



## **The Fear of Impending Death in Neil D' Silva's *Maya's New Husband***

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### **Abstract**

Death, especially fear of it, is a recurring theme in psychological thriller narratives. Fear and death seem constantly associated in a person's mind because no sane person wants to die. Psychopaths and serial killers are known to have twisted minds that give rise to the fear of impending death in people. Death has always been a constant factor in these narratives, and those deaths most of the time have resulted from fear. The present narrative talks about a serial killer who kills young women in the name of a ritual practice that is usually performed by aghoras. Maya, his wife goes through several mind-boggling traumas after knowing his reality. The present paper discusses how Maya goes through the fear of impending death while living under the same roof with Bhaskar, the serial killer. Moreover, it studies the psyche of these psychopath serial killers that make them do these heinous crimes.

Indian author Neil D' Silva is well known for his contributions to the Indian horror subgenre. In an interview, he discusses the ideas that inspired him to write in the genre as he states that “Doesn't everyone love a spooky and dark horror story? I feel we are all battling a few demons within us. Whether it is a difficult relationship, or failure at an examination...or an illness; these fears come from unexpected sources” (Divyesh et al.). *Maya's New Husband*, his first full-length narrative, falls under the psychological thriller genre. The book's concept is effectively captured in the title, which centres on Bhaskar Sadachari, the female protagonist Maya's new husband. After marriage, on the wedding night, Bhaskar emerges as a ferocious beast. Maya notices, “his sleeping form, his face. There's an undeniable animal like quality in it...the fear rose somewhere in the chest and stayed there without finding an outlet” (D' Silva, *Maya* 71). The ambiguity arises in the narrative when Maya senses the feeling of ‘fascination’ and ‘fear’ at the same time towards Bhaskar- “We have the tendency to react with emotional ambivalence...we oscillate between fear and fascination, between attraction and repulsion, worship and condemnation” (Butter and Eitelmann 135) which can be seen as “dreadful pleasure” (135). Later, Maya learns that her husband has been performing Aghori cultural ceremonies while not fully understanding them. In this fashion, the story describes the mythological world of the Aghoris, their cannibalistic practises, and the rites they undertake.



It also illustrates the perilous consequences of engaging in a religious activity without having a thorough understanding of it. The Aghori tradition's use of supernatural and black magic concepts heightens the story's sense of imminent death.

The mythical subject of 'Aghoris' makes the narrative ostensibly more intimidating. "Aghor", "Aughad", "Kapalik", "Aghori", "Aughar", "Awadhoot" means the same, which is simple and natural state of consciousness ("Aghor"). They are the most powerful "alchemists" and they can "associate various atoms from the space and form a physical structure and they can also change the physical structure into any other different physical form. In short, they are the best molecule manipulators" (Ibid). Hinduism practises abstinence through ceremonies like Aghora, which suggests three aspects of asceticism. Cannibalism is a common practise among the Aghori societies, serving as a reminder to the Aghoris that there is little difference between right and wrong or between human and animal meat - "Their secretive lifestyle, which includes ritual consecration and consumption of human flesh, and even sexual rites amidst burning pyres" (Zutshi) is planned to alarm the perceptual outline in order to "break the barriers between what is considered sacred and profane, the holy and unholy—all rigid dichotomies that dominate the bourgeois middle class" (Ibid). However, in the current story, Bhaskar Sadachari misinterprets the idea of cannibalism in Aghori society and begins engaging in it. He begins to relish the ingestion of human meat. Even after his father tells him, he does not comprehend the ideals of Aghori culture- "You are not supposed to enjoy it...This is a thing of our belief; it is something that is meant to be done. We consume human meat because it is valuable to us, it must not devolve to its ground elements" (D' Silva, *Maya* 138).

Like Bhaskar Sadachari, most people misunderstand the 'Aghori Culture,' a lesser-known cult that follows a path of serious spiritual endeavours. After seeing and hearing his father, Aghori Bhutachari, for the first time, Bhaskar is taken aback. Because his father is endowed with the abilities he has always yearned for, a mixture of intrigue and dread can be seen on his face as he observes the 'uncanny' phenomena- "He felt as though his life had gained some purpose. Perhaps this has been the path that had been eluding him for so far" (138). His father's supernatural powers fascinate him to the extent that- "he felt it was his rite of passage to enter the hollowed world of the occult" (140). But he in order to follow the wrong path transgress the boundaries set by this culture. Gothic narratives are concerned with the confines of humanity and with those being transgressed- "The Terrors and horrors of transgression in



gothic writing becomes a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety” (Botting, *Gothic* 7).

In the Aghor tradition, “A sadhaka who has gone through all the stages of Aghor and then returned to society for the benefit of others is called an Aghoreshwar, a concept similar to that of the Bodhisattva in Buddhism” (Zutshi). Even though an Aghoreshwar- “remains above and beyond all social and material illusions, distinctions, and categories, they can still bring social reforms into effect. They work for the benefit of all sentient beings, especially those on the margins like underprivileged women and Dalits” (Ibid). But a lot of individuals miss the true meaning of this ceremony, and they simply kill others to gain the alleged supernatural power or immortality. The Aghoris, on the other hand, solely use dead people in their ceremonies. The literary significance of myths and symbols in Indian literature is recognised by Harish Raizada with accuracy. Myths embodying “accounts of supernatural beings and actions originated to project philosophical speculation and explain religious beliefs” (Raizada 36). This is a suitable explanation for the character of Bhaskar Sadachari, who pursues the road of ‘serial murdering’ and “cannibalism” in order to find salvation based on his own ideology of ‘Aghori ritual.’ The traditional gothic narratives have an undeniable connection to modern horror stories since the former draw inspiration and their fundamental motivations from the later. By coinciding the supernatural experiences and insanity “Gothic narratives appeal to sceptical academics and their utilization of supernatural elements aimed at believers’ hearts more than their minds” (Cooper 130). Whereas critics, like Sigmund Freud reviews the portrayal of supernaturalism in the gothic narratives from the psychological perspective. He uses the term ‘Uncanny’ and he argues- “An uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality” (Freud 50). Because the claimed unreal presence is presented in a situation that is otherwise extremely real, these narratives produce the uncanny effects. After getting married, Bhaskar, who was formerly ‘known’ to Maya, becomes ‘unfamiliar,’ creating an unsettling effect in the story.

The majority of the time, psychological thrillers combine the themes of ‘supernaturalism’ and ‘insanity’ to reflect on current social issues as well. Similar to Maya’s New Husband, social issues have been considered, including those involving incorrect religious ideas that many Indians hold, women's overwhelming dependence on men, and how mental illness can result in a person's tragic demise. While displaying the overt presence of



superstitions in them, these themes are subtly present in the story. In doing so, Kelly Hurley explains the use of supernaturalism in psychological thriller narratives as a way to social criticism. She says- “These narratives can serve as a sort of historical or sociological index, if the genre serves to manage a culture’s disturbances and traumatic changes, its thematic preoccupations will allow us to track social anxieties at one remove, in the register of supernaturalism” (Hurley 197). She claims that the authors of these stories connect the supernatural components to social and political issues as well as feminist movements in order to symbolically depict how patriarchal society treats women. It seems like a postmodern demon description to describe Bhaskar Sadachari as having ‘ugly looks,’ ‘bestly demeanour,’ and ‘enjoying a feast of flesh and blood.’ These characteristics resemble those of traditional gothic stories from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which authors often used specific components to highlight the dark, irrational, impulsive, and occasionally aberrant aspects of human nature. In order to analyse the dread that lurks behind the surface of the story's meticulously crafted social, moral, and spiritual commandments, Neil D' Silva develops the nightmare plot. The heinous serial killings are connected to the unintentional message of today's society, where the destruction and monstrosity live inside the human psyche rather than outside, “The dream of reason definitely produced monster...and the new industrial age created its own negation” (Monleon 22).

Through the character of Bhaskar Sadachari, *Maya's New Husband* teaches us about the conflicted nature of people. For instance, while he is with Maya, he appears to be a good man, but when he is not, he has a tendency to turn into a monster who kills innocent girls for the sake of a false religious belief in attaining salvation and superhuman abilities. The idea of gothic always- “relates the individual to the infinite universe” (Varma 16) and thus produces horror by representing human individuals struggling with the tempting, mysterious, frightening controls that situate in the universe and within themselves. The protagonist of gothic stories is typically a ‘villain’ who has been cast off by his fall and must either face a monster who is his double or transform into a monster himself, as Bhaskar does. In this instance, incorrect religious ideas encourage the protagonist's ugliness to grow. When Bhaskar's Aghori father appears to him, it stimulates him. Despite not comprehending the fundamentals of Aghori culture, he begins to practise it and veers off the right road, from which he will never be able to recover.

The graphic blood-curdling incidents that occur throughout the story serve as an inevitable motif of a psychological thriller's severe nature. The gruesome cannibalistic



experiences of Bhaskar Sadachari resemble the depiction of monstrous characters that pierce the macro-social, moral, and spiritual order's interstices. The ambivalence and extimacy of one's fantasies are identified as the 'monstrosity' in the story, which makes Zizek's subsequent statement appear most suitable- "Simultaneously pacifying, disarming (providing an imaginary scenario which enables us to endure the abyss of the Other's desire) and shattering, disturbing, inassimilable into our reality" (Zizek 69). *Maya's New Husband* thus comes out as a literature that emphasises the problem of horror psychology, which relentlessly combines socio-cultural structure with the inner workings of the human brain to portray the blend of attraction and repulsion, as well as desire and terror, "Evil bounds across the disciplines of religion, philosophy and the social sciences with aplomb, defying attempts at a single-minded classification" (Wilson 10). The minor crimes that men execute, for example, robbery, trickery for material gains and even unplanned murders do not get counted under evil nature. Evil is something in which- "someone else's pain is prized for its own sake in which the motive is precisely to cause suffering" (McGinn 63). Bhaskar throughout his childhood suffers mentally a lot due to people around him who tease him for his looks and also for being an illegitimate child of an Aghori. He keeps on asking from his mother about his father- "Who is my father? he used to ask. You will know in time," She would say. Why don't you tell it now? Letting go of anything didn't come easily to him. It is not the right time," and press her lips tightly shut (D' Silva, *Maya* 124). The humiliation which he undergoes throughout his life creates a void in him and that is the very thing that makes him indifferent to the society and even to himself- "The boy who had been optimistically named Bhaskar Sadachari by his mother, was a changed man now" (128). Eventually, he becomes- "so hardened he wasn't moved even by the death of his mother" (128). He became a serial killer at a young age due to childhood bullying and suffering, and these experiences also influenced his development into a psychopath later in life.

Because of his skewed methods of thinking, which are cultivated by the abusive, resentful relationships with family members at a young age, a psychopath perceives the world as scary and persecuting- "Serial killers have an accentuated need for control over the lives of their victims – a desire to intimidate and terrify-because the psychological and physical abuse that they suffered as children has left them impotent and less worthy than other people" (Goldberg 31). Nordau emphasises that the psychopath is an ego-maniac who is unable to follow the world around him- "The ego maniac is a mental Robinson Crusoe, who in his imagination lives alone on an island" (J. A. 259). The book *Jung on Evil* discusses the primitive



forces intensely entrenched in the human psyche, when give a free rein can make man hazardous- “We need more understanding of human nature, because the only real danger that exists is man himself. His psyche should be studied because we are the origin of all coming evil” (Jung and Stein 34). Bhaskar here not only project the threatening disorder in the social associations but also is the representation of the monster existing inside each human being, “Our decline and fall comes not only from the barbarism without but also from the barbarism within” (Kantor 165). Prison psychologist Joel Norris who has made a study of incarcerated serial killers has concluded that these killers- “were totally indifferent to the pain and suffering of their victims” (*Serial Killers: The Growing Menace* 32). The narrative's usage of elements like suspense, dread, and several twists and turns aids in creating a terrible environment. The description of the horrific killings and the boiling of human flesh helps to develop the repulsive feeling. As such, the book falls within the category of horror to bring attention to current social issues. The caste system, issues relating to women like sati and dowry, gender inequity, not educating girls, keeping women in restricted quarters while menstruating, and other dark features of Indian society are all present in Indian horror stories. Other troubling elements of Indian culture, some of which are even connected to religion, include cannibalism, which, despite being practised by a very small minority of the population, persists. The law enforcement turns a blind eye towards it because these people are believed to be spiritually closer to God and are supposed to possess supernatural powers.

As the female characters in *Maya's New Husband* suffer at the hands of a male character, certain peculiar emotions are shown in this film. Maya, instead of being a strong, independent woman, is trapped by Bhaskar when he marries her- “He had laid a meticulous plan to ensnare her, and she had fallen right into the trap. Like a fly that knowingly walks into a spider's web. Only, this fly had apparently endangered the other flies around it too” (D' Silva, *Maya* 128). This demonstrates the reliant nature of even a woman who is financially independent, who worries to live her life without a man's assistance. Only when she begins to feel the threat of death do these worries begin to fade. Numerous incidents in the story contribute to the sense of approaching catastrophe. For instance, when Padma discovers the video footage in which she learns some peculiar facts about Bhaskar, she flees the hallways- “...she would have seen the tall dark man staring at her with hands buried in his large trouser pockets and murder in his face...Engrossed in her talks, she hadn't even seen him earlier peering through the side window of the computer lab with his bloodshot eyes...” (137).





Another instance that represents that fear in the narrative at the time of the second murder- “Another lay on its back, the skin torn, the spine broken and jutting out of it. A rotting spinal cord played peekaboo from the twisted vertebrae” (115). These descriptions evoke a terrifying sense of fear. The story’s protagonists allude to the ‘evil side’ of humanity, while the concept of ‘Indian Aghori Ritualism’ simultaneously introduces an element of extremism that heightens the horror effect. According to Sigmund Freud, “The acme of the uncanny is represented by anything having to with death, bodies, spirits, revenants, and ghosts....” (*The Uncanny* 12).

According to the psychological study, despite the growth of our civilization, people still have a basic instinctive response to death and ghosts. Despite, the few changes that have been occurred in the thinking and feelings it is better to state that- “The old been so well preserved, under a thin veneer” (Jentsch 16). In this story, the author makes an effort to draw attention to Hindu culture's dark side and its detrimental consequences on modern society. Undoubtedly, these superstitions can infuriate a person and drive them to take scary deeds, and Bhaskar Sadachari is no exception. The ‘dark side’ of people has the power to enrage their intrinsically wicked side, according to many literary critics, and as such is defined as a conflict between reality and illusion. In this story, the concepts of "superstition" and "insanity" point to current social problems. The popularity of psychological narratives can be attributed mostly to the divided nature of people. Through these terrifying stories, the writers try to reveal the socio-cultural anxieties existing within a society. The “extimate” nature of the uncanny “points neither to the interior nor to the exterior, but is located there where the most intimate interiority coincides with the exterior” and this uncanny extimacy “provokes anxiety, a sense that one has already come too close to the monstrous, traumatic thing that derails the subject’s desire and sense of reality” (Dolar 23). The utility of myths in literature- “Owing to their universal nature and timelessness and power to convey that which cannot be otherwise expressed; the modern writers have found in myths a useful media of communicating the predicament of the contemporary man and their own view of life” (Raizada 42). Because of their subconscious believe in religion, myth, and supernaturalism, modern writers have been exploiting mythical circumstances and characters to represent contemporary difficulties and, in this manner, leave a greater influence on their readers, “In gothic, the middle class displaces the hidden violence of present social structures, conjures them up again as past, and falls promptly under their spell” (Punter, *Literature*, 125).



In this sense, *Maya's New Husband* intensifies the anxiety over impending death while also illuminating the complexities of husband-wife relationships, the dissolution of families and communities, and the fragmentation of society. According to the story, Bhaskar Sadachari's child, who has been developing inside Maya, comes back to life after his death. Maya experiences mental distress when she learns that she is pregnant with Bhaskar's kid because she continues to be terrified of his probable death. She sees a face in her bathroom "The face had been ugly when she had lived with it and now it only looked uglier...and it said something. Atone. You have to atone" (D' Silva, *Maya* 210). The story introduces the readers to societal suppression, psychological trauma, perversion, and criminality, all of which exist behind the surface of a person's existence that appears to be 'normal.' The introduction of Aghori culture in the narrative enhances the atmosphere of dread and also invokes kind of terror and fear in the readers through its representation of uncanny things, forbidden knowledge, craving for immortality, cannibalism acts, serial killing, transgressing boundaries, desires for attaining supernatural powers, psychopaths, potential monstrosity in human beings.

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