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Raag Darbari as a Story of Corruption: A New Historicist Reading

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ABSTRACT:

Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari* (1968) is one of the most influential political satires in Hindi literature, acclaimed for exposing the rot within the Indian bureaucratic and political system. Written by an IAS officer who was deeply familiar with the machinery of state power, the novel depicts how corruption permeates rural life through political opportunism, caste politics, bureaucratic inertia and educational decay. Unlike the idealistic narratives of post-independence India, *Raag Darbari* portrays a grassroots disillusionment with Nehruvian progress. Using a New Historicist approach, this paper situates *Raag Darbari* within its socio-political context and analyses it as a corruption narrative constructed around four central pillars—bureaucracy, education, politics and cooperation. By comparing the failures of Nehru's vision of "Newness" with the realities of Shivpalganj, this study reveals how literature becomes a mirror to the crumbling ethos of governance in postcolonial India.

KEYWORDS: Raag Darbari, Shrilal Shukla, Satire, Corruption, Nehruvian Idealism, Bureaucracy, Politics, New Historicism, Rural India, Shivpalganj.

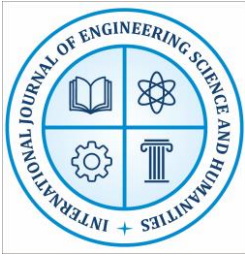
INTRODUCTION:

Shukla was an IAS officer in Uttar Pradesh; therefore, he was familiar with every nook and cranny of the bureaucracy and corruption. *Raag Darbari* is a crucial work in the history of state satires, as it introduced Awadhi witticism and ribaldry to the rotundity of Sanskritized-Hindi in satire writing, giving it a new dimension in Hindi literature. Such linguistic exercises contribute in the accurate portrayal of rural India. Shukla has portrayed the true face of the countryside with the help of characters by exhibiting a deteriorated spirit of rustic life in the shape of wicked political practises, caste politics, sectarian interest and corruptions, moral and administrative, all-in sync with rural life.

There is no striking comparison of the novel to the Nehruvian rule in any of the resources I've found. As a result, this study will use a New Historicist approach to understanding *Raag Darbari* as a corruption story. As a result, the entire study has been separated into two parts. This paper will require a large number of historical references for the first half and the second half will evaluate *Raag Darbari* as a corruption story built on four pillars: bureaucracy, education, politics and cooperation.

After reading Girish Karnad's play *Tughlaq*, a famous allegory about Nehru's and his successors' faults, especially Mrs. Gandhi and then reading *Raag Darbari*, lost memories and conflicted sentiments concerning Nehru's administration surfaced. It gave a starting point for contrasting *Raag Darbari* with the post-independence administration in order to investigate Nehru's idealism's failure among the general populace. All of these situations inspired this article, which examines how Nehru's big rhetoric of national progress failed at the grassroots level. The basic idea of this study is to find a parallel between Nehru's rule and Shivpalganj, as well as to learn more about *Raag Darbari*'s reflections on the failed bureaucracy and polity of the time. Finally, this paper will seek to inquire about the reasons for the failure of Nehru's vision of "Newness" which he had discussed in *The Discovery of India*.

Some of the novel's initial critics are addressed in the essay 'Raag Darbari ka Mool Raag' from 'Raag Darbari ka Mahatva' (68-79). It begins with a commentary by renowned poet and critic Nemichandra Jain. He refused to accept *Raag Darbari* as a novel in a review published in the weekly journal 'Hindustan Saptahik' (1969), in which he claims that its rural image is "flat" and its distinctive satirical style is "unnecessarily upsetting." In 1975, a young writer named Kamlesh disagrees with Nemichandra's analysis and, in defence of Shukla, revalues the book in 'Aadhunik



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Hindi Upanyas' (1975), claiming that the novel incorporates a theme of exploitation that has taken root in the society and politics of rural India and Shukla has used satire as a literary form to expose this to his readers. He also criticises Nemichandra's literary taste, claiming that he can't stand Shrilal Shukla's writings. Later, this article considers the novel's nepotism, which has plagued politics across the country since the country's independence. The essay concludes by stating that Raag darbari politics are similar to present Indian politics.

Rupert Snell's Rural Travesties, published in 1990, is one of the early English critiques of Raag Darbari, juxtaposing Shukla with Premchand, the writer who glorified the rural life and showing how Shukla expertly inverted the story of a perfect rural society with a hint of mockery. It also addresses the novel's linguistic aspects. The essay concludes by stating that meaningful change is impossible to achieve in rural India owing to the political systems in place. Most notably, it discusses how the use of scatological humour distinguishes this novel from other satirical works. Shrilal Shukla's Raag Darbari: Satire in Indian literature, by Yoshita Singh, includes one of Shrilal Shukla's last interviews, which reveals the nuances of his writing. Singh reveals how disillusioned Shukla was with the independent India when he compares it to the spirit of pre-independence days, which seems to have degenerated today and this essence of disillusionment is evident throughout his writing. Singh also explains how satirical works exploded in popularity after independence. Finally, Singh compares and contrasts the modern-day hamlet with Shivpalganj in terms of changes over time, concluding with the deteriorating status of rural India, which is already dire. Singh's focus is on examining how satire is used to bring attention to issues such as corruption and politics.

Ulka Anjira examines the diachronic history of satire in Indian literature and how it has been used to criticise the colonial state and later the newly constituted government in 'Satire literary realism and the Indian state.' In the novel's background, Anjira depicts a state of postcolonial disillusionment. It is primarily concerned with Nehruvian cynicism or the portrayal of the Nehruvian rule as a flop-show and it skilfully draws out the novel's political tendencies.

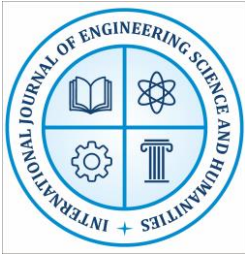
Akhil Gupta, a well-known American anthropologist from Stanford, wrote 'Anthropological & fictional assessments of the Indian state.' It's a dedicated piece of research on corruption narratives in Indian fiction, in which he took an unusual approach to research by adding his own personal experiences as part of the research paper. He begins by defining corruption, then discusses the causes of corruption, the operation of the corruption cartel within the bureaucracy and finally, the justification of corruption in the Indian bureaucracy. The purpose of this research paper is to compare the state condition depicted in realism literature with real anthropological state representations using the classical ethnography method. This paper has numerous bibliographies that will help me expand my studies in this area.

Finally, Rajnikant Puranik's book "Nehru's 97 Major Blunders" covers all areas of Nehru's errors during his presidency. He defines blunder as "failure, negligence, improper policies, stupid decisions, nasty and shameful behaviours and so on." The book is divided into length based on the mistakes made in foreign policy, internal security, economy, government, education and cultural mismanagement, among other areas. Although the author fails to provide a deeper understanding of these errors, he has supplied weblinks to books and articles to support his claims. The goal of this work is to expose the historical realities that have been hidden by historians.

Raag Darbari:

Raag Darbari, written by Shrilal Shukla and released in 1968, is a well-known political satire for which he received the Shahitya Academy Award in 1969. This novel, originally written in Hindi and later translated into English by Gillian Wright, is about a distant village Shivpalganj and its politics as seen through the eyes of Ranganatha, a learned man who has come to this village for health reasons to see his uncle Vaidyaji, who runs the entire village politics with his two sons.

Vaidyaji is also the principal of the local school, giving him the authority to obtain and manage cash. Rupan and Badri, two of his sons, demonstrate the Vaidya's dual social and political



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influence. Ruppan's name is Ruppan Babu, which is an obeisance suffix that represents the authority he wields on behalf of his father and frequently at his command. He is the younger son, who is still enrolled at his father's school/college after failing his school board exams for numerous years and is regarded as a community leader.

Badri, the oldest son, is a pehelwan, or physique builder, who is represented by his protégé Chote Pehelwan during Vaidyaji's meetings. Badri the pehelwan is a figure of symbolic strength, hefty in stature yet happy to be silent. Ruppan acts inside society, using it as a monitoring agent for Vaidyaji, as well as an active mobiliser and troubleshooter.

Vaidyaji's foe Ramadheen wants to take over the college and the village panchayat. His income comes from the drugs trade. Gayadeen is the moneylender, who is still present in the life of the peasants.

Sanichar and Langad, whose names indicate their inferior position, symbolise two political threads in the area. Vaidyaji's servant Sanichar gets promoted to village pradhan. He acts as a proxy for Vaidyaji, allowing him to spawn power through and around him. Langad is a victim of the corrupt local administration due of his 'deformity.' The patwari's office consistently delays his legitimate claims. Langad, on the other hand, insists on filing his claim in the proper manner.

After independence, India made adult franchises universal. The extension of franchise was supposed to make government more responsible. The assumption that persons in positions of power may be trusted was a crucial part of this process.

Raag Darbari teaches us that governmental power can never be completely trusted. According to studies and polls, public faith in political authorities has eroded. Money and muscle are widely regarded as influencing the makeup and functioning of political power. Indeed, in politics, 'crime pays.' Furthermore, political position has become a means of accumulating riches. Numerous studies have revealed how politicians' or their family members' wages increased, often enormously, after they took government.

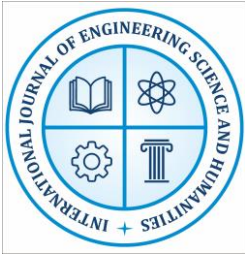
Significantly, trust in local institutions of political involvement and representation, such as gramme panchayats and nagarpalikas, is greater than in parliament and state assemblies. The police, government officials and political parties have the lowest levels of confidence. The district commissioner and the tehsildar, however, have a higher level of confidence. The Supreme Court, as well as the lower courts, continue to inspire confidence.

People care about the efficacy and responsiveness of local institutional regimes, but national institutional regimes may just have symbolic value. However, there appears to be a growing acceptance of corruption among the general public, as well as a lack of faith in authority engendered by experience with it.

People, paradoxically, flock to local systems of power, both political and bureaucratic, because of their ability to 'facilitate' things. Even in the lack of the components that make authority 'trustworthy,' trust appears to become 'effective' in this environment. If you're still curious, Shukla would probably encourage you to ask a 'ganjahaan,' as he reads from his book from years ago (a common person who resided in Shivpalganj).

CONCLUSION

Raag Darbari continues to hold a significant place in Hindi literature as a searing critique of corruption, power and social disillusionment. Shukla's satire, deeply rooted in rural realities, demonstrates how politics, education, bureaucracy and social cooperation had degenerated into tools of manipulation rather than agents of progress. Through Shivpalganj, Shukla builds an allegorical universe that parallels the failures of Nehru's governance model, exposing the collapse of the rhetoric of democracy and modernization at the grassroots. Despite criticism from early reviewers like Nemichandra Jain, who dismissed the novel's rural image as "flat," *Raag Darbari* has stood the test of time as a realistic yet humorous portrayal of systemic failures. Later defenders such as Kamlesh and international critics like Rupert Snell, Yoshita Singh and Akhil Gupta have shown how the novel transcends satire to serve as a historical document of corruption in post-



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independence India. The persistence of the issues raised in *Raag Darbari*—nepotism, political opportunism and bureaucratic exploitation—demonstrates the continued relevance of Shukla's narrative. In fact, the novel's politics are as strikingly similar to present-day Indian politics as they were in the late 1960s. Thus, *Raag Darbari* not only remains a powerful literary satire but also a profound commentary on the enduring challenges of governance and democracy in India.

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