



Harvesting Illusions: Power, Politics and Fabrication of Reality in *Shoes of the Dead*

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ABSTRACT

The research paper “Harvesting Illusions: Power, Politics and Fabrication of Reality in Shoes of the Dead” critically examines the novel Shoes of the Dead by Kota Neelima about the intersection of agrarian distress and political corruption in contemporary India. It provides a powerful commentary on the socio-political issues that pay towards the suicide of the farmers. It mainly focuses on corruption due to the inclusion of politics in the field of farming. India is an agricultural country where agriculture is considered as the backbone of the Indian economy. However, with industrialisation and urbanisation the farming community is mostly unnoticed. This article mainly focuses on the post-truth tactics in the field of farming where the lines between truth and falsehood are blurred, predominantly in politics. It tends to ignore controversial issues in the field of farming in a way that it never occurred. The usage of methodology in this research paper includes literary and theoretical analysis through close reading of the text. It helps to uncover the deep messages that the author projects through her narratives. Analysing the truth and reality portrayed in the novel explores contemporary issues related to truth, misinformation and subjective realities, particularly in political or social contexts. The findings clearly illustrate that the novel engages with political issues and their role in destroying the environment. The research powerfully evaluates the political issues that shape the life of the farmers and the environment where they live.

Keywords: Agriculture, Farmers, Politics, Post-truth

Introduction

In the political sector, post-truth is interpreted as a form of spreading fake news and hiding the truth from the public. The novel *Shoes of the Dead* by Kota Neelima is a political fiction. Kota Neelima is an Indian contemporary author whose works mainly focuses on the issues related to farming and farmers. The research paper tries to examine the post-truth tactics that are used in the field of farming where personal opinions are given more importance by influencing people on what they need to believe. It uses emotive language rather than providing actual evidence to the people. The novel is about Gangiri Bhadra whose

brother committed suicide due to crop failure and the inclusion of politics in denying the compensation money for his death by creating an alternative reality behind his suicide. The research paper also portrays the concept of falsifying statistical data regarding the death of the farmers in order to decline the compensation money. It shed light on the issues that are not spoken in the world outwardly. It shows the inclusion of media behind the false accusations regarding the agrarian crisis. It exposes the true intentions behind the role of institutional powers, which are responsible for the betterment of poor marginal farmers turning against them in order to protect their name and position in the political world. Kota Neelima takes up the courage to expose the problems through her novel *Shoes of the Dead*.

The Turbulence of Power

Post-truth describes a situation where the political world is turned upside down by making distinction between truths and lies. It erodes the trust people have upon the institution of power. According to the Oxford Dictionaries, the term ‘post-truth politics’ was first coined by Steve Tesich in his essay “Nation” published in the year 1992. Post-truth politics can also be termed as post-reality politics. Post-truth became popular especially in the twenty-first century after the introduction of media and technologies. In 2016, it was declared as the international word of the year by the Oxford Dictionaries. Media studies scholar John Hartley uses the term post-truth as the title for a chapter “Journalism in a Post-truth Society,” in his book entitled *The Politics of Pictures*. In the context of politics, post-truth involves spreading misinformation, intentional rumours and fake news. Despite the political parties, government sectors, news media, everyone can spread fake news.

The term post-truth can be applied in many contexts, but scholars and popular commentators grasp it as the only feature of post-truth instead of distinguishing between true or false. In the political sector, post-truth is interpreted as a form of spreading fake news and hiding the truth from the public. The political people often spread fake and false news to manipulate the public. Erosion of truth seems to be a major consequence of post-truth in the political world. Post-truth politics also focuses on ignoring something that can be trivial, controversial by making up in a way that such things never happened. This can happen due to the act of using the power against the powerless and ignoring their problems claiming as though the issue will become more controversial.

The statistical data regarding the problems faced by the people or about their needs is used as actual evidence to indicate the life of people and as a representation of truth which is misused. Without having any sort of concern towards the people who selected them, the politicians either destroy the data regarding a particular problem or they change the data

according to their wellness. This is an indication that for political minds, their position and reputation is more important than the lives of the poor people. They often run for wealth and identity that would keep up their reputation alive and their status without being ruined.

Post-truth politics are skillfully employed in Kota Neelima's novel *Shoes of the Dead*. The novel represents the issue of spreading false news, hiding data and giving misinformation to ruin one's life. The story of the novel alternates between two people Keyur Kashinath, a powerful politician and Gangiri, a poor farmer. Keyur Kashinath is caught with an issue of raising number of farmer's suicide in his constituency, only after when he gets appointed as the MP. In order to protect himself from the turmoil, Keyur calls for an unofficial meeting to discuss about the solutions to stop farmers from committing suicide. Such kind of unofficial meeting is even a clear indication that things are not going in a right way and the truth is to be hidden. When it comes to politics, such an unofficial meeting is not a rare one especially in the context of the novel. In the meeting the members of the suicide committee discuss about the statistical data regarding farmers suicide, providing various reasons for suicide happening in his constituency. Whatever findings said in the meeting are not facts but false lies.

Like some politicians, Keyur spoke better when addressing a small crowd rather than a large crowd. Before we begin, I would like to reiterate what I had mentioned to you all over phone two days ago. This is an informal meeting and I would request you to keep everything said here off the record. He politely repeated No one is to be quoted. (6)

The major issue that gives space for the post-truth politics to come in is the suicides by farmers. It is an undeniable fact that people elect leaders to guide them hoping that all their difficulties will come to an end. They promise the people for a better future, but once they get the position which they were hoping for, all their promises turn into lies. The public without knowing the after effects, give their entire life in the hands of such public servants by casting votes. This is very much evident in the novel *Shoes of the Dead*, where Keyur Kashinath is appointed as the MP of Mityala district. He gets the position as a MP only because of two cunning people Lambodar, the maha sarpanch of Mityala and Durga Das, a member of suicide committee. These two men make the farmers elect Keyur as an MP saying that he will help them to improve their standard of living and to get rid of all their problems regarding farming and to overcome their poverty. They also force the farmers to vote for Keyur by giving them some money.

I would not have identified myself with these people, he gently said. That is not to say I don't need their help because I know I would have not won without the votes these two men got for me, by force and funds. But I would have chosen farmers to be my

allies. Or the labourers on farms, the tenants or any of the underprivileged. In almost every single speech I made, I promised to help the poor and marginalized sections of the society. I need to stand by that promise. I must support the poor labourers, farmers, widows and orphans, Keyur stressed, especially because I was funded by sarpanches and moneylenders. (148-9)

These situations prove that the standards for truth have disappeared. People holding the highest positions in the political sphere report false claims in order to influence public opinion and to increase support. Denying the compensation money will surely make the farmer's family sell their land, the only source of their income in order to close their debts. The politicians claim that the farmers are committing suicide only with an intention to get the compensation money and so by stopping it will prevent the farmers from committing suicide. This indicates how cruelly the farmers are treated and how the things are being hidden without being exposed to the public. Only the things that favour politicians are shown in the media.

Role of Media in Shaping Perception

Though the media is in favour of the political parties, some journalists like Nazar Prabhakar try to showcase the reality by writing articles about what is actually happening to the farmers and who is behind such things. Prabhakar is an indicator of reality who is against the policy of post-truth politics. He tries to portray the reality behind the political world and the suffering that are undergone by the poor marginal farmers. Nazar speaks in favour of the farmers during the committee meeting. He questions the committee members disapproval of suicides as normal deaths just as in a way that normal deaths are being claimed as suicides by the farmers.

Just as you claim that “normal” deaths are being called distress suicides by farmers, Nazar continued, you might have dismissed farmers suicide as “normal” deaths in the past. There is political control in keeping suicide figures low. It disproves debt distress and shows the success of the policies. Figures that make governments look bad are really fudged. (16)

Justice is one of the undeniable things, and to get it Gangiri becomes the member of the suicide committee. This pushes Lambodar and Durga Das into anxiety and they try lots of ways to make Gangiri resign from the committee. They threaten him and his brother's family, but these incidents are not shown in the media to cover up the vices of powerful men like Durga Das and Lambodar. Whatever is shown in the media is fake and has nothing to do with reality. These people even try to kill the farmers in order to protect their name and fame. In

the novel, a man from Allur village is thrown into the lake and so he dies. All such brutalities are not broadcasted in the media. This is not only the condition of the farmers in the novel, but also in the real world, especially regarding the condition of marginal farmers. It is the truth that whatever struggles the farmers undergo is not projected to the real world; whatever suffering the politicians and other people in power give to the poor farmers is not projected; whatever is projected is only the fake news and it is opposite to what really happens. The novel *Shoes of the Dead* is projected as a representation of farmers' sufferings, as the author Kota Neelima presents everything in a courageous way. It brings the problems of farmers into light and shows how the media projects fake news.

I will write the story tonight and put an end to it. Give me one quote and I promise you; the story will protect Gangiri tomorrow. This was, of course, a great story, a real glimpse into the politics of the young generation, the politics of ruthless and arrogance. But it might come too late for Gangiri. Lambodar's plan would have begun by the time the newspaper reached homes of Keyur's political masters in Delhi in the morning. (88)

The concept of post-truth politics is also applied in the act of representing false statistical data by the corporate-serving politicians. To protect politicians from any confusion related to the death of farmers, they create a false record and present it to the public through the media. To protect himself from the political turmoil, Keyur misrepresents the statistical data of farmers suicide thereby constructing a post-truth discourse.

Fabricating Realities

The tactical plan of Lambodar and Durga Das to create an alternate reality is that the increasing number of suicides due to debt distress will be buried with the dead. They are with an intention that the dead farmers cannot come alive and claim that their death is falsified by hiding the reality and it cannot be proven as a death due to distress and harassment from the moneylenders. Post-truth thereby is seen as a rejection of facts and use of lies to shape one's beliefs about reality. Such kind of post-truth discourse in power politics accurately destroys the life of farmers. The post-truth discourse also uses fabricated data as a main source of validity. This is seen in various perspectives in the novel. In the beginning it is seen when Videhi presents a report about the various measures to be taken by the government to decrease the suicide level. It also includes providing investigation report about the number of valid and invalid suicide cases of the farmers. This shows the corruption of data politics regarding post-truth discourse of creating an alternative reality.

Often, fertilizers, pesticides and sprays are applied disproportionately to increase yields. Secondly, subsidies for fertilizers and power should be withdrawn. Thirdly, she

continued the expenditure of farm income is connected to the increase in exposure to urban lifestyles due to television and cinema. Finally, religion is the support system of rural society and spiritual discussions can yield solutions to many problems. (9)

Post-truth also signifies the process of using factual evidence besides falsifying the reality. This significance is seen in the novel as Nazar writes articles and news stories about farmers' suicide, and also about the threatening's given to Gangiri through his news stories. All these references make the novel more factual than a fictional work. From the case studies being discussed in the novel it is elucidated that whatever evidence and incidents portrayed in the novel is not a fictional one rather it is similar to that of things which are happening in real life. Furthermore, the loopholes that the members of the suicide committee use, especially Lambodar and Durga Das in deciding whether the suicide as valid and invalid one is also similar to that of the reality which brings factuality into fictional text. All the corruption and behaviours of the government officials are not a fictional one, everything is fact are things that are actually happening in the society. People in Mityala demanded for a new MP due to the increasing number of farmers suicide in Keyur's constituency which becomes a major threat to his position. Nazar without hesitation presented all the things that are done by the committee members through his news story.

New Delhi: Prominent citizens of Mityala constituency have demanded the resignation of their elected representative, Keyur Kashinath, from Parliament if farmer suicides continue in the constituency. They have called for a fresh election to the Parliamentary seat to be held along with the assembly elections scheduled in six months. Keyur Kashinath, it must be noted, is the son of Vaishnav Kashinath who is known for his decision to quit his post as a minister in the central government, taking responsibility for a mishap that had cost lives. (168-71)

Even though Gangiri takes the path of death at the end of the novel, the appointment of Vadrangi as a new member of the suicide committee representing the farmers is a way of resistance against the post-truth discourse and victory of subjective realities. In the words of Varangi "Just wanted to mention that Lambodhar maha sarpanch, the man notorious as apatra Lambodar, today voted for all debt suicide cases as patra or eligible for compensation" (274). These words of Vadrangi proves that post-truth politics is destabilized by Kota Neelima as a way of supporting the subjective realities. The truth that the widows are provided with compensation proves that lies will come to light one day which will act against the power groups, who once dominated the marginalised farmers. The politicians will realise that even

though they try to hide the reality it is impossible in the hands of truth; the subjective realities will become a reason for the downfall of the political world.

Conclusion

The research paper “Harvesting Illusions: Power, Politics and Fabrication of Reality in *Shoes of the Dead*” exposes how institutional powers manipulate the narratives around farmer suicides, distorting reality to serve their own self-serving and corrupt agendas, by presenting a subjective truth that obscures the actual socio-political realities. The novel critiques how those in power such as government officials, corporations or other media outlets construct a false narrative around farmer’s suicide. Inclusion of news stories format in the novel makes the narration of the text more factual than fictional. The novel opens as a battle between the political and the power groups and she concludes the novel in favour of the farmers depicting the fact that there can be only one winner at the end of every battle. The future scope of this research proposes various opportunities for further exploration mainly on the impact of spreading misinformation on society, particularly the influence of post-truth politics in public opinion and government policies.

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