

# Raag Darbari: A Satire on Government Mechanism in Post- Independence India

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**Abstract:** The paper tries to explore the satirical mechanism used by Shrilal Shukla to expose post-Independence India. The focus is on how the writer harnesses the situations to depict the real realm of villages in India. *Raag Darbari* is holding a significant place in the genre of satire where Shrilal Shukla aims at the presentation of corruption spread in every layer of the domain he penetrated in. Provincial sketches in the novel depicts the whole regional bureaucracy, from petty clerk to the Pradhan. Enticement, larceny of state funds, bullying, idleness, defamation and moral degradation are consistent aspect to the village. The PPP- Public, Police Partnership is obvious in the thematic fabric which gradually reveals: The corruption in betrayal of emergence of new ideologies and policies, the centralization of power, the failure of a self-reliance, and the pressure of survival in oppressed atmosphere, where no one wants to be the herald of a change as everyone travels in a bandwagon.

**Key Words:** Post- Independence India, Satire, Cooperatives, Police, Court, Power, Education, Villages, Corruption, Despotism, Politics, Nepotism, New ideologies

## RESEARCH PAPER

### INTRODUCTION:

Shrilal Shukla occupies an eminent place in Indian fiction because of his unequivocal satiric stance. His novels are the exposure of the reality of rural India. *Raag Darbari* (1968) a novel on Indian dystopia earned him wide acclaim with its Sahitya Academy Award. It has been translated into English and 15 Indian languages. The novel has been marked as one of the best satires in Indian Literature. The satire is a critical and stimulating agent that tends to debunk and disparage the flaws of the political and social system such as moral degradation, injustice and power abuse.

Rabindranath Tagore, a Nobel Laureate of pre-independence India, wrote a poem *Let My Country Awake*

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high

Where knowledge is free

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments

By narrow domestic walls

Where words come out from the depth of truth

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way

Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit  
 Where the mind is led forward by thee  
 Into ever-widening thought and action  
 Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

(Tagore <https://www.tolstoytherapy.com>)

*Raag Darbari* by Shrilal Shukla evidences how the Utopian dream of Tagore has been scattered into pieces in post-independence India, where each piece mirrors nothing but a fraud. The novel takes the reader to a journey of a village in post-independence India, where the satire, the dark humor, a maestro of Shukla's creativity is visible at each stage. The subtle realistic representation of the time calls for vehement criticism at every strand as it tells a story of a life of people in Shivpaganj and sheds a satirical light on socio-political structure in the contexts of the post-Independent India where Britishers were driven out but people fall under the control of so-called village Raja, Vaidyaji. The power corrupts both, the powerful and the weak, one uses it for oppression and gets more powerful and the other finds himself prone to misdeeds under the influence and oppression of power.

With the iconoclastic but hilarious tone of the author, Shivpaganj records an anti-thesis to the idyllic description of the villages as depicted by many writers. The work aptly reverberates the real experiences of the author as a bureaucrat in a rural area of U.P. Having a dystopian trait, *Raag Darbari* nails on the tangible picture about Politics and government, education and cooperatives machinery working in the archetypal village Shivpaganj, situated in Uttar Pradesh, the Manchester of politics. Gillian Wright, the translator of the novel in introductory note writes: 'Shrilal Shukla depicts politics at the grassroots, but much of the factions, nepotism, and behind-the-scenes manipulation seems to be familiar to anyone who follows events through the national press.' (Raag Darbari-Wright, 1992 V) The satirical fabric is woven around U.P.'s highly developed bureaucracy for its incompatibility to the common man, incompetence and close networks with politicians. Post independent India aimed at centripetal power but gradually it turned out to be centrifugal with the formation of gram sabhas, panchayats, and other institutes - the British Raj has been substituted by the village politician. The author writes: 'The monarchy in India has vanished with the independence of India, but it is on just a paper, in fact in every Indian village, "local-raj" is the village politician; in whose praise the Raag Darbari (a classical tune) is sung.' (Raag Darbari-Wright, 1992 VI)

Authoritarianism is the nasty challenge in any society at any place in India as in this village where it continues to function even when the majoritarian instinct is curbed. It is a forced submission to an autocrat accompanied by curbing of individual freedom and civil liberties. A vein of ridicule and satire has been evident from the description of the truck and the same attitude is prolonged to a depiction of events, persons, scenes, and actions. Nay serious matter or conduct becomes farcical by the way the author treats the myopic vision of the people: '....And there, on the edge of the town stood a truck, as soon as you saw it you could tell that the sole purpose of creation had been to rape the roads of India. Like reality, the truck had many aspects. From one point of view, the police could say that it was standing in the middle of the road, the driver could say that it was on the side of the road.' or 'Today the

railway has deceived him. He had left home thinking the local passenger would have been two hours late as usual, but it had only been an hour and a half late and had left without him.' (Raag Darbari-Wright. 1992 p. 1) This is an everyday scene in India.

During the British colonial era, Gandhiji advocated for boycotting foreign goods and to adopt indigenous things and Khadi clothes were an eminent part of it as to encourage hand-spun clothes to remove unemployment and make the nations self-reliant. Khadi grew as an ideology and an emblem of self-reliance, purity, will, transparency and dignity, however, in the contemporary era it has been a metaphor of hypocrisy, corruption, and disloyalty as it has become an off-the-record dress-code for politicians. Their adherence to wearing khadi is just to nurture a misconception of Indians that if he is wearing khadi he is unscrupulous. The Gandhian era marked it as an identity of a pure, uncorrupted innocent hearted man, but now its innocence is molested by the politicians. The truck driver says 'Come off, no sensible men do wear khadi. Only politicians, plain cloth men and fools wear it' (Raag Darbari -Wright 1992, p.4)

*Raag Darbari* is a critique of Cooperatives in India. Shukla sarcastically writes: 'Whatever I describe in the book, for example, the working of the cooperative union was the kind of thing that was common knowledge. In fact, one of the criticisms of *Raag Darbari* when it first appeared was that it didn't say anything new- it is just described what everybody knew already.' (Raag Darbari-Wright 1992 X)

In spite of their substantial beliefs, the new breed of politicians, police, and scholars don't make any change to society, but under the cover of power mechanism, they just 'skim the cream' i.e., enrich themselves by mitigating the predatory element of their power abuse. Post-Independence government postulated the idea of cooperatives to ensure the command over individual resources to the peasantry and to eliminate the evil of intermediary in villages of India. The cooperation is the core of such an organisation leading to autonomy in democracy. But Bureaucratic intrusion in the form of Vaidyaji has vilified the new paradigms and changing contours as it is identified with all types of unscrupulousness \_ embezzlement, cheating, misuse of government fund and so on. This can be illustrated with an incident of embezzlement in the cooperative union. Union supervisor Ram Swarup loads sacks of wheat (that were for the villagers of Shivpalganj) and runs away to another village. The director of the union, once, while having head massage finds Ram but does not catch him. On reaching Shivpalganj he tells Vaidyaji about the incident and the latter decides to arrange a meeting to discuss how to catch the convict. The committee resolves that the government should grant them the compensation for 8000 rupees, the supervisor has caused to them. This way the cooperative union ran!

Even after decades, the situation is dismal, A Report of the High- Powered Committee on Cooperatives, May 2009 released by the Ministry of Agriculture Government of India notes: 'The Committee concluded that cooperatives have not been given due importance, despite the emphasis laid by the Planning Commission and Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru on developing cooperatives as a third important sector of the economy. The Committee is convinced of the need for uniformity in cooperative legislation that would respect the autonomous and democratic nature of cooperatives. It also feels that there is a need for a higher Authority to ensure that State Cooperative Societies Acts follow the Model Cooperative Act and that any transgression in this regard is justifiable' (High powered committee, 2009 p. 5). 'Cooperative politics 'is the other dimension, which Shrilal Shukla accentuates on. Power politics and power concentration within the family. In other words, there is a special kind of 'cooperative politics' in the major cooperative societies, as Vaidyaji gradually gets devoid of his political influence and gets aware of with the new inspector's transfer recommendation rejection. He decides to resign from the director's position. The annual meeting of Cooperative Union takes place and Badri takes the position of his father and thus becomes the new director. In this context, Daniel Thorner, a researcher of cooperatives in India states:

"In quite a few places the people whom I met were anxious to impress upon me the importance of the heads of their cooperatives. They took pride in telling me that these cooperators were big men In trade, in Government contracts, in rice-milling, in land-holding,

and in local politics. In general, I found that the heads of cooperatives were the big people of the villages and that they had their fingers in many other pies as well as cooperation.” (Thorner, 1964, p. 16)

A favourite target of the author are the courts which have been the cause of complaint about the common man ever since the 1850s when the administrator Sleeman visited villages in what is now U.P. and found people confounded by the corruption and complications of the newly introduced British legal system. Shukla portrays the functioning of courts by delineating the case of Langar who has filed a case for land grabbing. It reveals how bargaining for bribe takes place to settle down the case. No compromise is made even after the interference of other officials. Langar returns back and hopes that his case will be settled someday by Divine. The sharp-edge satire is seen in the phrase ‘Kaurilla brand Justice’ – a masterly representation aided with the story of a Nawab’s prince. The principal says that in village kaurilla-brand justice exists. He says, ‘Whatever kind of court you require, you can find.’ and adds, ‘If a kaurilla brand, low bred man once gets to a court that is higher than his status, he will be led in destitute’ (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p. 169)

The evil enjoys heyday as villagers freely indulge in gambling flourishing under the kind eye of the police. The managing director of the Gambler’s union of Shivpalganj was arrested once a year just to maintain the record as per the deal with the sub-inspector. Police, Politician, and Pradhan are considered omnipotent, as Jognath, the manifold culprit gets bail with the recommendation. A murderer can escape charges with the help of bribery. Radhelal is famous for bearing false witnesses to any offense. ‘This witness forms an essential link in the legal chain... Because in the court, judgments are reached on the basis of knowledge but on the basis of law and no matter what one might feel about Pandit Radhelal’s testimony, the law would find it genuine. (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p. 170) It is a court where Chhote comes to ‘testify for Police against Jognath’. Nobody succeeds to defy Jognath of his crime and the sub-inspector, who had had Jognath arrested is now forced to pay a fixed amount (which is quite high) to Jognath.

Education is envisaged as the driver of growth but the Indian education system has become a farce. In fact, today’s research is twice as spiteful as the shared knowledge is pocketed to private, resulting in the whirlpool of the same barricading something innovative or new. Hallak and Poisson (2002) indicate, “corruption in the specific sphere of education...affects not only the volume of educational services but also equity in education and public confidence in educational systems.” (‘Overview’,2005) The author notices that it has nothing to do with originality or any self-involvement in finding something innovative. He discernibly uses his comic take off by using the rich linguistic apparatus of phrase to achieve the comic topping as icing on the cake of satire. He writes: ‘What are you doing these days, sir?’ ‘..... I am digging up the grass. In English, you call it research.’ (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.3) Highlighting the intensity of pathetic situation of the system he opines, ‘The present education system is like ‘Pariah Bitch lying on the road which anyone can kick’. (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.6)

Shrila Shukla harshly criticizes education system in villages by depicting Changamal Vidyalaya, which serves as the cluster of corruption. Various loopholes in ‘Changamal Vidyalaya’ are indebted to politics, the very foundation of it is falsehood, corruption and usurping. Nobody seems devoted to teach or to study, the teachers are involved in non-teaching activities and the principal is corrupted. Shrilal Shukla makes Rupam speak: ‘You don’t know the condition of the college. It is the den of louts and layabouts.’ (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.96) The masters have given up teaching and just play politics. Khanna master supports by Ramdin, the opponent of Vaidyaji do he is also interested in getting him out of the college. Malaviya says that principle wastes government’s money. At this Gayadin says, ‘It’s not right to get so upset over the public money. In any case, it’s bind to be wasted.’ (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.230) A report on Corruption in the Education sector in India by UNESCO’s international institute of Educational planning study mentions 25% teacher’s absenteeism is found in India which is among the highest in the world.

Fractionism and hazardous college building are the example of substantial ridicule as students are more active in any other job than study. They are grouped under two, principal and Khanna. Again, Shrilal Shukla strikes back: ‘Vedanta is a part of our tradition, and the meaning of fractionism can be drawn from Vedanta, fractionism is also our tradition. Both are our cultural heritage. That is why we travel to Europe by air, but get an astrologer to draw up our programme first..... In exactly the same way we accept

democracy we have learned from a western education' (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.187) The people like Rangnath feels much at this degradation but they are considered: 'Educated people in India occasionally become afflicted with certain disease which is known as "crisis of conscience' (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.273) Lack of amenities is another aspect which is described as: 'the students sitting for their immediate exams could say, 'we are more advanced than Tagore's university at Shantiniketan. It may try to recapture the tradition and hold its classes in models of village architecture, but we are genuine Indian students. We have no idea what electricity is, what tap water is. What a pucca non-mud floor looks like or what is meant by sanitary fitting? We have even had our western education in an Indian tradition and so, behold today we are still just as close to nature as ever" (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.241)

Shukla tells how the young generation is becoming lazy and workless. Politicians build colleges to prepare their ground **'for the next state assembly or parliamentary polls and their main achievement was to exploit teachers and government grants.'** (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.168)

Another issue Shrilal Shukla interrogates is 'brain drain' a recent practice in India. "Indian doctors and other professionals go to abroad in search of opportunity and wealth. 'India produces more poets than doctors, it produces doctors or engineers, they will truly be engineers or doctors when they go to America or England but some initial work – the take-off stage is to be done here.' (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.223) The dreary picture of Indian rural education system continues when it is said that Rupan is studying in 10<sup>th</sup> class for ten years, just to preserve his rule over the students' fraternity.

The author delineates the pathetic situation of farmers too. India is called a land of agriculture. A Hindi song celebrates it as "*Mere Desh ki dharti son ugle , ugle hiremoti*" but is India same? What about farmers of India? Farmers and farming have succumbed to Industrialisation, globalisation, privatisation, new economic policy. The one who was considered the 'father of the world' has been devoid of his own livelihood, due to oft-quoted reasons, as a consequence driven towards suicide. Local merchants and international merchants with local government have been playing the major role.

Indian politics is arduous of its type where the majority of politicians are travelling in the same boat. Power is a blind game where one can't play with eyes open. The decision is based on the absence of mind and is to be implemented with blindfolded. The history paves evidence of getting power by snatching it or by killing kith and kin, power is not a slave of emotions, it has to be emotionless. Politics never has been a slave to emotions, it embraces cold-blooded men. Politics seizes simplicity, innocence, and modesty. Apparently, soft-natured politician is none the less than a terror incarnated. It's not a cup of tea for a layman. Life is a right for everyone. But it has two sides, rights as well as duties to it. A politician is alike to actors, both have to show their talents on the stage. One showcases his talents for clapping and the other for voting. Both have scriptwriters, and both are having a different personality on the stage and backstage or off the stage. But some politicians act as both, as a long queue of people come to them charmed by their personality, oratory or ideology.

In the matter of politics, the village has a miscarriage of morals and values accompanied by justice. Both the opposite parties in the village, Vaidyaji and Ramdin are always involved in cat and dog game. Their gameplay is criticised by the author as 'bribery, theft, dacoity, now they've all become the same. It's communism.' (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.301) Power hungry Vaidyaji always contrives to get the power by hook or crook. He is severely criticised: 'During the British Raj he had revered the British. In the days of Indian Government, he had begun to revere Indian rules. He was the oldest servant of the nation. He represents the hundreds of great men who lived in the capital to serve the country. Like others, he also has vowed that he would grow old when he would die'. (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.68) The principle of democracy is to pin down the opponents through the power of will. The political leaders endure their opponents with enormous politeness. The opposition keeps on talking nonsense and the leadership quietly plays its game. No one else is affected by anyone else.

Even the village council election was a kind of farce. Shukla writes: 'Vaidyaji was greatly interested in it because he believed in "Village uplift" and knew the situation as "some people have just grabbed the village's wasteland, and the Pradhan definitely took bribes. The council had no money and the Pradhan had definitely embezzled it. The village had become filthy and the Pradhan was



definitely the son of a pig. The police had prosecuted several people on complaints from the Pradhan from one could only conclude that he had now become a police agent. The Pradhan had been granted a license for a shotgun, which was definitely loaned out to the decoits' (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.243)

Shukla confirms that the environment plays a decisive role in forming human typos as the corrupted rule has made almost every character the same in the novel. Aberration from law can enrage the despotic ruler and so survival is sought by deceit and ingratiating himself with the ruler as Sanichar, a pradhan claims himself to be just the 'servant' of Vaidyaji. In fact, he as an emissary through and around whom Vaidyaji could spin power. Sanichar, the elected Pradhan says: 'I accept only Vaidyaji Pradhan and as consider this shop his, it's just that I am sitting in it. Look at me as a tenant'. (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.135) The author has shown the great skill in the depiction of various events and abstract ideas, again the force behind it is satire. The dream of Vaidyaji on Democracy is a marvelous piece of satire.' He saw democracy squatting on the ground next to his wooden bed, his hands folded in supplication, his face looked like a ploughman's and he could not even speak good Hindi, Let alone, English -----Democracy called him 'sir'...' master' and appealed to him, saying....." my clothes are in rags, and I'll be soon necked . I'm ashamed to come before anyone in this state, therefore Oh! Vaidyaji Maharaj, give me clean dhoti to wear.' (Raag Darbari, Wright 1992 p.260)

They all are the same, no one can afford to cross Vaidyaji. In fact, the political and administrative system seemed to be inherited from the British who created it to run the empire. Shukla very well depicts how government grant is used for acquiring personal motives. Kalika Prasad's profession was spending government grants and loans. He lived in government money and for government money. Thus, he has a lot of money and can also arrange money for him by unfair means. Ramadhin has a well dug which has already been dug, however this time it is registered "officially as 'Well Constitution Scheme'. 'It has a political plot to extract good seized grant." The election by three different methods- the Ramnagar Method, the Nevada Method, and the Mahipalpur Method is the worst example of the annihilation of democracy.

#### **Conclusion:**

Furnished by a vernacular fervour the linguistic fabric greatly opens up to the intention of the novelist. The social set up of the novel takes us to the tour of a dystopian world. Where we cannot remain detached with it, sometimes either getting astonished or the other time repulsive and feeling pity. The socio-political and educational cladding of the country is tarnished with mal-practices. Provincial people hoping for any affirmative change in their lives through new ideals encounters power corruptors: Pradhan, principal, opportunists, court officials, police, convicts, frauds, and charlatans of all sorts who have gone mad in their pursuit of 'the golden calf'. While scorning the systems, Shukla expressed the true disgust toward the class to which the gentry was yielding its position – the growing bourgeoisie. These new 'predators' triumphant through new systems as their thrust for power as their sole aim in life. There are so many lapses to focus on and to do away with, in the present day, its failure is causing us lives. Neither these revelations are unknown to us nor confined to any specific place or person, although nothing noteworthy on any level is resolved and practiced. Our systems are failing, and our country is not really advancing much beyond a certain level. The country basking in the sun has become a part of a curriculum book, but it has been witnessing bleak future of major aspects. The visionaries lack the vision and beneficiaries lack the urge and voice to press for change. Politicians, educationalists, bureaucrats, thinkers, scholars, media and others can greatly influence the situation but they didn't consider it to focus upon as it does not benefit their agendas. These issues are to be treated before the final death knell of their value. Yoshita Singh in her book *Shrilal Shukla's Raag Darbari: Satire in Indian Literature, A Critical Analysis*, rightly notes that: "Infrastructure development, road connectivity, mobile penetration and a level of economic prosperity have undoubtedly altered the landscape of rural India in the seven decades since Independence but strains of social ills of corruption, poverty and illiteracy continue to impact a common man's life in the 21st century as they did in Shukla and Premchand's rendition of life in pre-Independence and post-Independence India" (*Shrilal Shukla's Raag Darbari*, Today News)

The author feels that the new developments in post-independent India have not contributed to the growth of the village rather it has significantly substituted the British rule with the indigenous, in the same fashion. He uses the metaphor of gear-box for the

government as the top gear keeps slipping into the neutral every hundred yards. Freedom has brought nothing new to the people it has simply replaced the previous evil the subsequent.

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