



THE VOICES OF THE REPRESSED:

PROBING THE PALIMPSEST OF SARADINDU BANDYOPADHYAY'S "BISHKANYA"

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Abstract: This paper seeks to look at the politics of selective representation and characterisation in Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's 'Bishkanya' (1938) within the context of colonial modernity, resistance, nationalist self-fashioning and identity formation in the early 20th Century with the rise of nationalist consciousness. It employs a close reading of the text aided by a postcolonial intersectional reading as part of its theoretical framework. The paper is unique in its in-depth analysis of the highlighted text, with a special focus on the character, unearthing the propagandist ideology of nationalist discourse embedded within the text, which has not been adequately researched. The paper argues that 'Bishkanya' is an attempt of nationalist identity formation with its problematic exclusionary politics and 'postcolonial subalternization.'

Keywords: Poison damsel, subalternization, feminism, postcolonial study, intersectionality, politics of representation.

I

'Bishkanya' is a story authored by Saradindu Bandyopadhyay. It was first published in the year 1938. The current rendition has been collected from the anthology of historical fiction of Saradindu Bandyopadhyay published by Ananda publishers (Bandyopadhyay, 2021). Set in the backdrop of the reign of Shishunag Dynasty of Ancient India, this historical romantic fiction reiterates the tragic story of Ulka, a 'poison damsel', brought up to seek revenge against the atrocities meted out on her adoptive father and birth mother. However, she meets an untimely tragic end after falling in love with her enemy against whom she had once sought revenge. She sacrifices herself to save her lover. The narrative apparently problematises the concept of poison damsel and gender norms in the interesting narration of a retrocognitive narrator. The paper seeks to problematise this very problematisation and attempts to bring to the fore the politics of representation and national self-fashioning that lies underneath the narrative. This has been done by adopting a postcolonial

approach of ecocriticism, gender study, feminism, and, intersectional reading. With this end in view, this paper has used Pramod K Nayar's book, *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*, Swarnalatha Rangarajan's book, *Ecocriticism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies* and *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* by J. A. Cuddon as source resources for the basic theoretical framework of postcolonial reading.

The paper is divided into seven sections. After this introductory discussion in Section I, Section II makes a brief literature review that reveals the research gap. It poses the research questions and puts forward its research arguments. Sections III to VI discuss various aspects of the problem establishing the research argument. The discussion is wrapped up in the concluding Section VII.

II

In spite of the ever-surging popularity of his historical romantic fictive novels, Bandyopadhyay's historical stories remain under-researched. Within the constraints of time and scope of this paper, the researcher has managed to excavate two research theses in Bengali literature on Bandyopadhyay's historical novels by Mausumi Chaudhuri and Srestha Kundu. The former's Ph.D. thesis, *Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's Itihas Ashrayee Kathasahitya* deals primarily with the historicity and narrative aspects of Bandyopadhyay's major historical novels. The latter's thesis titled, *Bangla Sahitye Saradindu Bandyopadhyay (1899-1970) Sahityakritir Mulyan* contains a single chapter dedicated to the historical novels in her larger corpus of discussion on Bandyopadhyay's body of fiction.

Chattopadhyay (2025) deals exclusively with the text under discussion. It provides a feminist reading focusing on Ulka, the chief female protagonist. The concept of 'poison damsel' and its problematic representation in the text forms the core of her research.

This paper is especially indebted to Partha Chatterjee's renowned book, *Nation, and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories (1993)* for its enriching critical study of the political psychology of colonialism and the counter nationalist project — essential for understanding the nuances of the nationalist psyche in the face of the all-subsuming colonial identity; a tension, palpable in its intercourse with the coloniser, a natural consequence of the colonial encounter.

Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's anthology of historical fiction, *Oitihāsik Kahini Samagra* published by Ananda Publishers is the primary source text for this research paper. The text of 'Bishkanya' is originally in Bengali. The researcher has taken the liberty of self-translating the lines that have been quoted in this paper from the Bengali texts for the benefit of her readers.

As evident from the literature review, the researcher finds a serious lack of in-depth critical engagement with the author's historical stories. This research paper attempts to bridge the lacuna of the former research works by undertaking an exclusive in-depth critical analysis of a single story from the anthology of Bandyopadhyay's historical fiction, 'Bishkanya,' in consideration of the limited scope of the paper.

It questions ideological politics behind selection of subject, conceptualisation, and representation of the characters in the story, written at the historic moment of India's emerging nationalist consciousness. It argues that these techniques serve the purpose of fashioning the dominant nationalist ideological self and formulation of an Indian national identity as a counter-measure and alternative to the colonial discourse of Western modernity. It coincides with the early stage of alternative identity formulation by the native exposed to the colonial modernity in the anticolonial movement which Frantz Fanon in his seminal works *Black Skin, White Mask* and *Wretched of the Earth* puts forward, decoding the psychological aspect of colonisation (Nayar, 2017). The paper problematises this narrative politics of the author arguing that the neo-structure proposed by the author as the "national ideal" is no less problematic than the colonial structure it wishes to counter.

III

The story, at its onset, begins with a description of the supposed '*Chirantani*' (The idea of woman that is supposedly eternal) (Bandyopadhyay, 132). The image so portrayed is that of the stereotypical traditional cult of *asta-nyaika-abhsarikawoman*: dressing in anticipation of the impending union with her lover. Bandyopadhyay claimed of writing 'historical fiction,' and not 'fictionalised history.' His appropriation of ancient Indian Hindu and Budha dynastic time frames have often been commented upon by various scholars including Sukumar Sen in the very preface of the anthology (Bandyopadhyay, 2021). This selective tendency has been attributed to the autobiographical fact of him spending his childhood in the fort city of Munger. However, in Choudhuri's discussion on the tradition of historical romantic fiction in Bengali, she cites a critique of another novelist of the contemporary period, Prof. Bijit Kumar Dutta's critique of Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's historical fiction. He comments that it was highly likely for Bhudeb to select Maratha history for his Nationalist imagination because Marathas rose to power and prominence in the eve of Rajput's surrender to the Mughal rulers. So, if anyone can establish a new India, it is none other than the Marathas (Chaudhuri, 2007). This bit of selection politics may also be applied to Bandyopadhyay in his selection of time frames. One must not forget, he had an entire series of *Shadashib* based on the Maratha expedition against the Mughal domination. In this story, he appropriates the Ancient North Indian Hindu history, the dominant discourse of majority to form the unified myth of the nation. However, this appropriation is deeply problematic. As Gyanendra Pandey suggests, "too often is 'national identity' constructed by the majority, while minorities remain on the fringes of the nation as 'outsiders' even when they are on the inside." (Nayar, 2017, p. 177)

The author often takes recourse to Sanskrit myths from Mahabharata and Ramayana as well as his characterisation deeply bears the mark of his erudition in Indian Classical culture such as *Natyashastra*, *Kamasutra*, and various other Sanskrit literary tradition of Kalidasa. The visual description of the palace garden scene in Bishkanya directly parallels Ulka with Shakuntala (Bandopadhyay, 2021). Ulka is described as an 'accomplished woman', learned in 64 forms of art that were part of Indian system of education for women, the royalty as well as, the *nagarnatis* (state courtesans) and *devadasis*. The additional knowledge of statecraft and art of war further elevates Ulka as a heroic figure, reminding once again of figures like the

valorous Queen of Jhansi. Here we get a direct glimpse of nationalist project of self-fashioning at play. Chatterjee cites Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's "Essays on Family" (1882) where education of the "new woman" is debated. Mukhopadhyay writes,

... the education of women, in particular, is constantly talked about. But we rarely hear of those great arts in which women were once trained— a training which if it had still been in vogue would have enabled us to tide over this crisis caused by injudicious imitation. (Chatterjee, pp. 124-125)

The "injudicious imitation" is result of "the derivative discourse of nationalism" which acknowledges western modernity as mark of progress and desires to formulate an alternative nativized modernity digging the grave of the nostalgic ancient past. This same concern is echoed by Bandyopadhyay in another story "Amitav," where the retrocognitive narrator introduces himself for the first time. The narrator contrasts the "new woman" with that of the ancient past: 'The existing ones, are alive like a cockroach in darkness. In those days, women were as intense and indomitable as fire. They had to be tamed like a wild mare. ... and men? My reflection in the mirror makes me laugh.' (Bandyopadhyay, 2021, p.11)

Clearly Ulka is fashioned as the idealised valorous female figure of ancient India. Her femininity, is distinct from the 'traditional stereotypical woman.' Apparently, it would seem the author, as part of the nationalist project, is trying to counter the victimised dependent image of Indian women with the image of an empowered heroic woman, often through the voice of the *jatismar* (Retrocognitor) narrator, mocking "new women." Even men are not spared. His self-description directly contrasts with that of the ancient male protagonist, Shenjit, an "ideal male figure" apparently. However, these new ideals are highly problematic. One must never forget: "Self-interested men are mindful of the improvement of women only to the extent that it furthers their self-interest; not for any other reason." — Bankim Chandra in an essay comparing women of an old age with those of women of the modern age. (1870) (Chatterjee, 1993, p.135)

IV

The figure of the narrator is interesting. He identifies himself as a male, a clerk serving in colonial India, who is a retrocognitor and a misogynist through and through. These aspects of his identities play significant role in the politics of narration. Such a self-proclaimed misogynist, in whose past lives, every important event revolved around women, when portrays women of such calibre as Ulka and questions satirically the very concept of "poison damsel", the first impression on the reader will automatically be that of being in league with the narrator. His being a male and a misogynist speaking for women at a glance, creates an illusion of "Bishkanya" being a feminist text critical of the patriarchal structure. This aspect is problematised in Chattopadhyay (2025). Beyond the illusion, the reality is, Ulka is a femme fatal. A constructed misfit in patriarchy, who had to die, because patriarchy can never allow such a powerful woman as her, to live.

From the very beginning of her existence the patriarchal knowledge system and its agents in the form

of astrologer, king and ministers define her fate. She is labelled as a 'poison damsel.' The astrologer recommended abandoning of the child who will bring harm to her loved ones. Her own father, Chanda, orders her live burial in the cremation ground along with her mother who "birthed her" (shifting the entire responsibility on woman, in case the offspring is undesirable to the family: the husband altogether withdrawing any responsibility on his part in begetting the child—an absurd belief that holds true till this day in many households of the country). Batukbhatta, the court jester recommended raising the poison damsel only to appoint her as the state courtesan to send the oppositional voices to their doom. Shibomishro raises her for exacting revenge, turning her sexuality into weapon of seduction. She is sent to seduce Shenjit and destroy the Shishunag Dynasty as an act of revenge for her foster father figure. All her education was geared ultimately, not for her empowerment but for manufacturing a biological weapon for the service of patriarchal forces. Her sexuality is objectified and weaponised.

The system is well aware of the danger of this project—the possibility that any moment the weapon so created might backfire. This acute awareness of its power necessitates the need for restraint. The male gaze overarches the entire narrative reducing her to a serviceable object instrumental to patriarchal cause. 'She heard the thundering ordinance from within: "You are a poison damsel"' (Bandyopadhyay, 2021, p.159). The thundering ordinance from within is nothing but the voice of the patriarchy that she had internalised. She is ideologically interpellated, so much so, that she consented to her own misrepresentation and consequent subjugation. Patriarchy succeeded in making her believe that 'she is a misfit', an idea imposed upon her by the structures. Thereafter she acted befitting her prescribed role as a poison damsel, without questioning, sacrificing herself for its cause. "Dearest, I am a poison damsel!" (Bandyopadhyay, 2021, p.164)

Throughout the story she detoxifies everything that she encounters, but ironically, fails to detoxify her own mind — a mind, heavily poisoned by the precepts of patriarchy. Her first and last act of agency, her suicide, is itself conditioned by patriarchy, enacted to save her male lover and keep her promise to her foster father. All her actions and decisions were ultimately geared towards the service of patriarchy which alone remained intact. The pedestal of tragic heroine on which Ulka is made to sit, her apparent eulogization and the sympathetic gaze of the author narrator is but a farce which forces her either to serve the patriarchy or sacrifice herself for it.

The fashioning of the new woman as part of the reformatory nationalist project is not very different from this. The fashioning of 'Bhadrakumari' is but another such patriarchal project: for nationalism has always been a gendered discourse. Ulka's life somehow resonates with Partho Chatterjee's (1993) instance of Binodini, where a woman, more specifically a misfit woman like actresses (in those days prostitutes were often brought to act because women of genteel household were prohibited from participation on stage, acting then considered as a "dirty job") though are fashioned according to the new taste of the age to serve men, are nevertheless never integrated within the mainstream of the societal discourse. "When she realised that she could be transformed only to fulfil the cultural needs of a class claiming to represent the nation but would not be given the

place of respectability that the class had set aside for its own women, she learned not to believe anymore.” (Chatterjee, 1993, p.153)

Their expression of sexuality becomes a threat to the nationalist discourse which is in reality the old patriarchy served in a new platter. Though Binodini in her autobiography shredded this hypocrisy of the nationalist project, Ulka failed to do so. “... the story of nationalist emancipation is necessarily a story of betrayal. Because it could confer freedom only by imposing at the same time a whole set of new controls, it could define a cultural identity for the nation only by excluding many from its fold; and it could grant dignity of citizenship to some only because others always needed to be represented and could not be allowed to speak for themselves.” (Chatterjee, 1993, p.154)

V

It is not just Ulka. All other characters in the novel are problematic in their representation of the identity that they manifest. Shenjit, for example, is a supposedly ideal man who is a chivalric, masculine ‘bhodrolak’ through and through. Clearly, he is an alternative male figure, countering the hyper barbaric masculinity of the coloniser. It is interesting how male characters are contrasted with each other in the same story. “In postcolonial nations, certain categories of people, cultures, and practices are validated and promoted as national, at the expense of others. This process of “Postcolonial subalternization” suggests a postcolonial anxiety.” (Nayar, 2017, p. 177). The “other” is portrayed with extreme imageries, either animalised (virile and powerful or extremely cunning, shrewd, or cruel)¹ or reduced to “*kimpurush*” (i.e. not man enough, questioning his virility: “the feminine male”)².

Shenjit is desirable. He is described as a virile man with androgynous sensibility, loved by his subject, a benevolent father figure (recurrent emphasis is found of his efficient bird-keeping), a tamer.³ Shenjit is desirable. He is described as a virile man with androgynous sensibility, loved by his subject, a benevolent father figure (recurrent emphasis is found of his efficient bird-keeping), a tamer.³ Shenjit belongs to the same Shishunaga dynasty as Ulka, displaying similar serpentine qualities, yet he goes unpunished for the same acts for which Ulka is punished. She is marked as a transgressor. Lazer highlights this point in his article in a different context: “Orestes’ avoidance of retribution for his serpentine nature shows that, in a society in which feminine individuals are often subject to extreme restrictions, masculine individuals are capable of exerting the same qualities that their feminine counterparts are punished for without punishment.” (Lazar, 2023, p. 4) Suddenly the trope of a “sexualised woman ensnaring a man with her sexual charm” turns to “a virile man engaged in the conquest of the woman,” both of which are stereotypical patriarchal tropes of literature. Thus, the narrative though questions some aspects of patriarchal double standards, never really succeeds in breaking out of it. It moves round and round within the same power dynamics. This is evident from two statements quoted from the text in the words of the “apparently liberal” ideal male figure, Shenjit: “The token of Vaishali’s cordiality, in whichever form may it be: a woman or a man, merits our warm welcome.” (Bandyopadhyay, p. 148)

Again: ‘In bitter hatred Shenjit uttered — “I may as well forgive the affected” manliness” of a woman, but her immodesty is unbearable!’ (Bandyopadhyay, 2021, p.154) The contradiction in the two statements is self-explanatory. Also worth noting is Shenjit’s awareness of his position of power against Ulka. “Nationalist construction of woman once again shows how, in the confrontation between colonialist and nationalist discourses, the dichotomies of spiritual/material, home/world, feminine/masculine, while enabling the production of a nationalist discourse which is different from that of colonialism, nonetheless remains trapped within the framework of false essentialism.” (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 194)

VI

This was just one aspect of the characterisation—that of the gender. But that is not the only problematic issue of representation in the text. “Huggan and Tiffin... argue that major theoretical concerns of postcolonialism, such as racism, miscegenation, and otherness, ‘offer immediate entry points for a re-theorising of the place of animal in relations to human society.’” (Rangarajan, 2022, p. 95)

Caste, race, and class are other aspects of the discourse. Bandyopadhyay, in a way is very conventional in his representation. The “other” in the story, shown in the form of minor characters are almost flat in nature, without any psychological depth. In his nationalist identity formation project, the other is merely subservient to highlight the goodness of the self. This reminds one of the postcolonial arguments that the post independent elite masters are no different from their colonial counterpart. “Women, ‘lower’ castes and classes, ethnic minorities became the ‘Others’ within the postcolonial nation-state.” (Nayar, 2017, p. 177) The nationalist discourse was not just an act of subversion but also an act of mimicry of the Western coloniser. So, it might as well turn out to be equally oppressive. “Chatterjee argues that natives transform the Western idea of nation in three stages... anti colonial nationalism is built on the conceptual framework and ideas of progress and history given by the West.” (Nayar, 2017, p. 177)

The animalisation of the other in this respect, is disturbingly visible. Chanda, the tyrant king, that contrasts with Shenjit, the ideal benevolent king, is demonised. He is described as with the “Nature of demon within the physique of a bull” (Bandyopadhyay, 2021, p. 133). The very name (the narrator says the original name of the king was long forgotten) Chanda smacks of a caste identity — *chandal*, a profession that engages in cremating dead bodies. Often associated with cruelty for their engagement with the acts of public assassination and dealings with corpses, *chandals* are an outcaste, the lowest of the low in caste hierarchy. This association conveniently forgets the oppressive caste system that forces a group of people to the margins, dehumanising them, reinforcing stereotype to perpetuate oppression over generation. Chanda is shown to behave like an animal, and treated like a chained animal during his captivity.

The idea of his punishment comes from another low caste man, one who has been identified as a nose-less drunkard (nose-less can mean both, an indigenous identity, non-Aryan, typically identified by their blunt nose or a shameless person.). He conceives the cruel treatment that should be meted out on Chanda. It is important to note the recurrent emphasis on physicality and skin-tone of the “other.”: the blackness of the

individual and association of it with villainy. For example, the mixed bred retainer who attempts to assault Ulka, has a distinct class-race identity. He is a black skinned *Shobor* (hunter), an *Anarya*⁴, in this context, becomes a term of insult.

There is also a reference of a “black man with Bhim like physique,” possibly a Bhil, (a mountain tribe) anointing Shenjit as the new king with his blood. This traditional ritual is pregnant with symbolism and caste politics that we shall not delve into at present. Instead, in contrast, it is important to note the portrayal of Shenjit and his close associate, Batukbhatta, the witty court jester. While the former belongs to the Kshatriya class, the latter is a Brahmin. This caste-class nexus is significant and it makes one wonder if caste was one of the other reasons that became the driving force behind the narrative’s tragic ending. Ulka was not just a ‘poison damsel’, but also an illegitimate daughter of a tyrant and a servant, unlike Shenjit who is a legitimate ruler brought into power with generic consent. Therefore, Ulka is triply marginalised on the basis of not just her being labelled as the poison damsel, but also because of her gender and caste.

VII

There are two major female characters in the entire text: Ulka and her mother Morika. Others are the maids, *sakhis*, and the Greek female warriors (identified by their blue eyes, a reference that recurs throughout the text), the *Yavani* sena— who guard the inner sanctum of the royal palace. They find passing reference in the text. Perhaps Bandyopadhyay sought to highlight the prominence of women in the professions traditionally associated with masculinity, hence the emphasis on warrior women. However, if we contrast Ulka against them, we observe in spite of her efficiency in holding arms, Ulka retains the fire of femininity and sexuality which *Yavani* Sena do not. They too express “feminine yearnings and emotions,” yet they are not sexually potent beings. Sexuality as strategic weapon is explicitly mentioned in the last scene of the story where Shenjit directly compares her ability in warfare with her sexual potency. “I have already had a taste of your *astravidya*, this heart still languishes under the impact of your attack.” (Bandyopadhyay, 2021. p. 161) This reinforces the stereotypes of women as seducers and femme fatal. Patriarchy, like a coloniser, is at the same time attracted and terrified of her sexuality (women compared with earth, nation and resource), hence seeks to contain it.

It is important to understand how power dynamics operate. Sibamishra (Shibomisra comes to be referred to Shibamishra after developing scars from the fox bite in the cremation ground. He supposedly begins to look like a fox, which did not make him unhappy. Rather he revelled at his new name as it smacked of the nature of shrewdness and cunning traditionally attributed to fox.) It is Morika who saved him in the cremation ground. It is disturbing to note that despite his verbal gratitude to her, all he thought of at that moment was acquiring the ‘poison damsel’ for extracting his own revenge. Saving the life of his saviour did not cross his mind. He asked her to bestow Ulka at the moment of her death to raise her. Not once did he reveal his real motive to the dying mother. Yet, 16 years later, Shibamishra provokes Ulka for “avenging her mother and her foster father.”—a father who raised her as a sacrificial goat, a killer to serve his own self-interest. One wonders if Morika, if alive, would have really wanted such a life geared towards revenge and hatred for her daughter.

She never asked for avenging herself. Bandyopadhyay portrays Morika as an “ideal mother figure,” who could not give up on her child, a protector, life giver, both to Ulka and Shibamishra. She died before giving consent to Ulka’s adoption. It is doubtful, whether she would have consented at all had she known his real motive.

Shibamisra seals the child’s fate with her nomenclature: Ulka (Comet, a ball of fire that blazes only to be extinguished). All the father figures throughout the text are problematic— even Shenjit, who is keeper of the birds and animals, their metaphorical father. He keeps them in chains, be it Puskar or Bimboshto, the Sukh bird. The most harrowing scene comes at the end of Section-1 of the text where Morika lies dead, a pack of hungry jackals gradually closing into her. “Morika’s lifeless corpse lay in the great crematory ground. The jackals that had once left on her arrival, returned from every direction.” (Bandyopadhyay, 2021, p. 138)

It parallels the scene of Shibamishra encircled by the same jackals and marks a fundamental contrast from Morika. In spite of being his saviour, he left her corpse at the mercy of the scavenging animals. The scene is disturbing in Shibamisra’s palpable disrespect towards his saviour. She did not even receive a proper burial, rather presumably torn from limb to limb, a horrific death. Her life meant nothing before her death, neither after it. The jackals, like the males in her life, fed on her, sans a shred of humanity. Her identity, was reduced to being the “mother of a poison damsel.”

Ulka fared no better than her mother. Neither her birth father nor her foster father are in any way better than the other. Perhaps Chanda was better. He ordered her death at birth for being an ominous one instead of choosing the alternative offered by Batuk of using her as a state courtesan to lure and entrap his enemies. The narrator criticised Chanda for his cruelty. But Shibamishra is even more terrifying. He pushed her towards her certain death only after using her life for his self-interest. The apathy in his narration of her birth history is unsettling. There is not an ounce of attachment for a daughter whom he had raised for 16 years. Before her departure, he blessed her of “returning to his lap after achieving the desired end.” Ulka, did not return. She did not get what she had desired. The researcher does not aim to pass any value judgement. Yet, perhaps at the end, her suicide was an act of futile resistance and faint protest, against the father figure.

Her death is orchestrated by this patriarchal narrative and structure. Her story was forced to be tragic to serve the interest of the male author engaged in a new nationalist patriarchal project. The conception of Ulka is a political act of valorisation to reinforce certain stereotype of the “eternally love thirsty feminine nature” (Bandyopadhyay, 2021, p. 154) who sacrificed herself for her love. “The essentializing of the woman is central to the freedom struggle. Nationalism is always a gendered project.” (Nayer, 2017, 174.)

Shenjit, the male heir of the dynasty continued to rule. Yet, her claim to the throne, despite her being the daughter of the former king, direct heir to the throne, with no less potential to reign than Shenjit in any aspect, was never acknowledged. Marrying to the cousin was common in those days. But in spite of all the clamour for equality, Ulka was denied her rightful share of power. She was forced to die, sacrificed once again for carrying on the male supremacy. Bandyopadhyay thus defuncts the idea of femme-fatale as evil, only to show they are goddesses of liberty, who sacrifice themselves for the greater good of patriarchy: and in

contemporary context, for their nation. “A national identity... unites people under one umbrella, provides them with sustaining form/ story, and asks them to function together in the name of the nation. national identity is freely accepted and assimilated by the people.” (Nayer, 2017, p. 176) Therefore, Ulka is idealised. And Nationalism remains a discourse of deception and betrayal to many at whose expense the project spread its new oppressive roots replacing colonial oppression with a more invisible form of violence and violation.

VIII

The national project so revealed shows a lopsided progress. As Nayar suggests, nationalism manifests itself in two components in literature and art: First, it provides writers with a “pre-colonial past” to define the nation. Second, it helps in visualising a shared destiny, common to all people sharing the common space of a nation. (Nayer, 2017, p.176) Nation is predominantly a masculinist space, a land of fraternity and nationalism, a gendered discourse that thrives on essentialising women and homogenising the marginalised. Rarely it is a space where sorority or equal camaraderie may ever bud. ‘Bishkanya’ is part of the *jatismar* style of narrative where the narrator, a clerk reminisces the glorious past. The element of nostalgia and romanticisation of multiple problematic dynamics in ‘Bishkanya,’ through its narrative politics, makes it a product of the early phase of Nationalism project where new Indian nationalist identity was being forged at the cost of homogenisation and suppression of the subaltern voices.

The story of “Bishkanya,” is by no means, an adequate text for unveiling the intricacies and nuances of narrative politics that connect all his historical stories taken together. However, an intersectional postcolonial reading of the text does give a glimpse of its very interesting take on the problematic concept of the “poison damsel” that directly brings the power-play of gender, caste, and class politics to the fore. This research paper does not claim to have made any exhaustive discussion on this text. Rather, this is just the tip of the ice berg. The researcher concludes this paper with the hope that further researchers shall be enthused to initiate further researches to bridge the lacunas of this paper.

Notes:

1. Rangarajan (2022) refers to Rob Nixon for his critique of Indra Sinha’s *Animal*, where he uses Julia Kristeva’s concept of abject to describe the foulmouthed Animal, the outcast and absolute ‘other’ who exists on the fringes of society. The same may be applied in this case.
2. Ulka’s addressing of Batuk as a “feminine male” is not surprising because, in spite of her erudition and apparent empowerment, she is steeped in patriarchal ideology where she believes herself to be a misfit amongst other females. Therefore, in her standard, the masculinist perception of manhood, comes as no surprise to the readers.
3. Almost sexual, he tempers Ulka as well as his elephant Puskar without resorting to violence: The description is almost that of a sexual conquest over the feminine body: one must not forget, “*hastini*” is a feminine type described in *Kamasutra*, one with high sexuality thereby equating the elephant with Ulka. However, Puskar being a male behaving all shy like a stereotypical woman adds to Shenjit’s virility.
4. The non-Aryans of India are called *Anarya*.

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