

The Survival of The Fittest: Deconstructing Man-Made Beliefs in Yashpal's /khəccər ɔ:r a:dmi:/ (Mule and the Man)

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Abstract

This paper examines Yashpal's short story /khəccər ɔ:r a:dmi:/ (Mule and the Man) as a powerful critique of man-made religious beliefs and their disruptive impact on the natural order. Through an intricate interplay of themes including The Survival of the Fittest, economic inequality, and human dogmatism, Yashpal unravels how traditional beliefs can often diverge from natural instincts, leading to consequences that ultimately expose the emptiness of these convictions. The narrative, centered on a mule and a man stranded in severe conditions, highlights the clash between humanity's blind faith and the animal's innate survival instincts, presenting nature as both resilient and unforgiving. The study delves into Yashpal's deft integration of Darwinian principles, demonstrating how survival relies on adaptation and alignment with nature rather than adherence to irrational convictions. Additionally, the story portrays economic inequality as a force that reinforces superstition, with individuals often drawn to dogmatic solutions for material gain or comfort. By employing a rigorous literary analysis, this paper reveals how Yashpal uses storytelling as a medium for societal critique, challenging entrenched beliefs and underscoring the need for a more rational, symbiotic relationship with the natural world. The findings affirm Yashpal's commitment to social justice through literature, emphasizing that literature serves not only as reflection but as a call for intellectual discernment and adaptation in the face of changing environmental and social landscapes.

Keywords: Yashpal, short stories, mule and man, Darwinian principle in literature

Introduction

Yashpal (1903-1976), an influential figure in Hindi literature, stands out as a progressive writer deeply engaged with social issues, using his works to

confront prevalent dogmas and injustices. Known for his revolutionary zeal and unyielding commitment to societal reform, Yashpal's writings often explore themes of class struggle, economic inequality, and the oppressive nature of traditional beliefs. In his short story /khəccər ɔ:r a:dmi:/ (Mule and the Man), Yashpal crafts a narrative that serves as a poignant critique of religious superstition and its detrimental impact on human behavior and the natural world in a comparative way. Set against the backdrop of a harsh, unforgiving environment, the story depicts a man and a mule stranded and struggling for survival, exposing the inherent conflict between human dogma and primal survival instincts.

The story's central theme 'The Survival of the Fittest' challenges deeply rooted, man-made religious beliefs, demonstrating how such convictions can hinder one's ability to adapt to natural demands. The stranded mule, representing the innate will to survive, operates according to instincts rather than superstitious beliefs, in stark contrast to the man, who clings to faith and irrationality in a dire situation. Yashpal uses this juxtaposition to highlight how religious dogmas, when applied to life's practical challenges, can blind individuals to the reality of their own needs and surroundings. The mule's instincts symbolize a natural resilience and wisdom that remains unclouded by external ideologies, underscoring a powerful message: survival often depends not on adherence to dogmatic beliefs but on adapting to the natural world.

By examining the mule's pragmatic responses against the man's superstitious inclinations, Yashpal not only critiques the naivety and destructiveness of rigid beliefs but also questions their broader impact on society. The story underscores how superstitious thinking disrupts the natural order, stifling human instincts and, consequently, survival itself. In doing so, Yashpal raises questions about the relevance of tradition in modern life and the importance of rational thought in the face of adversity. Through this narrative, Yashpal's literary vision transcends simple storytelling to address deeper societal issues, reinforcing his role as a pioneer in the progressive literary movement in Hindi literature.

Literature Review

Yashpal's literary contributions emerged in the early 20th century, a period of significant socio-political upheaval in India marked by the struggle

for independence and a concurrent rise of progressive ideologies. As part of the /nəyi: kəha:ni:/ movement (1954-1963) (New Story movement) in Hindi literature, Yashpal's work was instrumental in challenging societal norms, particularly targeting religious orthodoxy and entrenched superstitions that hindered India's social progress. Unlike many writers of his time, who emphasized themes of patriotism or romanticism, Yashpal embraced a distinctly realist approach that focused on social critique. Scholars recognize Yashpal as a pioneering voice who used his writing to question traditional power structures and advocate for rational thought and equality. His characters often find themselves caught between societal expectations and a natural, instinctual drive, highlighting the tensions between social norms and the organic order.

Existing academic analyses of Yashpal's work emphasize his critique of religious orthodoxy, which he perceived as a primary factor inhibiting individual and societal growth. Researchers have noted how Yashpal's narratives consistently dismantle the sacred veneer surrounding religious dogma, exposing its often irrational, oppressive nature. His stories challenge the notion that religious beliefs are absolute, encouraging readers to question their validity in practical, survival contexts. Yashpal's /khəccər ə:r a:dmi:/ (Mule and the Man) is one of several works in which he juxtaposes human characters with animals to underscore the folly of adhering to superstitions, highlighting that survival often depends on instincts rather than rigid beliefs. Scholars also argue that Yashpal's portrayal of animals, like the mule in this story, serves as a literary device to emphasize natural order and survival instincts, elements that human characters, bound by religious orthodoxy, often lack.

Yashpal's themes resonate with Darwinian Evolutionary Theory, particularly the concept of 'survival of the fittest,' which he uses to critique societal structures that prioritize rigid beliefs over adaptive, rational responses to challenges. Literary critiques have drawn parallels between Yashpal's work and Darwinian principles, suggesting that his characters embody the conflict between natural survival instincts and socially constructed limitations. This intersection of literature and Darwinian thought has been explored in numerous studies, where Yashpal's work is seen as a call for adaptability and rationalism over blind adherence to tradition. His critique of superstition and societal norms reflects a broader discontent with the repressive elements of

Indian society, situating Yashpal not only as a literary icon but as a catalyst for social change in modern Hindi literature.

Methodology

This paper employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining literary analysis with theoretical perspectives on evolution and survival, to explore Yashpal's /khəccər ɔ:r a:ɖmi:/ (Mule and the Man). This analysis seeks to uncover how Yashpal uses narrative structures, character symbolism, and themes to critique societal norms and religious dogma. By examining Yashpal's characters and their interactions with both human and animal elements, the study demonstrates how survival instincts challenge the validity of superstitious beliefs and religious orthodoxy, aligning with Darwinian principles of 'survival of the fittest.'

The interpretive methods used in this analysis are primarily rooted in close reading and thematic analysis. Close reading allows for an in-depth examination of language, dialogue, and interactions between characters, which reveal the narrative's underlying critique of superstition. Through this lens, we analyze the protagonist's relationship with the mule as a reflection of humanity's inherent conflict between adhering to societal beliefs and embracing natural instincts. Additionally, literary techniques like symbolism and metaphor are dissected to expose how Yashpal uses the mule a symbol of survival and instinct to question religious dogma, portraying it as a man-made construct that disrupts the natural order.

This paper also incorporates theoretical perspectives from Darwinian Evolutionary Theory to frame Yashpal's commentary on survival. The concept of 'survival of the fittest' provides a framework for understanding the characters' actions and choices, particularly the protagonist's realization that rigid beliefs are incompatible with the demands of real-world survival. Drawing on these evolutionary perspectives, the study interprets the mule's behavior as emblematic of adaptive responses to life-threatening situations, a stark contrast to the human tendency to rely on prescribed beliefs. This contrast is analyzed through Yashpal's narrative structure, which juxtaposes instinct with superstition to reveal their implications on survival.

Finally, the study integrates socio-cultural perspectives to contextualize Yashpal's critique within broader Indian society, where religious orthodoxy often intersects with social norms. This context allows for a deeper

understanding of how Yashpal's characters embody both individual and collective struggles, challenging readers to reassess the role of belief systems in a rapidly changing world. Through these interpretive methods, the analysis reveals Yashpal's literary strategies in deconstructing the narratives around superstition, inviting a re-evaluation of the relationship between natural survival instincts and socially constructed beliefs.

Analysis and Discussion

The rugged setting of the Lahaul Valley, with its harsh weather and treacherous terrain, plays a critical role in Yashpal's /khæccər ɔ:r a:ɖmi:/ (The Mule and the Man), highlighting the story's central theme of survival. This unforgiving environment forces characters to confront primal instincts, where adaptability becomes essential. The struggle of the survey team and the devotee of Vishnu (who is one of members of the team) against these elements vividly illustrates the consequences of failing to align with natural instincts. The environmental backdrop functions as a mirror for the internal conflicts of the characters, emphasizing the stark contrast between blind adherence to beliefs and the adaptability required for survival.

The mule emerges as a powerful symbol of resilience and nature's unyielding will to survive. Its actions, such as resorting to cannibalism in extreme circumstances, underscore an instinctive alignment with nature's principles. In contrast, the devotee of Vishnu represents humanity's blind faith in cultural conditioning and religious beliefs. Her refusal to remove wet clothing or drink life-saving brandy actions dictated by her adherence to religious customs highlights a tragic inability to prioritize survival. This rigid behavior, juxtaposed with the mule's pragmatic instincts, critiques the limitations of dogma in the face of life-threatening circumstances.

The narrative's climax illustrates the conflict between religious beliefs and natural instincts. The devotee of Vishnu's tragic death, resulting from her unwavering commitment to ritual purity, exemplifies the dangers of ignoring the natural order. In contrast, the mule's survival serves as a stark reminder of the importance of adaptability and self-preservation. Through this dichotomy, Yashpal questions the validity of man-made myths that contradict the demands of survival, suggesting that blind faith often leads to catastrophic outcomes.

The story incorporates Darwin's concept of "Survival of the Fittest" as a critique of humanity's detachment from nature. The mule's ability to adapt

to extreme conditions aligns with Darwinian principles, while the devotee of Vishnu's rigid behavior demonstrates the consequences of non-adaptive tendencies. Her rejection of practical survival measures, driven by her faith, underscores the dangers of cultural conditioning that inhibits rational decision-making. Yashpal uses this contrast to illustrate the critical need for aligning human behavior with natural instincts.

Furthermore, Yashpal critiques the societal structures that perpetuate superstitions, linking them to economic exploitation and ignorance. Religious beliefs, as seen in the devotee of Vishnu's actions, often overshadow rationality, leaving individuals vulnerable in the face of real-world challenges. The narrative suggests that these beliefs are not just personal but are deeply entrenched in a societal framework that prioritizes faith over practical survival strategies.

The themes of survival and the human condition are woven throughout the story. The fragility of human life is starkly depicted through the dire circumstances faced by the survey team and the devotee of Vishnu. Their inability to adapt contrasts sharply with the mule's instinct-driven survival. The mule's actions, while unsettling, reflect the ruthless realities of natural selection, emphasizing the importance of aligning with nature's principles for survival. The contrast between the mule and the devotee of Vishnu serves as a broader metaphor for society's detachment from natural instincts. The mule's adaptability enables its survival, while the woman's devotion to outdated customs leads to her demise.

In essence, /khəccər ɔ:r a:dmi:/ (*The Mule and the Man*) critiques the dangers of blind faith and highlights the necessity of rationality and adaptability in the face of nature's challenges. By intertwining narrative, symbolism, and Darwinian Theory, Yashpal creates a powerful commentary on humanity's disconnection from the natural world. The story's tragic climax underscores the consequences of prioritizing dogma over pragmatic action, advocating for a balanced approach that respects both natural laws and rational thought.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *khəccər ɔ:r a:dmi:* (*The Mule and the Man*) emerges as a deeply reflective and socially charged narrative that transcends the boundaries of a simple tale about survival in harsh conditions. Through the powerful

juxtaposition of the mule's instinctive wisdom and the Brahmin woman's unwavering commitment to religious orthodoxy, Yashpal exposes the inherent danger of elevating dogma above life itself. The natural environment in the story is not merely a setting but an active, indifferent force that demands adaptability. Against this relentless backdrop, the characters' choices acquire symbolic weight, revealing how rigid belief systems can render human beings vulnerable in moments that require practical judgment and flexibility.

Yashpal's critique operates on multiple levels religious, social, and philosophical. By presenting the mule as a creature guided purely by instinct and self-preservation, he subtly invokes evolutionary principles, suggesting that survival favors those who can adjust to their surroundings. In contrast, the human characters, particularly the devotee of Vishnu, become emblematic of a society shackled by inherited customs and unexamined traditions. Her refusal to drink brandy for warmth or to remove her wet clothes, even in life-threatening conditions, illustrates the tragic consequences of allowing ritual purity to outweigh the fundamental instinct to survive. Through this contrast, Yashpal underscores the irony that the so-called "rational" human is often less adaptable than an animal.

Moreover, the story critiques the societal structures that perpetuate such rigid ideologies. Religious orthodoxy, as portrayed here, is not simply a matter of personal faith but a system reinforced by cultural expectations and social conditioning. Yashpal suggests that these structures often serve to maintain control and preserve outdated hierarchies, even at the cost of human welfare. The woman's suffering, therefore, symbolizes not just individual stubbornness but the broader human tendency to cling to beliefs that provide identity and moral certainty, even when they conflict with empirical reality.

At a deeper allegorical level, *The Mule and the Man* reflects the broader human condition. It questions whether civilization, with all its rituals and moral codes, has distanced humanity from the primal wisdom necessary for survival. Yashpal does not advocate for the abandonment of culture or faith; rather, he calls for discernment a harmonious balance between spiritual values and rational thought. His message resonates as a plea for intellectual awakening, urging individuals to examine whether their beliefs empower them or endanger them.

Ultimately, the story serves as a timeless reminder that adaptability is not a betrayal of tradition but a prerequisite for survival and progress. Yashpal

affirms that true strength lies in the ability to evolve, to question inherited assumptions, and to align one's actions with the realities of the natural world. Through vivid imagery, sharp characterization, and penetrating social commentary, he transforms a seemingly simple narrative into a profound meditation on faith, reason, and human resilience. In doing so, he reinforces literature's enduring role as a mirror to society challenging complacency, exposing contradictions, and inspiring the courage to embrace change.

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