



The Eroding Edifice of Education in *Raag Darbari* by Srilal Shukl

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Abstract

This paper explores how Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari* uses satire to expose the dismal state of India's rural education system, focusing on the fictional Changamal Vidyalaya. Shukla critiques the corruption and inefficiency plaguing educational institutions, which prioritize politics and personal gain over teaching and learning. Through characters like Ruppan, who has been stuck in the 10th grade for ten years, and teachers more involved in politics than academics, the novel underscores the systemic decay of education post-independence. Changamal Vidyalaya, founded with the idealistic goal of uplifting the nation, ironically becomes a symbol of dysfunction. The lack of infrastructure-classrooms used as storage, no access to electricity or proper sanitation-and irrelevant, rote-based curricula highlight the failure of rural education. Teachers often teach subjects outside their expertise, further diminishing the quality of learning. The novel also critiques societal attitudes, including patriarchy, as seen in the limited portrayal of women's education. Shukla emphasizes the superficial pursuit of education, with aspirations centered on studying abroad rather than contributing locally. Politicians exploit schools for electoral gains, turning them into hubs of corruption rather than centers of learning. Through satire and vivid depiction, Shukla portrays education as a microcosm of India's broader socio-political issues, calling attention to the urgent need for reform. *Raag Darbari* remains a powerful commentary on the enduring challenges of governance, morality, and progress in rural India.

Keywords: Eroding, Education, *Raag Darbari*, Srilal Shukl, rural

Introduction

Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari* is a sharp satire on rural India's sociopolitical and cultural conditions in the post-independence era. Set in the fictional village of Shivpalganj, it critiques power struggles within institutions like the Co-operative Union, Village Council, and Changamal Vidyalaya. The novel exposes corruption, caste inequality, decayed social values, and misuse of power, portraying Shivpalganj as a microcosm of India. Education, symbolized by Changamal Vidyalaya, is depicted as pitiable and corrupt, with inadequate infrastructure and teachers more focused on personal gain than teaching. Leaders like Vaidyaji manipulate the system, turning education into a tool for political exploitation. Students remain disengaged, and progress stagnates, exemplified by Ruppan's decade-long stay in 10th grade. Using dark humor and irony, Shukla critiques the disconnect between the promises of modernity and the harsh realities of rural life. His vivid portrayal of systemic flaws highlights the enduring neglect of villages and the persistent challenges of governance and education in India. Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari*, a satirical masterpiece translated into fifteen languages, critiques rural India's

sociopolitical decay post-independence. Published in 1968 and awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1970, the novel draws from Shukla's bureaucratic experiences in Uttar Pradesh. It presents Shivpalganj, modeled after Rae Bareilly, as a microcosm of corruption and systemic dysfunction.

The novel's title, meaning "the melody of court," reflects its deep political commentary. At its center is Changamal Vidyalaya, a crumbling educational institution symbolic of the rural education crisis. Described as decrepit and mismanaged, the college epitomizes how corruption and political manipulation hollow out institutions meant for public welfare. The principal misappropriates government funds while teachers, unqualified and apathetic, prioritize personal agendas over education. Students, disinterested and disengaged, treat education as an afterthought, focusing instead on trivial distractions. Through biting irony, Shukla exposes how rural development stagnates under layered corruption in cooperatives, panchayat, and governance. Changamal Vidyalaya, established ostensibly to uplift society, serves instead as a tool for extracting funds and perpetuating power struggles. Shukla's scathing portrayal of unaccountable leaders and indifferent villagers critiques the

persistent neglect of rural India, where progress remains a distant promise, undermined by entrenched inefficiency and self-interest.

Changamal Vidyalaya as depicted in Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari*. It delves into how the functioning of educational institutions in rural India is influenced by broader socio-cultural and political forces, drawing on contextual evidence from the novel. Furthermore, it investigates how Changamal Vidyalaya Intermediate College serves as a microcosm, offering multifaceted perspectives on the challenges facing educational institutes. The analysis also explores how the critique of education reflects the nation's post-independence condition, utilizing a postcolonial theoretical framework. *Raag Darbari*, Shukla's satirical masterpiece, critiques the administration in newly independent India. The novel intertwines the degradation of rural India with a larger narrative of administrative inefficiency and moral decay. Shukla offers a comprehensive critique of corruption, politics, societal hierarchies, and institutional degradation. Through the portrayal of Changamal Vidyalaya, the author highlights the dire state of education in rural India, emphasizing how it has become a tool for political power play rather than intellectual or moral development.

The college, originally envisioned as an institution to produce "honest doctors and engineers" contributing to national progress, becomes a breeding ground for inefficiency and corruption. The infrastructure is inadequate, with rooms used as storage or shops rather than classrooms. Even basic necessities like clean water, proper sanitation, and electricity are absent. Students ironically state, 'We have no idea what electricity is, what tap water is, what a pucca non-mud floor looks like, or what is meant by 'a sanitary fitting.' (Shukla, 14). The education system is portrayed as purely theoretical and detached from students' real-world needs. Teachers, who lack both expertise and motivation, overly emphasize English, diminishing the importance of other subjects. As Ruppen Babu remarks, 'This country's education system is useless... The masters have given up teaching and just play politics' (Shukla). The curriculum fails to equip students with practical knowledge or skills, creating a dissonance between what they are taught and the realities they face. The very foundation of Changamal Vidyalaya is steeped in irony. The institution was founded to 'inspire the youthful citizens of the nation with great ideals and, by providing them the best education, to make them the means of the country's uplift' (Shukla, 73). Instead, it becomes a hub of factionalism, where positions of power are fought over for political gains. Teachers and administrators vie for influence, using political connections to secure desired roles. For instance, Mr. Khanna, a teacher, aspires to become vice president, leveraging conventions in other schools as justification while employing underhanded tactics to outmaneuver his rivals.

Vaidyaji, a powerful local politician, epitomizes corruption. His manipulations extend to admissions, appointments, and examinations, reducing the college to his personal fiefdom. As Chauhan notes, Ruppen remains in 10th grade for ten years to maintain his influence over the student body (Chauhan, 501). This local politicking mirrors national issues, reflecting the pervasive misuse of institutions for personal and political consolidation in post-independence

India. The character of Ranganath serves as a foil to the village's corrupt reality. Embodying the idealism of educated Indian youth, Ranganath arrives with lofty notions of development and progress. However, he soon realizes the irrelevance of his education in Shivpalganj's murky political and social environment. His bookish knowledge proves inadequate in navigating the corrupt system. Meanwhile, the villagers, including students, prioritize exploiting the system over pursuing the ideals of education.

Through the lens of Changamal Vidyalaya, Shukla critiques the disarray in India's educational and administrative systems. The institution becomes a symbol of the nation's failure to align its post-independence aspirations with ground realities. As the writer observes, 'Vaidyaji treats the Changamal Inter-College management committee, the cooperative society, and the village panchayat as his personal fiefdom, representing, in an intimate way, independent India's 'democratic administrative culture' (Shukla, 23). This depiction reveals how corruption, inefficiency, and moral decay hinder both institutional progress and societal development.

Ultimately, *Raag Darbari* not only critiques the state of education but also provides a mirror to the broader socio-political and moral challenges of post-independence India. Through satire, Shukla underscores the urgent need for reform, exposing the disconnect between lofty ideals and the grim realities of rural life. The students exhibit minimal interest in studying and are frequently distracted by activities outside the classroom, which are inherently more appealing, especially since many schools lack boundary walls. As Shukla describes: "The drivers sitting at the front of the carts were swearing vigorously and at length . . . The oaths and counter-oaths entered the classroom through the window, and provided background music for the boys who were enjoying the drama while studying science" (Shukla, p. 15). This is exemplified by Ruppen Babu, a 10th-grade student for the past three years, who spends his time loitering under the guise of student union work and threatening strikes over minor disagreements.

Factionalism within the college further detracts from academics, encouraging students to prioritize anything but their studies. Students align with either the principal's or Khanna's faction, as demonstrated during the college's annual board meeting to elect a manager. The students wield hockey sticks and cricket bats to intimidate rival factions, while Thakur Balram Singh goes so far as to threaten opponents at gunpoint. These events leave Ranganath feeling guilty, described as being afflicted by a "crisis of conscience" (Shukla, p. 150). However, despite his guilt, Ranganath chooses escapism over action to address these issues. Another telling moment occurs when the principal derides Ranganath, an MA history student, as a fool for his idealistic views. The college also suffers from a lack of basic amenities. As one student remarks, "We are more advanced than Tagore's university at Shantiniketan. It may try to recapture tradition and hold classes in village-style architecture, but we are genuine Indian students. We have no idea what electricity is, what tap water is, what a proper floor looks like, or what is meant by 'sanitary fitting.' We've received our western education in the Indian tradition and remain as close to nature as ever" (Shukla, p. 14). Additionally, the college lacks proper sports facilities

and an agriculture department, which exists solely to collect fees and funds.

Teachers, students, and even the principal are indifferent to the March examinations, as their attention is consumed by the February village council elections. Only the impending arrival of an education ministry official, prompted by a complaint from the opposition, forces them to take the college's condition seriously. Shukla highlights how politicians establish colleges primarily to build support for upcoming state assembly or parliamentary elections. From officials to management, principals, teachers, and students, the attitude towards education is apathetic and alarming. Teachers are often assigned subjects outside their expertise, such as Khanna Master, a history MA, teaching English. The college is likened to "a pariah bitch lying in the road, whom anyone can kick" (Shukla, p. 7), emphasizing its neglected state. The principal, invigilation officer, and teachers in *Raag Darbari* are portrayed as corrupt and apathetic officials who perform their duties only when it suits them. They lack any sense of responsibility toward their roles, the students' futures, or the nation's progress. The text critiques the education system, especially through the lens of postcolonial theory. Post-independence India was expected to embrace modernization and ethical governance, yet the novel reveals how feudal structures persisted, merely reconfigured with bureaucrats and politicians assuming the roles once held by colonial rulers.

The hybrid language of the text, blending high literary Hindi with colloquial speech, reflects the complex identity of postcolonial India. While people honor their traditions and culture, they are simultaneously inundated with ideas of modernity and Western education. Instead of fostering liberation, this clash often leads to stagnation, alienation, and confusion. The novel juxtaposes the idealistic vision of education with the harsh realities of its corruption and misuse. Shukla demonstrates how education has been co-opted by those in power to maintain their control rather than serve as a tool for social mobility or intellectual development.

Teachers, often absent from classrooms, prioritize politics over pedagogy. When they do engage with students, their questions focus on agricultural produce rather than academics, asking students to bring goods for them the next day. The students, in turn, are distracted by the activities outside the classroom, exacerbated by the lack of boundary walls in many schools. This creates an environment where education is treated as an afterthought. Shukla underscores this irony: 'The boys of the Changamal Vidyalaya Intermediate College were well-acquainted with the sports; their ears were twisted until they deposited their sports fees. It was another matter that there were no playing fields in the college.' (Shukla, 54). This stark observation highlights the absurdity of the system, where students are coerced into paying sports fees despite the absence of any sports facilities. The system's primary focus seems to be generating revenue rather than providing quality education. Shukla's scathing critique is epitomized in the metaphor: 'The present education system is like a pariah bitch lying on the road, which anyone can kick.' (Shukla, 6). This vivid imagery portrays the education system as neglected and degraded, open to exploitation by all. The novel also addresses caste prejudices in education. A

character remarks, 'Now the children of sweepers and Chamars are coming to study, so what sort of education can there be?' Yet, Shukla dismantles this prejudice by illustrating how these marginalized students perform better when provided with proper nutrition and education. This narrative reflects the transformative impact of constitutional reforms championed by figures like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, granting equal rights to the oppressed classes. The novel further critiques the erosion of English education's potential. While it originally helped dismantle harmful practices and introduced modern ideas, its current state is hollow and dysfunctional. This decline is humorously reflected when a teacher sarcastically asks, 'How can you learn bloody science without English?' (Shukla, p. 15). Shukla's satire crescendos with a truck driver's blunt statement in the opening chapter: 'The present education system is like a pariah bitch lying on the road which anyone can kick.' (Shukla, p. 6).

Conclusion

This critique emphasizes the lack of vision among leaders and the inertia of those who would benefit from meaningful change. Politicians, bureaucrats, intellectuals, and media figures have the power to enact reforms but often prioritize personal agendas over public welfare. As Singh notes in his analysis of Shukla's work, 'Infrastructure development, road connectivity, mobile penetration, and economic prosperity have undoubtedly altered the landscape of rural India... but corruption, poverty, and illiteracy continue to impact a common man's life in the 21st century as they did in Shukla and Premchand's renditions of life in pre- and post-Independence India' (Singh, Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari*). Through sharp wit and incisive commentary, *Raag Darbari* not only exposes the flaws of the Indian education system but also calls for urgent reform to address its deeply entrenched issues. Shrilal Shukla once remarked, 'There's a shortage of engineers and doctors in India. The reason is that Indians are traditionally poets... They will only truly be engineers and doctors when they go to America or England. But some initial work – the take-off stage – is to be done here. That was the kind of work being done by the Changamal Vidyalaya Intermediate College.' (Shukla, 74). However, Rupan Babu, a student of the Vidyalaya, starkly critiques this ideal, stating, 'This country's education system is useless... The masters have given up teaching and just play politics.' (Shukla, 104). His statement succinctly encapsulates the dire state of the education system and the institution's shortcomings.

Ultimately, Changamal Vidyalaya serves as a powerful symbol of the broader social and political challenges that India faced post-independence. It reflects a systemic failure to deliver quality education while exposing deeper issues of corruption, inefficiency, and neglect within the nation's governance. Through the portrayal of Changamal Vidyalaya, Shrilal Shukla offers a sharp critique of both the educational system and the socio-political realities of rural India, underscoring the urgent need for meaningful reform and transformation.

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