

Anamika Saha

Ph.D Scholar

Gurukul Kangri University, Dehradun

[tissaatonyc@yahoo.com](mailto:tissaatonyc@yahoo.com)

## REPRESENTATION: A CONCRETE POWER PLAY IN JAGMOHAN BHANVER'S *THE CURSE OF BRAHMA*

Can Knowledge become the weapon for the subversion of any structure? Probably yes, because of which we all run after this. Most of us do not imagine subverting any structure but desire to be the supreme in the existing one effortlessly. More than half of the population behave like parasites and the rest as the host. The bond between the parasite and the host is violent: the former sucks the food from the latter for survival thus, the host is the giver and the parasite is the taker. Similarly, the Gods are the giver and we are the absorber. This give and take relationship can be extended to the imperial power: the colonizers as the provider and the colonized as the group that survived in their mercy.

Is this conjugal relationship so linear and effortless to understand as has been presented in the canonical texts and stories passed orally? Is the 'unnamed' creation of the copulation between the two is justifiable? This matrimony is the ground for all complications that had existed earlier and is breathing even today. This ground is not a new concept to introduce: it is ancient. Its form might have changed but the spine remains the same and hence, polymorphous in nature.

I have named the 'unnamed' creation as The Faith. Generally, we associate this vehement term with divinity. But the domains of dispersion of its tentacles are wider than any thought. The Faith is the key of all the conjugal relationships coloured by power-play. Power invites responsibilities as well as the need of representation. Here, I have wielded two powerful secret signs of the supreme: responsibilities and representation. The supreme possesses the responsibility of nourishment of the subservient. Since the former have to nourish, they have

to present a representative for the sake of the latter's abridged knowledge. Knowledge is, thus, selective that makes it a privilege property.

If knowledge is a privilege, then who endured the parturition of Faith? Faith is an influential drive: it is believed that it can neither be constructed nor destroyed but can be altered with the demand of time and situation, and hence it's not fragile. It is a constructed coerce of life that has become the base for survival. In mythology, faith has been portrayed as the driving force of the character's choices and *karma*. As is believed in Hinduism, especially among the Shaivites, as well as stated by Devdutt Pattanaik, fear is the driving force of survival in nature. This natural driving instinct has been insidiously metamorphosised to the constructive faith among humans that differs humans from the beasts (and this has been injected by the knowledge providers).

If faith is infinite, again, who endures the pain to bring the 'already-existing creation' to existence? To get the answer, we have to understand the relationship of Representation and Responsibility. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has discussed about this relationship in her critical essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' :

"Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as 'speaking for', as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation', as in art or philosophy...These two senses of representation- within state formation and the law, on one hand, and in subject-predication, on the other- are related but irreducibly discontinuous. To cover over the discontinuity with an analogy that is presented as a proof reflects again a paradoxical subject-privileging." (70)

In both the senses, representation is slyly interwoven with responsibility. When someone is 'speaking for' the group/ individual, it becomes the voice of the latter and hence, takes up the entire responsibility of representation. The representative becomes the envelope of the entire body by re-presenting the existence of it. This cobweb builds up the hierarchy of the representative as the superior. This superiority has to be understood by the Others for which they have to possess the power of manipulation. This can be done only by building up the Faith between them: it will work as a bridge between the two. The Others have to endure the parturition to adopt the Faith towards the supreme. Faith would cripple them as they elevate the supreme themselves, and thus, accept them as their representative. But the duration of parturition is not linear: it is a snare. Here, Knowledge functions as a spell of hypnotism that Spivak called the 'subjugated knowledge':

“...the subtext of the palimpsestic narrative of imperialism be recognized as ‘subjugated knowledge’, ‘a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity’. (PK,p.82)” (76)

The knowledge was manipulated insidiously that affected the Other psychologically that build up the inferiority complex within. Since Knowledge favours the dominant, it builds up the scaffold for the Faith on them by the former accepting the representation, though there is a huge gap between them. When this faith changes its course, it subverts the existing hierarchy and attempts to build a new one based on the earlier ‘bricoleur’ elements. Faith can change its course, but cannot be demolished. Similarly, hierarchy can be metamorphosed, but cannot be erased.

This system of power play within the hierarchy is evident in Jagmohan Bhanver’s *The Curse of Brahma*. It is the story of *Brahmrishi* Amartya Kalyanesu’s Fall and his quest for revenge from Lord Brahma. This book is the first part of Krishna Trilogy in which the antagonistic visages have been revealed. By Representing with the term antagonist, the text is revealing the *gap* between the term antagonist and the individual. Amartya was a devoted student of Lord Brahma who had received the rarest Knowledge from the latter and became a *Brahmrishi*. One fateful day, blinded by the ego, Brahma “unleashed the *Brahmashira* upon him.”(51) Earlier he thought Amartya to be dead, but 200 years later, he came back using the same Knowledge he had received to counterattack the supreme. To fulfil his plan, he used the royals Prince Kansa and King Jarasandha.

The book starts with a prologue in which the systematic exposition of the hierarchy of representation is evident. Amartya was the voice/ figure that had represented the entire *Paatallok*. Since he was a *Brahmrishi* before the Fall, he became the most powerful soul in *His Lok* that made him their Lord though the relationship between the representative and those who were being represented carries a huge gap of their associations of similarities and dissimilarities. Along with the gap, the figure that represented them did not look familiar to the commons that ignite the fear within them. We have realised one crucial thing in the prologue that the three creatures- *Pisaca*, *Kalakanja* and *Bonara*, were scared of being punished by their Lord: the punishment existed because of the gap between the hierarchies. He could punish them because he carried the power to punish, that is, he is their

Representative. Since they are being represented by someone who is more capable and powerful, he became the centre of their structure, and hence, not free.

The second sense of representation by Spivak is bringing forth the existence of the structure. By representing through one figure, the *Paatallok* is representing itself in front of the others. By killing Devki and through revenge, Amartya desired to substitute his structure by subverting the present one. This is possible through collision that decides the more powerful. This desire is the *desire* of the 'subaltern' who is placed at the periphery. Through this self realization another thing has been highlighted: his awareness of his new identity as a representative as well as his position against the supreme. He knew he was weak for which he had planned various plots to be more powerful than the authority.

In the past, the successful presentation of Amartya's absorbed Knowledge has established the guru's ground firmly: it is associated with pride. The representation here is mutual: they defined each other. But the dominant remained the same- Amartya was Brahma's *shishya* (student). The subordinate creates the dominant/ superior. It was the same binary relationship we all are aware of. But this relationship of representation and power play conceives cobweb of desire that establishes their authority with recognition. In Devki's case, it was the desire of being responsible as Ugrasena believed himself to be the embodiment of duty and responsibility (he is a king). With Amartya, it was more complex, the desire was mutual: Brahma desired authority whereas Amartya desired Knowledge. It was similar to the middle class of the Indian society during colonization that functioned as the bridge between the Authority and the periphery (commons) as Spivak borrowed Derrida's term to describe them as *antre*.

Knowledge is a manipulative power. Also, knowledge can be manipulated as needed or desired. Such need arises with the desire to influence till that particular level when the authority impregnates its safety from being questioned or challenged. The moment when any question being raised against the authority, the power of that manipulated knowledge is deconstructed. As Derrida as well as Spivak have stated, the centre is not affected by the rules of the periphery or the subordinate. Lord Brahma provided Amartya the knowledge by thinking himself to be unaffected by it. He provided the latter the knowledge that itself has built the relationship between the dominant and the submissive establishing himself the centre of the structure.

This thought proved fatal for Brahma when Amartya stood against him. The latter used the same knowledge he received as a weapon to destroy him. Since Brahma was at the centre, he imagined himself to be the one who cannot be affected by anything. When he overheard his mockery by Amartya's siblings, without any conversation or clarification the former accused his 'student' of insulting his *guru* and cursed him to the *Pataal Lok*. Blinded by rage as it was a puncture to his pride, he did it because he could. As Devadutt Pattanaik has stated in his *Seven Secrets of Shiva*, Brahma is *bhram* (illusion):

"Brahma has no faith. He refuses to look beyond the flesh. He ignores *atma*, and so catalyses the creation of *aham*, the ego.

The ego is the product of imagination...Brahma is every human being." (39)

His action to befall Amartya proved this illusion. This illusion of superiority was violated when Amartya stood against him to fail all his creations. He proved the opposition of the title provided by *devas* and gods as Amartya Kalyanesu- 'immortal goodness' (64). The *devas* had imagined him to be the one for the mankind, but ultimately it was the welfare of the doomed souls in *Paatal Lok* (extreme periphery).

Amartya had planned to create the '*antre*' (Spivak 79): the middlemen. To create this level, he himself chose the humans from the *Mrityulok* that would accomplish his desire. He chose the most powerful: Jarasandha and Kansa. Both belonged to the royals who were the centre of the *Mrityulok* and represented power. Jarasandha was driven through the desire to rule the *Mrityulok*: he craved for the power and hence, his desire to rule accelerated the interest towards the power to rule. On the other hand, Kansa was manipulated and metamorphosed through knowledge (*anagnorisis*). He was being ignited by Amartya to ask about his birth and was being addressed as *Kalanemi*. After being enlightened about his birth as a result of dupe and the hybrid of asura and human, Kansa became vulnerable that could be shaped in any form. And the 'etherization' (T.S.Eliot, *The Lovesong of J.Alfred Prufrock*) done by Jarasandha who injected venom against King Ugrasena, Devki and Vasudev.

To make him weaker and more prone to vulnerability, Amartya showed him the glimpses of Krishna killing Kansa. Dream is the path from as well as towards the sub-conscious mind of a human. As Freud stated in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, "They (primitive philosophers) took it for granted that dreams were related to the world of the supernatural beings in whom they believed, and that they brought inspirations from the gods and demons. Moreover, it appeared

to them that dreams must serve a special purpose in respect of the dreamer; that, as a rule, they predicted the future. The extraordinary variations in the content of dreams, and in the impressions which they produced on the dreamer, made it, of course, very difficult to formulate a coherent conception of them, and necessitated manifold differentiations and group-formations, according to their value and reliability.” Through such dreams Amartya had set the ground firmly inside the mind of Kansa over which the further insidiously gradual poisoning successfully worked by Jarasandha.

Though such subversive studies on Indian myth had always existed in different languages, the present generation of young mythical writers have exposed new ways of subversion- either by deconstructing the conventional myth as Amish Tripathi did who has changed the nature of the *play* within the structure being the centre as the same. On the other hand, we will find multiple fictions that have challenged the conventional mythical ideologies by presenting them from the Other’s voice that is, retelling the myth through different perspectives like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Anand Neelkanthan. Such retellings are possible because of the realisation of the newly discovered flexibility within the structure. Since myth is associated with the demons and the Gods conceived by the Faith, the structure becomes authoritative in nature. As Mikhail Bakhtin in his *Discourse in the Novel* had stated that the authoritative structure (discourse) is rigid in nature and does not allow any external force to include, interrupt or destabilize it:

“Therefore authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it.” (42)

“Authoritative discourse cannot be represented-it is only transmitted...It is by very nature incapable of being double-voiced; it cannot enter into hybrid constructions. If completely deprived of its authority it becomes simply an object, a *relic*, a *thing*.” (43)

With time, the mythology as the authoritative structure is being subverted gradually because of the realization of its flexibility within itself for which Bhanver’s *The Curse of Brahma* is a perfect illustration. Again, in Bakhtin’s words,

“...retelling a text in one’s own words is to a certain extent a double-voiced narration of another’s words, for indeed “one’s own words” must not completely dilute the quality that makes another’s words unique; a retelling in one’s own words should have a mixed character, able when necessary to reproduce the style and expression of the transmitted text.”

## WORKS CITED

- Abrams, M.H. and Geoffrey Galt Harpham . *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Delhi: Cengage Learning India Private Limited, 2016. Print.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Discourse in the Novel*. n.p. : n.d. Print
- Baldick, Chris. *Oxford Dictionary of Literary terms*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2008. Print.
- Bhanver, Jagmohan. *The Curse of Brahma*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications. 2015. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*. n.p. : n.d. Print
- Flynn, Thomas. *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, third edition. Vienna. 1911. pdf.
- Frye, Northrop. *Myth, Fiction and Displacement*. n.p.: n.d. Print.
- Pattanaik, Devdutt. *7 Secrets of Shiva: From the Hindu Trinity Series*. New Delhi: Westland ltd, 2011. Print.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" planetarities.web.unc.edu>files>2015/01. pdf. Flynn, Thomas. *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.