traditional notions of dharma, heroism, and divinity are being challenged and rearticulated for the contemporary audience.

The Visual Epic: Form, Style and the Power of Representation

The graphic novel form does not just retell tales—it recontextualizes the way stories are consumed. For epic works such as the *Ramayana*, moving from oral and text traditions to illustrated sequential narrative reconfigures not just content but

also interpretation. Form is as important as plot, and visual aesthetic becomes a form of comment. The chosen graphic novels—*Sita's Ramayana* and *Simian*—each utilize different visual languages to reread character, emotion, and philosophical complexity, testing the aesthetic and ideological integrity of previous interpretations. *Sita's Ramayana* shows this very clearly in the Patua scroll style (Bengali folk-art form) distinguished by vivid colours, elongated figures, and symbolic simplicity. Through strong lines and subdued colours, Moyna Chitrakar's art captures Sita's trauma, displacement, and spiritual fortitude, reinterpreting the epic not as a divine extravaganza but as close confessions. Furthermore, the horizontal scroll style produces a rhythmic visual movement that matches the tempo of performance-based storytelling, which evokes the epic's oral roots, using a noir-inspired black-and-white palette.

Simian shows another way that deals with Hanuman's internal conflict and broken sense of obligation. The lack of colour in *Simian* represents a deliberate aesthetic choice that reflects Hanuman's emotional weight and ambiguity in his moral struggle. The highly dense and chaotic panels mirror his psychological turbulence. This form matches what comics expert Thierry Groensteen describes as "braiding" (147), layering visual ideas to give depth and complexity beyond straight storytelling. This novel explores Hanuman as a deeply introspective character who navigates between purpose and doubt. The visual language throughout these texts does not simply illustrate the epic but actively participates in its reinterpretation. While earlier representations stressed linearity, devotion, and moral clarity, these graphic novels highlight fragmentation, introspection, and ethical plurality. Panels are moral spaces—they highlight what is seen, what is missed, and how meaning is expressed emotionally.

Centring the Marginal: Gender and Narrative Agency

In most classical versions of the *Ramayana*, Sita has always been on the edges of the story. She is projected as an iconic figure

who is respected but rarely given the chance to act. Her role has been delineated not by her voice, but by her virtue; not by her autonomy, but by her suffering. This dynamic starts to change in graphic reinterpretations like Samhita Arni and Moyna Chitrakar's *Sita's Ramayana*. These books not only put Sita back in the role of narrator, but they also use a visual language based on folk art instead of Brahminical iconography. This new way of looking at Sita is not just a creative choice—it's a political one.

The most radical thing about *Sita's Ramayana* compared to other epics is the way it tells the story. No one speaks for Sita; she speaks for herself. The first-person account lets her take charge of her own story of love, exile, betrayal, and survival. The use of Patua scroll painting, a traditional Bengali art form that is often used to tell stories about communities, makes it even clearer that Sita is taking back her story from elite and patriarchal frameworks. Samhita Arni says in interviews that the goal was to explore what happens when the silent woman finally speaks. This decision is not just a literary reversal; it's also a philosophical one. Wendy Doniger, a feminist scholar, has said that mythic retellings become revolutionary when they change how people access experience, "For myths are always context-sensitive. Acknowledging the importance of context has led me to take more seriously the possibility of comparing contexts" (xii). This is not just changing events but also changing how stories are understood, remembered, and shared. The transition from divine object to emotional subject enables the perception of Sita as an ethical agent rather than merely a moral ideal.

Moyna Chitrakar's art does not have the decorative elements that are common in other comics or temple murals. Sita's body is long, her eyes are heavy, and she is rarely in glorified poses. Instead, she is often placed at the edges of the frame or in a space that is separate from the rest of the scene, which shows how alone and lost she feels. Nick Sousanis, a comics theorist, says that this kind of spatial storytelling lets the arrangement of space carry the emotional architecture of the text: "FOR AS WE'VE SEEN WITH ERATOSTHENES AND THE CONCEPT OF PARALLAX, DISTANCE BETWEEN AND DIFFERENCES OF VIEW ARE ESSENTIAL AS LONG AS

CHANNELS FOR COMMUNICATION REMAIN OPEN AND ALIVE" (38). In this case, form and feeling come together to make a very personal picture of gendered pain and quiet resistance.

This reclamation of female narrative space transcends *Sita's Ramayana*. In *Simian*, Sita is not the main character, but her memory haunts Hanuman's mind. Instead of being a prize or a symbol, she becomes the moral centre around which Hanuman's sense of duty falls apart and comes back together. Balagopal's portrayal of her as calm, distant, and sometimes hidden makes the reader consider her to be more than just a muse. She transforms into a silent conscience, questioning the violence perpetrated by men around her. These depictions also question the traditional patriarchal view of dharma. Sita's banishment is often portrayed in the classical epic as a test of her purity or as the outcome of Rama's duty. This decision, which is politically charged, morally dubious, and emotionally devastating, is not blessed by God in *Sita's Ramayana*. Together, the image and text aim to provoke several thoughts.

According to Arvind Sharma, traditional interpretations of dharma often put women in a difficult situation by requiring them to submit for virtue and endure for honour, "Hindu women who suffered in Hindu law have been widely documented, and the modern Indian state has been active in correcting these" (9). In order to address this issue, graphic novels such as *Sita's Ramayana* totally disregard its terms. They depict Sita as thoughtful, hurt, perceptive, and morally strong rather than as submissive or rebellious. Her courage is steady rather than spectacular. These stories offer a different view of the *Ramayana* than the ones that are still popular in India today. When myth turns into medium and medium turns into message, telling stories through pictures becomes a way for women to fight back. Graphic novels like *Sita's Ramayana* not only placed marginalized voices at the centre of the narrative; it also transformed the concept of the centre by reclaiming narrative voice, spatial representation, and emotional depth.

Hanuman as Conscience and Chaos: The Subaltern Hero in *Simian*

Among the several characters in the *Ramayana* mythology, Hanuman is frequently portrayed as the perfect model of loyalty, service, and unrelenting devotion. He is deified, invulnerable, and morally clear—a symbol of strength and spiritual clarity. However, Vikram Balagopal's *Simian* radically departs from this familiar portrayal by rendering Hanuman not as a divine constant, but as a psychologically complex, emotionally fractured individual. In *Simian*, Hanuman is a subaltern hero, not because he is weak but because he is cut off from moral certainty and divine clarity.

By way of a black-and-white, film noir-inspired visual setting that strips Hanuman's story of its heavenly aura and exposes a tempestuous inner life, Balagopal's removal of colour is symbolic; this technique is one of the first in the art of comic books, as Jared Gardner states in *Projections: Comics and the History of Twenty-First-Century Storytelling* (2025) that "The first issue of Action Comics had a colour page and a black and white page" (92). Hence, it mirrors the gravity of the narrative as well as the moral complexity Hanuman encounters. Monochrome in graphic narrative usually means internal fragmentation and moral uncertainty. These traits set Hanuman apart in *Simian*, showing him as both a devotee carrying out God's will and a sentient being trying to figure out his place in a chaotic world. The graphic novel does not show Hanuman as the perfect *sevak* (servitor); instead, it shows him questioning divine silence, doubting, and getting frustrated. He is not just completely devoted to Rama; instead, he is conflicted about it because of the consequences of fights, the cost of obedience, and the emotional aftermath of being armed for a purpose he no longer fully understands. This moral anguish places Hanuman as dharma's most tormented performer rather than its passive adherent.

The story also looks into Hanuman's conflicting nature through visual fragmentation. Panels draw attention to bodily distortion, sharply change perspectives, and cut his face in the middle of an emotion. In postcolonial literature, where the familiar self becomes strange due to ideological conflict, these aesthetic choices visually represent what Homi Bhabha refers to as "the unhomely" (9). As a source of pain rather than a victory,

Hanuman's physical prowess distances him from the humanity he defends and the divinity he serves.

Simian presents one more challenge and tries to change the psychological cost of servitude. By recontextualizing Hanuman's silence and strength as symptoms of trauma and repression, Balagopal subverts conventional understandings of heroism. The character is now a representation of those torn between duty and dissent—a situation saliently familiar to contemporary readers trying to navigate political complicity and moral exhaustion. *Simian* is not about divinity but about surviving the burden of myth. This depiction of Hanuman holds particular significance in a modern Indian context where religious characters are frequently harnessed for nationalist or sectarian agendas. By redefining Hanuman as vulnerable, reflective, and morally complex, *Simian* resists myth-making into dogma. Rather, it revives the epic's richer philosophical question: What does it mean to do the right thing when rightness itself is in flux? And so *Simian* retrieves Hanuman not as a deity to be revered but as a moral ideal for the modern age—a character of inner turmoil, moral accountability, and emotional richness. He is no longer merely the paradigmatic devotee; he is the moral witness to the price of divinely ordained violence.

Myth as Mirror: Ethics, Identity and the Role of Reinterpretation

Myths are typically treated as sacred texts that are inviolable—repositories of untouchable wisdom—in traditional educational and religious contexts. But creating myths is a dynamic process, by nature. Myths endure and speak to us because they can be reworked in response to changing ethical and cultural sensitivities. The *Ramayana*, perhaps the most authoritative of South Asian epics, has shown this adaptability across region, language, and ideology. This tradition of adaptation is carried on by contemporary graphic novels such as *Sita's Ramayana* and *Simian*, which retell the myth to address contemporary moral complexities and fractured identities. Mythologist Joseph Campbell noted that myths are “public dreams” (48) that mirror values, fears, and hopes of a people. In this manner, the *Ramayana* in graphic novel format is a locus

where the common fears—gender inequality, authoritarianism, and social exclusion—are acted out not only through narrative but also through visual allegory and reconfiguring of the story. These reinterpretations are prescriptive, not blasphemous. They do not dismiss the sacredness but question its relevance to the modern world.

Sita's Ramayana reorients ethical focus from heroic victory to emotional survival. Sita's grief, in first-person narration, is a critique of systemic silencing—both in epic narrative conventions and in contemporary gendered landscapes. The visual and verbal constructions together redirect attention from victory to sympathy, contemplation, and suffering and hence redefine what counts as moral strength, whereas *Simian* recasts Hanuman as a conflicted moral agent rather than a god. His inner turmoil raises uncomfortable but vital questions regarding the weight of obedience, the horrors of war, and the potential for moral disintegration in the service of an ideal. Through this, *Simian* captures the existential ambiguities governing modern life, especially for readers living through political, religious, and psychological fragmentation. This process of reinterpretation relates to the larger function of myth in society: it is not merely a weapon of cultural unity but also a system of critique. As Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote, “Myth is considered a part of language but operates on a higher, more complex level with its own constituent units” (208). Yet the power of myth lies in reconciling them with layers of meaning. The graphic novel interpretations adopt this logic—keeping contradictory truths side by side, instead of reconciling them.

In addition, these reinterpretations place the reader not in a position of passive reception but of ethical engagement. The broken panels, moving perspective, and mixed styles require active interpretation. This strategy is consistent with what reception theorist Hans Robert Jauss called the “horizon of expectations” (175). Each reader has their own cultural context, and reinterpretations succeed when they strain or defy these contexts.

Conclusion

The *Ramayana*, India's greatest epic, has never belonged to a sole voice or unchanging interpretation. Its perpetuation lies in its capacity for retelling, reinterpretation, and reuse across generations. The two contemporary graphic novels discussed here are *Sita's Ramayana* and *Simian*, which has continued this tradition not by preserving the epic's sanctity in unchanging form but by affirmatively reinterpreting it through new ethical, visual, and political vocabularies. These books are acts of creative dissidence, challenging who speaks, who is at the centre of whose lives, and how the divine is revealed. They reclaim silenced voices, disturb moral absolutes, and challenge received myths to critical thinking through artistic play and narrative subversion. By doing so, they make the epic a living document.

Sita's Ramayana retrieves voice and narrative power for a character long silenced, and *Simian* welcomes readers into the inner psychological landscape of Hanuman, laying bare the moral cost of compliance and mythic demand. These works together show that retelling is not changing history—it is recognizing it. It acknowledges the profound depth and complexity of the epic, its inherent contradictions, and its potential to illustrate the similarities between our contemporary issues and those from ancient times. These graphic novels defy the common practice of using old stories for political purposes or transforming them into simplistic symbols of cultural identity. They encourage self-reflection, complexity, and conversation. The graphic novel is a site where the ethical and the aesthetic coalesce. When brought to the *Ramayana*, such confluence generates not distortion but the unveiling of new modes of vision for old tales.

It is not desecration to retell the sacred. It is a loving gesture. It is a recognition that inquiry enhances rather than diminishes sacredness. By introducing emotion, uncertainty, and graphic experimentation into the centre of the epic, these graphic novels remind us that myth is not an artifact but a living dialogue between past and future, between word and reader, and between tradition and innovation. With diversely divided global cultures, environmental despoliation, and moral

confusion, these reworkings of myth have the potential to do more than just provide aesthetic enjoyment; they can provide moral definition, emotional touch, and cultural commentary.

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Female and the Occult: Re-defining Female Autonomy in *Stree* and *Bulbbul*

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Abstract:

This paper explores the theme of female autonomy extensively with special reference to demanding female authority, rights, and freedom through the 'occult' form. The study involves a literary analysis of two popular Bollywood films *Stree* (2018) and *Bulbbul* (2020) and their larger-than-life portrayals of female autonomy in the occult form. Also, the paper tries to analyze how males become 'the secondary sex' in a patriarchal society while women are considered the dominant. This paper highlights females' retreat over the male dominated society. Also, a subtle critique of the imposition of the mumpsimus ways of the society upon women, is presented in the paper. The binary between the male order and female subjugation has been completely overturned in these films. Though represented in occult forms, the female protagonists in these films symbolize every woman from every sphere and enforces the idea that men become recreants when facing any challenge or when restricted from enjoying freedom and power. Moreover, through feminist theories and readings, the study includes the theoretical analysis of women's emancipation within the surroundings of *Stree* and *Bulbbul*. Through the lens of feminism, the study provides an explorative area of how these films highlight the subverted gender dynamics. The paper also presents female empowerment challenging the long-standing patriarchal traditions and the societal expectations to accept the autonomy of women in occult practices.

Keywords: Self-authority, justice, occult, female, autonomy, films.

The horror genre in literature as well as in films has been a distinct genre from the other genres. It has always dealt with depictions of some ghosts, monsters, or supernatural beings since ages. However, Noël Carroll in his book *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990) asserts that

...if a case can be made that a monster or a monster entity is a necessary condition for horror, such a criterion would not be a sufficient condition. For monsters inhabit all sorts of stories—such as fairy tales, myths and odysseys—that we are not inclined to identify as horror. (16)

The horror genre evokes mystery, thrill, and suspense by representing the occult, often focusing on female occult beings who have haunted societies for a very long time. While some films depict futuristic worlds at the cost of the occult, many explore women in supernatural roles. In *Psycho* (1960), the female is a castrating mother, while *The Exorcist* (1973) portrays a possessed girl. *The Hunger* (1983) presents the female womb as monstrous. Women in the occult face marginalization not only in mainstream religions but also within Western esoteric movements (Carroll 16). Throughout history, female mystics and prophetesses, such as those in the Middle Ages and the seventeenth century, navigated between orthodoxy and heresy. However, fear of their power often reinforced their influence. Occult literature, particularly when infused with feminist thought, is further excluded from mainstream discourse, where traditional structures dictate truth and meaning, thus challenging societal narratives of gender and power. Moreover, films have a greater impact on the audience as they have the capability of providing a message with sound entertainment as well. The narrative structures of many such films are intricately woven to manifest the authority of the females in society over males through the presentation of the woman as an occult being. Moreover, according to Patricia White, these films focus on how women form a subgroup of their own, often set away from the shackles and rules of patriarchal society (3-10).

Representation of females in Indian cinema has changed over the years. Indian cinema has always reflected traditional societal norms and how females have adjusted to these. Women being portrayed as 'heroines' and conforming themselves to

these practices, have impacted and shaped female audiences through decades. During the 1960s female characters or heroines were presented as traditional archetypes of sacrifice with females like Waheeda Rehman, Sadhana and many more. While in the 1970s the representation transitioned from traditional archetypes to more glamorous and socially conscious females, Zeenat Aman, Parveen Babi, Heema Malini were among the popular faces of this era. The females were not portrayed to have the authority of protecting themselves from any kind of evil. For instance, in *Sholay* (1975), Veeru (Dharmendra) and Jay (Amitabh Bachchan) have to rescue Basanti (Heema Malini) from the hands of Gabbar Singh (Amjad Khan). In the 1995 film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, Raj (Shah Rukh Khan) has to come to India to confess her love to Simran (Kajol) and also win her parents' heart. However, the portrayal of women and heroines in Indian cinema has changed to which Kumari Pallavi and Priyanka Singh shed their light:

In the 80s, films like *Arth* and *Mirch Masala* captured the essence of the era, delving into intricate narratives and social issues. The 90s witnessed powerful portrayals in "Damini" and *Bandit Queen*, shedding light on societal injustices. Moving into the 2000s, films like *Dor* and *Lajja* continued to challenge norms. The 2010s brought contemporary narratives with films like *Raazi* and *Pink*, addressing pertinent issues. As we step into the 2020s, *Thappad* and *Gangubai Kathiawadi* are making waves, contributing to the evolving landscape of Indian cinema. (229)

Women are shown to be independent, making their own decisions and even having the same place in the workplace as men. But in society her place still remained secondary. Similarly, women in the horror field were not commonly acknowledged. Ghosts were often men and had immense power to destroy the world, and to put an end to the ghostly being, the hero of the film was being called upon. The Indian horror industry was pioneered and dominated by the Ramsay brothers from the 1970s to the 1990s. Though their horror beings have dominantly been men but in *Veerana* (1988), female spirit is portrayed as seductive and vampish spirit. As Rituparna Sengupta writes:

Hindi horror film, especially comedies, have invited the audience's laughter at the collective fear of predatory women and also horror at social practices and traditions that continue to repress female desire and autonomy. (9)

In early Indian movies, female ghosts were presented as 'women in white' featuring them as tragic, romantic or wronged figures as in Kamal Amrohi's *Mahal* (1949) starring Madhubala. By the mid-1960s the 'white sari' troupe became common in the films like *Woh Kaun Thi* (1964) and *Kohra* (1964). Even though films began acknowledging females as ghosts but they were not made to fear or be horrified of. The appearance of the female ghosts was tied to the idea of beauty standards to represent their submissiveness. Naomi Woolf in *The Beauty Myth: How Beauty Images are Used Against Women* (1990) writes:

The beauty myth tells a story: The quality called "beauty" objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women's beauty must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, it is inevitable and changeless. (12)

Later in the 2000s the focus shifted from 'white sari' female ghosts to 'psychological horror' and 'possession' as in *Bhool Bhulaiya* (2007) where women are victims of malevolent force rather than purely evil beings. And from the 2000s to the 2010s the picture of female ghosts changed in Indian cinema. In the 2010s female ghosts began to be portrayed as 'chudails' ('witches') or supernatural beings where they were victims of patriarchal society and returned to reclaim her autonomy in films like *Stree*, *Bulbbul*, and *Pari* (2018), *Roohi* (2021). The early female ghosts in Indian cinema transformed from passive submissive figures to often successful and vengeful protagonists. And female witches or ghosts are no more

presented with so-called beauty standards rather with twisted feet, horrific appearance and practising unnatural activities.

Women often have an unknown fear of staying out late at night, a fear of being harassed by men in society. These fears allow patriarchal structure to confine women into a periphery of restrictions. Night is often considered as a time when women are discouraged from stepping out or staying outside for long hours at night. These rules are deliberately made by the patriarchal society to depict women as weak. Women have been made to think that night time is equivalent to something 'dangerous' or 'horrifying'. Even if women are allowed to step out of the threshold, they are given deadlines to return back home before it is too late at night. Even mothers advise their daughters to return home as soon as possible. While women staying out for long are often slut-shamed yet these age long restrictions have made it very natural for men to step out or stay out for long at night without any character assassination. Films like *Stree* (2018) and *Bulbbul* (2020) subvert this idea by further subverting gender roles. The female protagonists in the films *Stree* and *Bulbbul* respectively serve as a source of an unknown fear for the patriarchal society. What women feared about men no longer remains the same in these films. It is the men who are not allowed to step out of their house at night. The male community would not have faced challenges from the female community and confined them indoors, if the women were not presented in 'occult' forms. As the protagonists are presented in the 'occult' forms, the male community's fear is doubled. The women are portrayed not as victims rather agents of justice to womanhood. Mostly depicted in 'occult' form because the society fails to accept when the female self tries to establish her authority through her normal human self, or through the fact when they try to parallel the intellect of men. Instead, she compels the same patriarchal society to accept her and also autonomy in her occult form so that she can enjoy her freedom and rights and not stand as a jeopardized being (Wallraven 35-50).

Though both films belong to the same genre of gothic and mostly the incidents manifest at night time, yet the storytelling of each of the films is different from one another. Even the time period in which the two films are set, are quite distinct. While

Stree is set in the twenty-first century, *Bulbbul* has a setting of pre-independent Bengal. Although the time frame of the films differs, what is similar is the female suffering across ages and places. The female protagonists also have the similar kind of quest to create a utopian world for themselves and other women, where they are free from patriarchy and remain unquestioned, with a challenge to subvert the male order. *Stree* (2018), which tells the story of Chanderi, a town in Madhya Pradesh, and its residents, specifically males, who are in utter trauma due to the presence of Stree, a ghostly character. The story revolves around a four-day festivity where women go to the temple and male stay confined at home due to the authoritative power of Stree upon the male sex. The character of Stree is not omnipresent but only comes during these specific four days and captures men whom she finds outside their home at night, breaking the age-old stereotypical norm that prevents women from staying out at night. But Stree subverts this practice and male safety is at stake, and firmly establishes her authority as her presence is threatening the whole male society. On the other hand, in the film *Bulbbul*, the titular character was raised in the conventional ways by which women are often compelled to internalize the standards set by the patriarchal society. The narrative of the film is set back in the 1881 Bengal Presidency. The story begins with the marriage of Bulbbul with a man named Indranil portrayed by actor Rahul Bose, who also plays his identical twin, Mahendra in the film. Indranil was thrice the age of Bulbbul. Since the practice of child marriage was common in the nineteenth century, it was thought normal that Bulbbul gets married to man thrice his age. But when Bulbbul's wedding was taking place, she knew and saw Satya was the one she was getting married to. Bulbbul believed Satya to be her husband but Indranil made her realise and also made her believe it was Indranil himself with whom she got married, she was a child but once she was an adult she would understand the difference between husband and brother-in-law.

From the very beginning, *Bulbbul* illuminates upon women internalizing the patriarchal norms which subjugate women to a secondary gender in the society. The same manifests in a conversation between Bulbul and her Pishima (aunt). A few moments before she was getting married when

Pishima makes Bulbbul wear a toe ring and the latter asks the significance of it:

Bulbbul - Pishima, bichuye kyun pehente hai? (Aunty, why are toe rings worn?) [4:29]

Pishima - Kyunki yaha par ek nass hoti hai, usse dabao na toh ladki udh jaati hai. (Because there's a nerve here which if not pressed, the girl flies away.) [4:32]

Bulbbul - Chidiye ki tarah? (Like birds?) [4:38]

Pishima - Nahi vash mein karne k liye hoti hai bichuye. (No, to control women.) [4:43]

This conversation between Bulbbul and Pishima suggests that even women teach other women that they need to be controlled by the males of the society so that they do not gain any authority of their own. However, after Bulbbul meets her brother-in-law, Satya, who was almost contemporary to her, gets very friendly with him. He narrates to her the folklore of a witch which was quite prevalent in his village. He described the witch to have twisted feet, and Bulbbul somehow subconsciously internalized the witch into herself. In their growing years they became more friendly and fond of each other. However, in *Stree*, women are not portrayed as conforming to the patriarchal structure because *Stree's* supernatural powers to capture men is shown from the very beginning. Women in this film are not seen as weak. They respect the traditional values yet quite modern in their thoughts. Both *Stree* and Bulbbul are victims of male domination yet the former avenges after her death and the latter during her lifetime not revealing her vengeful identity.

Stree despite being a prostitute during her lifetime, fell in love with a man, who remains unnamed throughout the film but is believed to have taken a rebirth with the name Vicky, a character played by Raj Kumar Rao. It was a crime in the eyes of the patriarchal society for a prostitute to fall in love. The social stigma of being a prostitute is tied with just physical pleasure and no emotional values. When *Stree* and her lover had decided to get married, her amorous affair with the man was not accepted by the society, due to her social status. The male in her

village was attracted to her charm, treating her as an object of their male gaze. This male gaze has been described by Laura Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* as she asserts:

The woman is displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threaten to evoke the anxiety it originally signified. The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma...or complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object so it becomes reassuring than dangerous. (438)

The people of Chanderi later killed Stree and her unnamed lover. Also, her wish to spend the first night of her marriage with her lover remained unfulfilled. She then returns after her death to find her lover and fulfill her unquenched wish. Stree even re-affirms her autonomy by reinforcing the fact that she doesn't need any permit to roam about at night, which is considered a taboo in society for a female to roam at night alone, and also has the power to visit Chanderi at a particular time every year. This brings up the fact that society only accepts her authority as she is a ghost and has the power to capture men whom she finds out at night. Whereas, *Bulbbul* presents a complex narrative of patriarchal oppression, female subjugation, and ultimate rebellion through its titular character. Binodini, played by Paoli Dam, harbors resentment towards Bulbbul, envying her marriage to Indranil while she is wedded to Indranil's mentally unstable twin, Mahendra. Despite her extramarital affair with Indranil, Binodini's social position remains secondary, reinforcing the gendered hierarchy within the household. The term 'men' itself is considered superior to women without having any other supernatural power. Whereas for a woman, she has to do something unnatural or irregular to gain her freedom and autonomy in society and even in her life. The same society did not accept her amorous affair with a person in her lifetime as she was a prostitute. But the men from Chanderi also enjoyed her company. They thought their trivial attention to Stree would only matter in her life and she does not need any emotional validation as a woman in the society. This mere act of just paying attention to a woman for their sexuality is brought

about by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) where she asserts:

Women are systematically degraded by receiving the trivial attentions which men think it manly to pay to the sex, when, in fact, men are insultingly supporting their own superiority. It is not condescension to bow to an inferior. (10)

As Wollstonecraft says women are 'degraded', she means that women are often put down through superficial acts of attention or politeness by the male. In doing so the males show their superiority contrasting women to be inferior and need to be attended with politeness. In *Stree*, till the time Stree is considered just an 'object' of pleasure, she gets attention from men. They 'degrade' her both physically and mentally as a vulnerable being, craving male acts of attention. But when she wanted to experience the freedom of her life, she was murdered, proving that a woman can never exercise autonomy, power and freedom and they should remain inferior. So, Stree wishes to punish those men and generations of men after her death because what she was denied in her lifetime, can easily be achieved from the society by taking a revenge from the same society who once led to her and her lover's death. Also, this puts forward the fact that no person, especially men, can protest or prove to be a hindrance in safeguarding themselves from Stree's arrest. She even subverts the gendered norms where men are forced to wear saree at night to pretend to be women, realising how important it is to be a woman to remain free in the town of Chanderi at night and also to safeguard themselves because Stree never harmed or captured women so to wear and bangles were safe than to be a part of the threatened male grouping in the town. The same happens with Bulbbul when is married off as a child to a man thrice her age. Bulbbul in Wollstonecraft's words is also 'degraded' to mere acts of normalcy because she was a child with no maturity about what had happened to her. Both the fact that she is a girl and a child, gives Indranil and other people to consider her inferior and vulnerable. In the opening of the film *Bulbbul* when young Satya and Bulbbul meet for the first time, Satya remarks looking at Bulbbul "Thodi maili hai, par kaam chala lenge" ("Bit of a scruffy urchin, but we will take of her").

Satya at the young age was not aware of his remarks but the audience can very well understand that Satya is taught in such ways of considering women to be less important. Wollstonecraft's idea of women being degraded finds its manifestation in their meeting, as it the men who will manage with Bulbbul being a bit dark complexed, suggesting that they are being very much kind towards Bulbbul.

Sigmund Freud in his essay "Fetishism" (1927) points "Probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital" (qtd. in Creed: 28). This is also quite evident in the film *Stree* because male existence even cannot accept the fact of being threatened by a mere female, rather a ghostly female. *Stree*, although captures men at night, leaves a sign by leaving the apparels of the man she had captured on the road, and taking him with him naked, where males remain threatened. This may suggest a kind of advocacy on her part forcing other men to realize how important it is to be a woman and also to respect women, who wherever and however can establish their autonomous self and demand their rights. She even compels the men not to think women as mere entities and counterparts of males. Also, *Stree* is presented to be a literate occult woman, which is evident when she sees "O Stree kal aana" ("O Stree come tomorrow") written on the walls of the houses of Chanderi, she respects that idea and does not capture the man that particular night she had come for. Similarly, an unnamed female character is played by Shraddha Kapoor in *Stree*, who portrays similar characteristics as *Stree*. For instance, she visits the town of Chanderi only during the four-day festivity at night. She encounters Vicky and promises to go to the temple with him at night. She also paralleled the power of *Stree* to move freely. But she always comes to meet Vicky after the festivities are over. Vicky's friends Jana and Bittu, played by Abhishek Banerjee and Aparshakti Khurana respectively, believe her to be the same *Stree*. Yet, Shraddha Kapoor's character is not presented in any occult form but she practices black magic to gain supernatural powers to save women, which she reveals herself later. Even Bulbbul, when finds comfort and solace in Satya's company, becomes the reason for her physical torment. Bulbbul's growing intellectual and emotional bond with Satya, her brother-in-law, becomes the catalyst for her

suffering. Binodini manipulates this connection, informing Indranil in hopes of shifting his attention towards herself. The metaphor of the loosening toe ring symbolizes Bulbbul's perceived transgression—her increasing autonomy and intellectual engagement. Indranil, embodying patriarchal authority, responds with extreme violence, brutally assaulting Bulbbul. This moment marks a turning point, stripping Bulbbul of her physical agency and leading to further victimization. Mahendra's subsequent rape of the bedridden Bulbbul, resulting in her permanently twisted feet, cements her status as an object of patriarchal violence. This emphasizes the fact that females irrespective of their bodily representations have the same rights in the society and do not need to confine themselves to the conventional norms of the society. However, the presentation of women in the occult or a monstrous form is important as Barbara Creed in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993) asserts:

I have used the term 'monstrous-Feminine' as the term 'female monster' implies a simple reversal of 'male monster'. The reason why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience. A new term is needed to specify these differences. As with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality. The phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity. (33)

In Creed's words 'monstrous-feminine' is important in understanding the difference between male monsters and female monsters. She believes that female monsters need a different emphasis in matters of how they are horrific in nature. This concept of 'monstrous-feminine' is very evident in both the films and this concept becomes the motif for the protagonists to find their freedom and assert their authority. The motif of the twisted feet becomes crucial in *Bulbbul*; it not only marks her trauma but also serves as the literal imprint of her supernatural transformation, making her both invisible and omnipresent in her vengeance. Mahendra's death, seemingly unnatural due to

the inverted footprints, signals a subversion of power dynamics—Bulbbul, once the victim, now reclaims agency by enacting justice. Bulbbul's revenge extends beyond personal retribution to systemic justice. She eliminates Master Dinkar, a domestic abuser who, under societal norms, maintains an outwardly respectable persona. This challenges the dichotomy between public virtue and private brutality, exposing male hypocrisy. The occult elements of the film serve as a metaphor for female resistance. As the village is plagued by a series of murders, the audience gradually realizes that Bulbbul, transformed by her trauma, has assumed the role of the avenging 'chudail' (witch). Bulbbul's acts of vengeance are not arbitrary but serve as a direct challenge to the systemic subjugation of women. By eliminating men who perpetuate violence—such as Mahendra, her rapist, and Gadiwan, who drove his first wife to suicide—she disrupts the unchecked authority of men over women's bodies and lives. Her transformation into the so-called witch symbolizes not just revenge but a radical assertion of female autonomy, a refusal to remain confined by patriarchal dictates. Similarly, Stree's monstrous form is important for establishing her identity, power, agency and not just a simple source of horror. Stree's monstrosity becomes an active warrior against patriarchy unlike other female ghost characters in other films who are victimised. This supernatural entity allows Stree to subvert the gendered power dynamics - instead of women being preyed upon, men become the targets. In *Bulbbul*, Bulbbul punished men who did wrong to women but Stree on the other hand targets all men of Chanderi whoever she finds in the streets at night. Stree finds all men accountable for her unquenched love and freedom. Creed's idea of 'monstrous-feminine' is important for Stree's supernatural identity because it destabilizes society's idea of monstrosity as just a source of horror but rather a response to injustice. Once Stree remained just a prostitute, a woman of pleasure, being unacknowledged of her identity as a human being, a woman and her existence. Her monstrous identity allows her to reclaim her existence even being a non-existent creature; not just simple reclamation but complete acknowledgement of her non-existing identity. What she was deprived of in her life, she snatched it away through fear and

made justice with herself. Manaar Kamil Sa'eed, Haider Saad Yahya Jubran write:

Horror movies depict female characters as sexual, helpless victims. When horror movies try to reveal female characters as the hero of the story, this gave a message to audiences that women can be powerful and independent. (16)

The films, therefore, blur the lines between victim and perpetrator, justice and vengeance, and ultimately reclaim the vilified image of the monstrous-feminine as symbols of female power (Broedel 180).

Women's beauty and their identity as a woman is important for men's understanding of them as harmless beings. Beauty and sexuality define women to be inferior and not dangerous. *Bulbbul* and *Stree* both represent this idea. Bulbbul's conversation with Satya further highlights these gendered assumptions—when he dismisses the possibility of a woman committing such violent acts, it underscores the deeply ingrained belief that women, by nature, are incapable of transgression. Satya's belief that such brutal killings can only be committed by a man further reflects ingrained gender biases that equate violence and power with masculinity. His inability to recognize a woman as capable of retribution exposes the patriarchal refusal to acknowledge female agency beyond passive victimhood. This ideological bias, equating power and violence with masculinity, renders Bulbbul's transformation unimaginable to those around her. Also, in *Stree* when Vicky goes to meet Shraddha Kapoor, and tells her about his friend Jana's abduction and questions her whether it is her who is Stree too due her mysterious character. She disappears in a few seconds and also creeps in without anyone noticing. This made Vicky question her identity but he is also not willing to believe that such a beautiful lady can be Stree. When confronting Bittu about Shraddha Kapoor's mysterious nature, both share a conversation about this

Bittu "Kabhi kabhi dosto ka bhi sun liya karo" ("You should listen to your friends as well") [1:11:43]

Vicky; to which Vicky replies, “Par itni sundar stree, Stree kaise ho sakti hai!” (“But how can a beautiful woman like her be Stree!”) [1:11:47]

Bittu “Sundar thi kya? Sorry.” (“Was she beautiful? Sorry.”) [1:11:50]

Bittu who was doubtful of this mysterious woman of being Stree immediately changes his opinion when heard she is beautiful. Men have set superficial and unrealistic beauty standards about women. If she is beautiful, she can never be dangerous. Satya did not believe Bulbbul that women are capable of transgression, they are not harmful beings. Significantly, only Dr. Sudip, played by Parambrata Chatterjee, is privy to the extent of Bulbbul’s physical trauma. His knowledge of her twisted feet places him as a silent observer rather than an active disruptor of her revenge, subtly aligning him with her resistance against patriarchy. Whereas Vicky and Bittu believe a beautiful woman cannot be a ghost. A beautiful woman like her is not capable of abducting men. The fear both Bulbbul and Stree instill among men functions as a deterrent, shifting the power dynamics within the village. As Creed asserts “Witches were feared because it was thought they could cast terrible spells and bring death to those they cursed” (276). So Bulbbul and Stree are feared by the male community. The legend of the witch, previously a tool to control women through fear, is subverted - Bulbbul and Stree use it to make men accountable for their actions. This reversal highlights the films’ broader critique of societal structures that deem women either divine and submissive or monstrous and dangerous, denying them the right to occupy any space in between.

Later, towards the end of the film, Stree captures Vicky is again saved by Shraddha Kapoor, and Stree finds her lost lover in Vicky but her power leads to an end when Shraddha Kapoor cuts Stree’s braid and blends it with hers, getting all her powers. As she sits herself in the bus to leave Chanderi, vanishes in a fraction of seconds after blending the braids, suggesting in the transfer of Stree’s power to her where she too can apply her will and not be restrained by the society’s standards. Also, people of Chanderi uses the slogan later “O Stree raksha karna” (“O Stree protect us”) that means, if men in Chanderi need to be safe, they

need to be protected by Stree and other women from any kind of evil and in return respect women's demands and equally take part in every activity meant to be performed by females alone. On the other hand, Bulbbul's delight on the day of Mahendra's funeral is not just personal triumph but symbolic of a larger ideological shift—she is no longer the child bride silenced by the household but a force capable of rewriting the narrative. Their vengeance is not just an act of personal justice; it is a declaration that women, too, have desires, autonomy, and the power to retaliate against systemic violence. Through this lens, Bulbbul and Stree reclaim the image of the 'witch' as a feminist icon rather than a figure of fear (Broedel 168-70).

The representation of the occult female in films like Stree and Bulbbul serves as a metaphor for the suppressed voices of women who have been denied their rights for centuries. Through these films, the audience witnesses how oppression and neglect can transform a woman into a formidable force, compelling society to acknowledge her existence and demands. The patriarchal mindset, which disregards women's voices in everyday life, is ironically forced to listen when the same voices emerge in an unconventional or supernatural form. This highlights the hypocrisy of a society that fears power but refuses to respect equality. The occult being in these films becomes a symbol of not just vengeance but also justice—restoring balance where inequality has prevailed. Furthermore, these films subtly critique the deep-seated gender biases that restrict women from making independent choices. They also challenge traditional notions of femininity and weakness, proving that a woman's strength is undeniable when she decides to fight back. The supernatural elements serve as an allegory for resistance, where the female spirit refuses to remain confined within patriarchal boundaries. Thus, the occult form is not merely a source of fear but a manifestation of repressed power, breaking through years of suppression and injustice.

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Critical & Analytical Essays

Deductive vis-à-vis Didactic: The Curious Case of Byomkesh Bakshi

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Abstract:

Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's immortal creation Byomkesh Bakshi stands apart from other conventional detective characters both in terms of benevolent understanding and humanitarian approach. His main objective is not merely to catch the culprit and bring him to justice, but to solve the crime and reach the crux of truth – famously identifying himself as 'satyanweshi' or the 'truth seeker'. Whereas other detective characters complete their cases with a successful investigation of the crime, Byomkesh as an 'inquisitor' goes beyond the limited understanding of crime and punishment. His perception of truth is not confined within the finite scope of justice – either with the recovery of stolen goods or exposing the culprit; but the circumstances in which the crime has been committed. This paper is a modest attempt to critically analyse select stories of Byomkesh series, where the deductive reasoning of sleuth becomes secondary to the didactic teachings he imparts on the characters as well as readers. Byomkesh advocates exceptional methods and often takes unorthodox decisions which set him apart from the stereotype of Western detective models. His realisation of truth is as well the journey of readers from ignorance to experience. This paper also interrogates whether the 'truth seeker' aspect of his persona overshadows his capability as a criminal investigator.

Keywords: truth, crime, justice, detective, punishment, case.

Byomkesh's rationale of truth goes beyond our limited perception of crime, punishment and justice. In many cases, Saradindu compels the readers to think that crime is not only the outcome of individual flaws and moral decrepitude, but often the

result of adverse circumstances and social oppression. In several of Byomkesh stories, the 'whodunnit' question becomes subsidiary to 'why' and 'how' the crime has been done. Byomkesh often lets the culprit go away from being arrested by police only to suffer greater punishment than judicial incarceration. In few cases, he even forgives the criminal and gives the person a second chance to rectify his misdeeds if it is found that the malefactor is not a habitual offender and his wrongdoings are result of his serious unfavourable predicaments. In other cases, he strives for the betterment of nation and society rather than achieving personal milestones or acquiring wealth and fame. Saradindu's Byomkesh is a 'bhadralok' detective who is "deeply embedded in the localized cultural expression of genteel urban Bengalianness" (Brueck 609). This expression is not only demonstrated in his white dhoti-panjabi attire, but also reimagined in spirit and character.

Sleuth as 'Satyanweshi': Questing Justice and Truth

Pinaki Roy in his book *The Manichean Investigators* (2008), suggests that "the peripheral position of Bengali detective fiction is changed to a new centrality . . . by constructing a subaltern nationality, class, caste and demeanour of the investigator" (54). This is indeed true if one does a close literary analysis of some of the stories. In "Quicksand" (1933), Byomkesh's sheer persistence to look into the case of Himangshu is crucial. Despite Ajit's uneasiness at the hesitation of Himangshu to let them stay at his residence, Byomkesh insisted that they "must stay here" (142). He suspects a major crime behind the sudden missing of Baby's tutor Harinath and decides to uncover the truth which reflects his true character as a 'satyanweshi' or 'truth seeker'. This is a divergence from the general behaviour of a professional detective as his interest is driven by the urge to discover the 'larger' truth behind what apparently seemed like an ordinary theft case. Even while talking to Ajit about Anadi Sarkar's daughter Radha, Byomkesh is perceived in a completely different light. He stresses on the insensibility of the rigid societal structures in being merciful to the widowed women. Here Byomkesh's voice is that of an empathetic observant who is pained at the tragic fate of Radha and is deeply considerate of the hardships faced by the young widows of contemporary society. Moreover, his remark, "women are the

bitterest enemies of their own sex" (162) highlights a vital social irony: the oppressed becomes the agents of oppression, dismantling the simplistic binary of male oppressor and female victim. Here Byomkesh points out how patriarchal values get internalized and the women themselves enforce the same harsh principles on other women, perpetuating judgment without consideration. Another profoundly humane aspect of Byomkesh's character is unfolded through his genuine admiration of Himangshu as a 'perfect gentleman'. He is deeply respectful towards Himangshu as he is able to find a chink of compassion in the stone wall of harsh rules of the society. Amidst conservative norms that disgraces widows and restrict their freedom, Himangshu, according to Byomkesh, stands as progressive and incomparable in character. This becomes the main reason why Byomkesh considers it a moral duty to help this kind of a great man and asserts that they "should solve this case" (162) to relieve Himangshu from the troubles he is going through.

The idea of retributive justice is vehemently expressed through the final act of Kaligati's encounter and death at the hands of Himangshu. One exceptional occurrence to be noticed here – Satyanweshi himself assumes the role of a 'passive' murderer by utilizing Himangshu's skills to shot Kaligati dead. Byomkesh could visually construct the entire plan made for the cruel murder of Harinath and the terrible death of that innocent master shook him to the core. Therefore, the only mode of justice he could think of imparting to Kaligati was death, embodying the belief of cosmic or ethical balance, where sin invites retribution, "A tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye" (167). By reminding Himangshu of this statement, a complex, morally reflective side of Byomkesh is shown, where he points out that Himangshu acted as an instrument to mete out justice, which was indispensable. Here Byomkesh's role transcends from an ordinary detective who solves the crime to an agent of truth who delivers cosmic justice.

Another distinctive feature of Saradindu's Byomkesh is that he not only investigates a crime but also considers the circumstances which compelled a person to commit the crime. In *Aadim Ripu* (1955), upon learning about Anadi Halдар's iniquitous actions and his perverted desire for his son's would-be-

bride Sheuli, Byomkesh readily acknowledges that Probhat's wrath and retaliation was just and fair, "Anadi Haldar did such a thing which could cause even the most harmless ones to burst with murderous rage" (my trans.; 98). The identity and motive of the murderer was already revealed to Byomkesh even before he headed for Patna; but the usual promptness which is shown by him in other cases was surprisingly missing here. This accounts to Probhat's careful inspection of character which induced Byomkesh to view him through the eyes of mercy. This is again a striking deviation from the usual mode of operation that a detective undertakes in his investigation process. Byomkesh being a 'satyanweshi' does not merely identify the murderer, but also analyses the greater truth behind the incentive of the murder. This is further prominent when he admits that he is relieved from the onerous obligation of rendering a condign punishment to Probhat for his unethical killings, "I am freed from a tough responsibility" (my trans.; 92).

At the end, Byomkesh's unflinching resolve to burn down the entire sum of black money into ashes displays the most remarkable attribute of his personality – an unwavering commitment towards moral virtue. In the context of Anadi Sarkar's murder case, the money represents an unending cycle of greed and moral decay and can be rightly regarded as the 'root of all evils'. The immolation therefore delineates a kind of spiritual cleansing or inner-purification depicting a sacred beginning on the auspicious occasion of India's long-awaited freedom. Moreover, Byomkesh's exceptional act of setting the notes ablaze resembles a daring ritual (*yajna*) of sacrificing one of the most precious attachments of mankind to *agni* (Hindu deity of fire), "Byomkesh looked at our face and smiled. . . . Then chanted in a deep voice, 'Swaha, Swaha, Swaha'" (my trans.; 100). On the other hand, Ajit's reluctance in letting go of the tainted money symbolizes the average middle-class mindset that is confined to a certain boundary and cannot go beyond that limit. Byomkesh, on the contrary, is able to surpass that parochial way of thinking and align himself with a much higher idealism that is rooted in a deep sense of nationalism, "Today, on this propitious hour, this will be our offering at the feet of the Nation Mother" (my trans.; 100). Furthermore, this breaks the previous notion of Ajit where he

doubted Byomkesh for being immoral in accepting the bribe of five hundred rupees and thus hits upon the ultimate realisation of Byomkesh's ethical superiority when he effortlessly does what seemed to him as unthinkable. The earlier disagreement with Ajit regarding the acceptance of the bribe of five hundred rupees from lawyer Kaminikanto depicts the practicality of Byomkesh. He admits that it would be foolish to spend money from his own pocket to carry on the investigation. This shows that Byomkesh understands the need of financial income as a private investigator. The dissension further establishes him as a man not bound by impractical moral codes but rather guided by rational and logical thoughts.

An unparalleled dimension of Byomkesh's persona is exhibited through the dialogue between him and Probhat before the sunrise of 15th August, 1947. Byomkesh's recognition of the fact that no blood is left unstained exemplifies a broader perspective where complexity of human character is acknowledged instead of imposing blind judgement. The birth of independent India signifies not only political freedom but also Probhat's self-liberation – emancipation from the burden of his crime. Byomkesh himself constructs for him a passage from sin to salvation, transgression to redemption. But to a 'satyanweshi' this redemption cannot happen without the complete realisation of truth, on account of which he reveals to Probhat his paternal identity. Here again, Byomkesh imparts cosmic justice to Probhat by denying him the comfort of ignorance. The revelation itself becomes a lifelong psychological burden and a punishment more cruel than death. By the irony of fate, the man for whom Probhat harboured deep hatred turned out to be his own father and his cruel fate endowed him with the ineradicable sin of patricide. At the dawn of independence, Byomkesh's encouraging words ushers a new hope into Probhat which further reinforces the idea that humans are capable of rising above their weaknesses through moral strength and unyielding courage, "There is a custom in all civilised countries that prisoners are freed on auspicious days. You are freed too" (my trans.; 100). Hence, Byomkesh here renders his own way of justice and punishment outside the framework of judicial system.

“Rakter Daag” (1956) serves as another example where Byomkesh forgives the murderer (Ushapatibabu) as the victim (Satyakam) was himself a culprit and serious offender. The impudent, flamboyant and womanizer Satyakam portrays the elite circles of post-independent Calcutta standing in contrast to the disciplined middle-class society, which includes Byomkesh and Ajit. A close scrutiny of this story depicts that Satyakam’s impending and unavoidable death is a kind of ‘rule of law’ governed by the moral codes that Saradindu usually abides by in his Byomkesh series. Since Satyakam had crossed all limits of dissoluteness, it was necessary to eliminate him in order to establish justice and peace for the truly decent Ushapatibabu. The mention of Bhuteshwar’s fitness club and Byomkesh extending support in their plan of beating up Satyakam to teach a befitting lesson can be perceived as the last humanist resort to restrain and safeguard him. Byomkesh said, “If a few blows can save his life, isn’t that better?” (my trans.; 165). The wilful forgiveness rendered by Byomkesh upon Ushapatibabu is the pivotal element of “Rakter Daag” that allows one to dive straight into the unexplored corridors of Byomkesh’s persona. It firmly establishes the unrivalled supremacy of probity when viewed through the lens of a ‘satyanweshi’. Ushapatibabu is undeniably the criminal and deserves strict punishment in accordance to legal rules; but to Byomkesh his action is carried out as a repercussion to prolonged mental torture and distress. Satyakam’s outrageous actions and unbearable harassment forced him to take the extreme step of murder. For many years, Ushapatibabu was desperately searching for mental peace and finally got the opportunity to embrace a ‘new beginning’ with his wife. From Byomkesh’s understanding of the truth of life, Ushapatibabu in no way deserves all those troubles and misfortunes that came upon him and is therefore the rightful claimant to what he desires. Byomkesh himself being a family man comprehends the paramount importance of marital bliss and contentment in Ushapati’s miserable life. His action is guided by the noble doctrine of righteousness than being solely driven by legal codes, “But there is something greater than law—righteousness. What do you all think. Have I done something wrong?” (my trans.; 187).

The peculiar case in “Kahen Kobi Kalidas” (1961) is another instance where Byomkesh again forgives the murderer. Going against adultery and infidelity, Saradindu offers an indirect support for the fierce loyalty shown by the couple Bhubaneswar-Mohini towards each other. The extent to which a husband goes to protect his wife’s honour is clearly evident in this story. There is an explicit deviation from the traditional nature of detective story when Byomkesh completely sided with the murderers while sorrowfully stating how the evil Pranhori destroyed their innocent lives. Here, readers can definitely find out a similar kind of retributive justice as obvious in previous stories like *Aadim Ripu* and “Rakter Daag” where Byomkesh himself validates the killing of extremely wicked individuals as rightful act according to the code of moral justice; not as a sleuth, but as a ‘satyanweshi’.

In “The Rhythm of Riddles” (1964), Bhupeshbabu’s revelation about the loss of his only son adds a tragic dimension to the detective narrative. Mentioning of the Dhaka riots in his mournful expression places his grief within a larger dimension of the devastating impact of communal violence. Bhupeshbabu’s plaintive question: “Is there a medicine to wipe out memories of grief?” (21) elucidates his desperate longing for relief from the excruciating pain that he constantly bears. Byomkesh, who usually relies on logic and reason, is confronted by a problem that cannot be solved by usual means. His reply sheds light on a compassionate father within him who deeply realizes the magnitude of such a severe agony, “Eternity is the only medicine” (21). In this case, the deliberate concealment of Natabar’s murderer to the police exhibits an insightful perspective of Byomkesh’s humanitarian outlook. To him, Natabar Nashkar is none other than a criminal who has terribly destroyed several innocent lives and continues to do so. Therefore, Byomkesh views his murder as cleansing of an invasive weed from the society, which is undoubtedly a noble deed. In Byomkesh’s worldview, there is no mercy for the grave sin committed by Nashkar in snatching away a child from his parents. Bhupeshbabu’s act of revenge is therefore considered as morally justified since he happens to be a bereaved father who had lost his son and sought vengeance at the right time. This gets reflected through Byomkesh’s reassuring words, “I believe no one should hang for killing a vulture either. You need not worry” (36). In this

case too, Byomkesh lets the culprit go away since he is not a habitual offender but a grief-stricken father who exerts justice for his son's murder.

The Nationalist Byomkesh: Partition and Beyond

The character of Byomkesh “demonstrated the feasibility of a rapprochement between the local and the global, in an attempt at bridging the chasm between the seemingly divergent demands of a late-colonial South Asian ideational, more than socio-historical, anomie and the burgeoning aspiration of decolonisation” (Chakrabarti 266). The politics of India in the 1950s is marked by a series of unstable factors and equations – the Partition of 1947 and shifting of national boundaries, rise of communal identity, refugee crisis and violent wars. Saradindu has reiterated these geo-political issues in many of his Byomkesh stories including *Aadim Ripu*, “Rakter Daag”, “The Rhythm of Riddles”, “Mogno Mainak” etc. In *Aadim Ripu*, the reference to the communal riots of 1946 places the plot of the novel in a politically turbulent environment. The killing of Ajit's bosom friend Fazlu amidst the mass violence depicts the fact that no one was spared from the devastating fire that partition lit. Hence, Ajit is not merely a narrator but also a silent observer of the intense chaos that India went through at that time. The quote “we became to love the god of death” (my trans.; 17) displays the grim picture of the massacre of thousands of Hindus by the goons of Muslim League during Jinna's ‘direct action’ in Kolkata on 16th August, 1946. The utter negligence of police administration in protecting the lives and rights of Hindus is sharply criticized through Ajit's remark, “Suhrawardy saheb's police arrives and punishes the Hindus, the number of dead bodies increases by a few” (my trans.; 17). Again, the nonchalant attitude of the police jamadar towards Nripen at the news of Anadi Sarkar's murder is worth noticing. His heartless advice to throw away Anadi's dead body on the road showcases the same mindset of turning a blind eye to the plight of the Hindus.

There was nobody in the police station. One jamadar was sleeping keeping his leg on the table. He got furious after hearing my complaint and said, “Get out! What's all the fuss about when a Hindu has died? Dump the corpse in the street. (my trans.; 36)

During these riots and mayhem, Byomkesh had to remain separated from his wife Satyabati and his toddler son, who are kept at Patna in Sukumar's safe custody. Hence, Byomkesh is not an intellectual who is detached from society but a middle-class family man directly affected by socio-political upheavals. Thus, with regards to family and marriage, "Byomkesh is a little dissimilar to other popular detectives who are not tied by familial bonds. He also ages with time in subsequent stories" (Sinha 180).

In "Rakter Daag", the character of Shitangshu is a symbolic representation of the psychological fragmentation and dehumanization caused by the communal violence of 1947. He is reduced from a well-mannered young boy to a vindictive individual who counterbalances the act of violence by killing those Muslims who had murdered his father.

Bhabanibabu smiled a bit, ". . . He was a good guy, but the Muslims killed his father during the riot last year. From then on, his nature changed. We suspect that he committed no fewer than three murders". (my trans.; 173)

Later in the story, Shitangshu's cold demeanour in fearlessly replying to Byomkesh about his murder weapon reveals a staunch determination and conviction about his reprisal for the unjust killing of an innocent man.

Gautam Chakrabarti suggests that, "Byomkesh was lionized as an intersectional figure, at once Anglophilic and 'cryptonationalist', navigating between traditional cultural ideals and a postcolonial modernity" (261). However, Laura Brueck argues that Saradindu maintains "a balance between a formal Holmesian Anglophilia and a vernacular setting and political sensibility" (607). A meticulous study of his stories reflects that Byomkesh happens to be a patriotic citizen who often dedicates himself to the national cause. In *Aadim Ripu*, a patriotic fervour is invoked by Saradindu when Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel summons Byomkesh to Delhi. This again correlates the story with the unstable political situation of contemporary India where the nation was torn between ongoing freedom struggle and sinister conspiracies aimed at destabilizing national integrity. The motive behind Patel's call

remains undescribed, but Ajit hints that it is related with India's national security and not any petty criminal investigation. The utmost significance of responding to national interest as one's foremost duty is well exhibited through Byomkesh's urgent departure from Patna. The secrecy is maintained while depicting what actually happened in Delhi and it serves as Ajit's inescapable duty as a responsible citizen in ensuring national security. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is regarded as 'The Iron Man of India' and therefore embodies the 'iron will' of unifying a nation marked by differences in language, culture and religion. Associating a fictional figure like Byomkesh with a historical figure like Patel represents Saradindu's conscious effort in establishing his sleuth, Byomkesh, as a nationalist dedicated to the cause of united India. In "Dushtochokro" (1963), another patriotic aspect of Byomkesh's character is revealed when he transforms the punishment of the culprits into charity and welfare. The strict condition given to Bishupal for donating one lakh rupees to the defence fund within a day highlights Byomkesh's patriotic spirit and his steadfast moral uprightness. Upon realising that the culprits cannot be proven guilty in court, he thinks of employing their lucre for national cause instead of demanding for himself. This again establishes him as a citizen devoted to the welfare of nation. The donation is indeed a penance for Bishupal for his misdeeds and a way to reform his moral character.

"Mogno Mainak" (1963) showcases Byomkesh's unrelenting pursuit for truth in decoding a highly complex murder case which interlaces war of espionage and political corruption. The story is set against the backdrop of post-independence era when West Bengal, as a newly formed state, was vulnerable to major social, administrative and security crisis. The government under Chief Minister Bidhan Chandra Roy struggled to restore order amidst the chaotic situation. The massive influx of refugees from East Pakistan was uncontrollable and created havoc in the state. Hena Mallik, who initially appears in the story as an orphaned refugee sheltered by Santosh Samaddar, signifies this refugee problem that put an overwhelming strain on Bengal's economy and infrastructure. The violent communal riots led to widespread killings, loots and destruction of properties that worsened the situation further. The political and social turmoil led

to rapid growth of crime which the Congress government failed to curb efficiently. On top of that Congress was engaged in factional fights marked by internal rivalry and power struggle. Many of the highly corrupt Congress politicians ignored public welfare and lacked in organised and integrated governance. Moreover, the central grants provided to the state as per Nehru's economic policies were insufficient in mitigating the needs of the people.

The fifth columnist Santosh Samaddar is a perfect example of the internal threat that inflicts heavy toll on sovereignty and security of the nation. His exceptional oratory skill as depicted through his public speeches underscores the impressive ability of contemporary politicians to woo the public, brainwash them and divert their attention from core issues or weaknesses of the ruling party. Through his character, Saradindu openly critiques the contemporary politicians of Congress who misused their ranks and powers for financial gains. Chameli Samaddar's former involvement in revolutionary activities provides a convincing explanation for the antipathy towards her husband's debauchery and malfeasance. Moreover, the blunt acknowledgement about her disbelief in the Gandhian principle of non-violence (*ahimsa*) implies a critique of the guiding vision for Congress which often proved to be impractical or ineffective on political grounds. The major breach of confidential and sensitive information delineates the frailty of the Congress government in properly safeguarding national security. Byomkesh's deep pang of regret reveals what heavy price India had to pay for the betrayal, "Consequently we were defeated at every step, we lost the territory that was rightfully ours" (my trans.; 414).

Byomkesh's utterance unfolds some crucial details about the espionage system widely prevalent during the Indo-Pak wars between 1947 and 1965. The rapid creation of ISI (Inter Service Intelligence) as a defence-oriented intelligence mechanism proved to be highly beneficial for Pakistan. India unfortunately did not have a strong external intelligence agency capable of countering the ISI and had to rely on IB (Intelligence Bureau) for both internal and external information. ISI in its early times was trained by British officers especially Major General R. Cawthorne bringing about its quick advancement and stood superior to India in covert

operations and strategic infiltration. This was more evident when Pakistan carried out 'Operation Gibraltar' (1965) aimed at provoking a local insurrection and 'Operation Grand Slam' which was successful in overwhelming the Indian forces through large-scale deployment of Pakistani armour. In the late 1950s, Pakistan was actively involved in the separatist movements of North-East India by facilitating a secure network for Naga and Mizo insurgents. Furthermore, the failure to measure Chinese intentions during the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the success of Pakistan led 'Operation Desert Hawk' plotted before the full-scale war of 1965 made the critical failure of Indian intelligence abundantly clear. Saradindu, through the words of Byomkesh, directly hits upon the exact weakness which prompted India to establish its strongest external intelligence agency after five years – Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) in 1968.

The activities of the spy Meena Mallik mentioned as 'demimondaine' (415) indicate the extensive use of honey trapping i.e. romantic affiliation or seduction to manipulate military personnel and political leaders into revealing sensitive information. This was very much popular as a part of intelligence operations between India and Pakistan since 1947. The original French term 'demimonde', which was used for glamorous elite women associated with espionage, perfectly fits for Meena as she lured Samaddar for both money and confidential information. Operatives from East Pakistan even functioned as refugees taking advantage of the tumultuous times of partition, which is portrayed through the character of Hena Mallik. These agents preyed upon individuals who were psychologically vulnerable and weakened in spirit. Politician Santosh Samaddar, who lacked moral restraint, was too an easy target for Meena Mallik and this infirmity is highlighted by Saradindu as a deadly blow to India's security. As Byomkesh expresses his concerns:

Think of the situation—a political shadow war is going on. We know nothing about their secret motives, but they are aware of all our secret plans. The outcome is inevitable. (my trans.; 416)

Byomkesh's anger and disgust towards the traitor Samaddar indicates a deep-rooted patriotic conviction and an

uncompromising stance against treachery. His unshaken resolve to punish him does not waver even at the face of constant threats and intimidation. Byomkesh rightfully establishes himself as a nationalist by scorning Samaddar's offer to conceal his shameful deeds, "Even you don't have enough money to bribe me, Santoshbabu. You have betrayed your country, you are a traitor, you should be punished for that" (my trans.; 413). Byomkesh's counter-threat demonstrates the strength of will that emanates only from an ardent believer of truth. The face-off between Byomkesh and Samaddar is a larger representation of the constant strife between common men and power structures where the latter often tend to stifle the voices of the former and succeeds in crushing them under political influence. Thus, Samaddar's collapse before Byomkesh epitomizes a total reversal of the commonly encountered abuse of power and the ultimate triumph of virtue over vice. Anindita Dey opines that Saradindu's nationalist thoughts in the Byomkesh narratives are "subtle and he tactfully presents the realities of colonial India with the purpose of regenerating national culture" (101).

To conclude, Byomkesh Bakshi was "alter ego of Saradindu Bandopadhyay and his prospects in life changed as did his creator's" (Sinha 183). The intricate relation between crime and justice becomes bleary in many of his cases where Saradindu maintains "a perfect balance while interlacing a series of tales and fashioning a complex web of characters while bestowing optimal equipoise of social interests and narrative prerequisites" (Mukhopadhyay 22). For both Byomkesh and Saradindu, justice is not what is served as punishment under judicial incarceration but which truly reforms a character through penance and sacrifice. In this regard, Byomkesh as the sleuth, conveys a didactic pedagogy that offers a new perspective of 'truth' (hence 'truth-seeker' or 'satyanweshi') through his process of deductive investigation. Often, truth emerges greater than justice and justice transcends beyond the limited scope of punishment. Set in the vernacular context of both pre-colonial and post-colonial Calcutta, Byomkesh's critical success specifically depends not only on his dedication to ratiocination, but also as an inquisitor who conspicuously embraces an emotional balance between justice and truth.

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Review

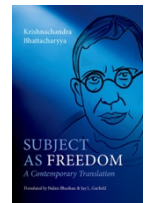
The emergence of the modern-day Bhāṣyakāras in the discourse of modern Indian Philosophy

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The *Subject as Freedom* holds a unique and distinguished place in modern Indian philosophy. Broadly acknowledged as Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya's magnum opus, the book represents one of the most original and philosophically sophisticated attempts to rethink the nature of subjectivity, freedom, and self-consciousness in twentieth-century Indian philosophy. Despite providing a highly valuable framework for understanding subjectivity, self-consciousness, and freedom, the book has earned a reputation as one of the least accessible texts in modern Indian philosophy because of its dense arguments, difficult prose, and highly technical vocabulary. Even seasoned readers of Indian philosophy may feel intimidated while engaging with the text. It is precisely in this context that Nalini Bhushan and Jay Garfield's edition appears — one that not only translates the text but also bridges the conceptual distance between Bhattacharyya's philosophical worldview and contemporary readers.

It is tempting to describe the volume simply as a new translation of a difficult classic. Such a description, however, would seriously underestimate its achievement. The volume is

simultaneously a translation, a philosophical commentary, an intellectual biography of a text, and an interpretive intervention into the reception of Bhattacharyya. Indeed, one of its greatest virtues is that it refuses to separate these tasks. Translation here is itself understood as philosophical work.

This point deserves emphasis because the editors consciously reject the fiction of interpretive neutrality. Every philosophical translation presupposes an understanding of the text translated. Rather than concealing their interpretive commitments beneath the appearance of literal fidelity, Garfield and Bhushan make those commitments explicit. Their extensive introductory essay argues that *Subject as Freedom* should be read within the broader trajectory of Bhattacharyya's engagement with Advaita Vedānta, particularly through the illuminating "bookends" provided by "Śaṅkara's Doctrine of Māyā" (1925) and "The Advaita and Its Spiritual Significance" (1936). The introduction is therefore not merely preparatory; it provides the conceptual architecture within which the translation itself is to be understood.

This feature distinguishes the present edition from many contemporary philosophical translations. Instead of presenting Bhattacharyya as an isolated historical thinker, Garfield and Bhushan have reconstructed the intellectual movement of his philosophy. Their concern is not merely what Bhattacharyya says but how he arrives at it. Consequently, readers are introduced not only to his terminology but also to his philosophical method, his dialectical strategy, and the wider constellation of debates within which his reflections on subjectivity and freedom acquire their significance.

It is here that the present reviewer would like to propose an alternative way of understanding the editors' contribution. Garfield and Bhushan are perhaps best regarded not simply as translators but as contemporary *bhāṣyakāras* of Bhattacharyya. Within the classical Indian philosophical tradition, a *bhāṣya* is never a mere explanatory supplement to an original text. A commentator reconstructs arguments, clarifies conceptual

transitions, identifies implicit presuppositions, responds to possible objections, and above all initiates the reader into a particular philosophical vision. The commentator is therefore not secondary to philosophy but an active participant in its continuation.

Seen from this perspective, Garfield and Bhushan's introduction resembles a classical *bhāṣya* more than a modern editorial preface. They neither simplify Bhattacharyya's arguments nor attempt to domesticate them within familiar Western philosophical categories. Instead, they preserve the conceptual demands of the original while providing readers with the hermeneutical resources necessary to inhabit Bhattacharyya's mode of philosophising. Their work thus performs precisely the function traditionally expected of a philosophical commentator: not making a difficult philosopher easy, but making him genuinely readable. This becomes particularly evident in the editorial philosophy governing the translation itself. Rather than mechanically reproducing Bhattacharyya's terminology, the editors repeatedly explain the philosophical motivations behind their lexical decisions. For instance, they render Bhattacharyya's "object" as "intentional object," clarifying that he is concerned not with physical objects as such but with objects of reference or discourse. Likewise, "meaning" is translated as "reference" in contexts where Bhattacharyya is clearly concerned with referential rather than semantic function, and these choices are carefully justified through explanatory notes. Such interventions exemplify an editorial philosophy that prioritises conceptual fidelity over lexical literalism.

This approach deserves considerable praise. Many translations of philosophical texts oscillate between two unsatisfactory extremes: excessive literalism that renders the original unintelligible, or excessive domestication that silently replaces the author's conceptual vocabulary with the translator's. Garfield and Bhushan avoid both dangers. Their translation remains remarkably faithful to Bhattacharyya's philosophical intentions while simultaneously rendering the text accessible to readers unfamiliar with the peculiarities of his style. The result

is an edition that neither betrays the complexity of the original nor mistakes obscurity for philosophical depth.

The intellectual heart of the volume is undoubtedly the eighty-page introductory essay. Equally noteworthy is the manner in which the introduction bridges classical Indian philosophy and contemporary philosophical discourse. Their comparisons with Kant and Husserl are offered as heuristic aids rather than claims of direct influence, which keeps the cross-traditional reading honest. Garfield and Bhushan argue with considerable confidence that Advaita Vedānta provides the principal interpretive key to *Subject as Freedom*. Their reading is sophisticated and supported by impressive textual scholarship. Their treatment of the distinction between the real and the true is a case in point: Bhattacharyya's analysis of illusion is shown to be neither a purely epistemological exercise nor a metaphysical aside, but part of a larger movement toward freedom. Nevertheless, one may wonder whether the very success of this interpretive framework occasionally limits the philosophical openness of Bhattacharyya's text.

Bhattacharyya's analyses of subjectivity, freedom, alternation, and self-consciousness frequently proceed through phenomenological description rather than scriptural exegesis or metaphysical assertion. The originality of *Subject as Freedom* lies precisely in this methodological independence. Although Advaita undoubtedly forms an indispensable background, Bhattacharyya often appears less concerned with defending an established philosophical school than with reconstructing the very conditions under which philosophical reflection becomes possible.

This raises an important hermeneutical question. Does reading *Subject as Freedom* primarily through the lens of Advaita illuminate the text, or does it risk determining in advance what readers are expected to find? The "bookend" strategy undoubtedly provides valuable context, yet it can also create the impression that the meaning of the 1930 work is already settled by texts written before and after it. Such an approach may

unintentionally diminish the autonomy of Subject as Freedom as a philosophical work capable of generating interpretations that exceed the doctrinal commitments of its author.

This concern becomes particularly significant because Bhattacharyya consciously develops a vocabulary that frequently departs from traditional Advaitic terminology. Expressions such as "alternation," "objective freedom," "spiritual freedom," and the intricate analyses of subjectivity possess a conceptual texture that is uniquely his own. They invite comparison not only with Advaita but also with phenomenology, transcendental philosophy, and contemporary discussions of selfhood. While Garfield and Bhushan acknowledge many of these connections, the gravitational pull of Advaita remains so strong throughout the introduction that alternative philosophical possibilities occasionally recede into the background.

This is not fatal to the editors' reading, but it does mean the introduction is best approached as a strong argument for one way of reading Bhattacharyya, not as a settled account of what the text is. Strong interpretations invariably provoke disagreement, and Garfield and Bhushan deserve considerable credit for resisting the safe neutrality that characterizes much editorial scholarship. Their introduction does not merely accompany Bhattacharyya's text; it enters into dialogue with it. That dialogue, even where one is inclined to dissent, constitutes one of the volume's greatest intellectual achievements.

The parallel presentation of Bhattacharyya's original text and the modern translation is especially commendable. Readers are afforded the opportunity to appreciate the extraordinary density of the original prose while simultaneously observing the editors' interpretive decisions. This editorial transparency is pedagogically invaluable. Rather than concealing the inevitable difficulties of philosophical translation, the volume invites readers to reflect upon them.

Equally impressive is the extensive editorial apparatus accompanying the translation. The explanatory notes are never merely lexical glosses; they frequently reconstruct the conceptual motivations underlying Bhattacharyya's terminology. For instance, the editors' discussions of intentionality, reference, universals, and first-person discourse clarify why seemingly modest terminological decisions carry substantial philosophical consequences. The notes function less as explanatory annotations than as miniature philosophical essays, allowing readers to follow not only Bhattacharyya's reasoning but also the translators' interpretive deliberations. Such editorial care significantly enhances the scholarly value of the edition.

In the final analysis, this volume deserves to be regarded as the standard English point of entry into Subject as Freedom. It combines careful translation, sophisticated philosophical commentary, and substantial editorial scholarship, and it demonstrates the continuing vitality of Bhattacharyya's thought whether one approaches him from Advaita Vedānta, phenomenology, transcendental philosophy, philosophy of language, or comparative philosophy. More importantly, it restores Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya to the centre of philosophical discussion—not as an historical curiosity or merely as a representative of Advaita Vedānta, but as a philosopher whose reflections on subjectivity and freedom continue to challenge and enrich contemporary thought.

Garfield and Bhushan have therefore accomplished considerably more than the production of a reliable translation. They have recovered a philosophical voice that had become increasingly difficult to hear beneath the weight of its own textual complexity. If future generations of scholars come to read Bhattacharyya with greater philosophical confidence and greater interpretive sensitivity, this edition will undoubtedly be remembered as the work that made such a revival possible.