

# Feminist Hauntology in Indian Folkloric Fiction: A Derridian Reading of Yakshini and Shakchuni

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## ABSTRACT

Hauntology by Jacques Derrida refers to the haunting of the past events and affects the present time. It explores nostalgic memories, uncanny experiences, flashbacks and unsettling presence of unknown. Derrida talks about Hauntology in *Spectres of Marx* blurring and intersecting between materialism and abstract. He discloses the concept of Spectres or ghosts being the entity for the source of Hauntology. The present paper significantly studies the idea of Hauntology through the novels – Shakchuni by Arnab Ray and Yakshini by Neil d Silva.

Shakchuni as a spectre comes from Bengali folklores which portrays her as a haunted spirit who possesses married women. In the novel ,it encapsulates the elements of patriarchy, guilt, exploitation seeming to develop the thematic presentation and background of haunting in it.

Yakshini by Neil d Silva examines how women's haunting presence in stories exposes trauma and questions societal expectations of women. It reveals how female ghosts in Indian folklore are not just reminders of the past, but symbols of women's struggles demanding justice. These stories challenge patriarchal norms and offer a new perspective for understanding the past and present.

Feministic Hauntology deals with the themes of Past injustice, Exclusion, Oppression, Marginalization and Violence done to women that lingers from past to present and future events. As per the folklers Shakchuni has physical deformity and Yakshini is a very beautiful young woman associated with Fertility.

**KEYWORDS:** Hauntology, Past injustice, Haunting narrative, Folkloric spectres.

## INTRODUCTION

Indian folkloric fiction has long been a rich source of storytelling, weaving together myth, legend, and social commentary. This research paper aims to explore the intersection of feminism and hauntology in two novels, Yakshini and Shakchuni, through a Derridian reading. By examining the ways in which female characters haunt and subvert patriarchal structures, we can gain insight into the complex experiences of women in Indian society. This analysis throws a light on the ways in which folklore can be used to challenge dominant narratives and reclaim female agency.

### Yakshini - Neil D Silva

The novel Yakshini written by Neil D Silva has a mythological background, introducing the concept of Yakshinis. Yakshinis are the celestial beings known for their attractive beauty, magical powers, and dangerous tempers. One such Yakshini is punished by the gods for breaking celestial rules, and so she is trapped and forced to live a human life. As the cursed Yakshini takes on a human form, she is reborn as Meenakshi, a young girl in a remote village in Tamil Nadu. Unaware to her parents and the world around

her, Meenakshi is more than just an ordinary human – she is a vessel for the powerful and mysterious Yakshini spirit.

This sets the stage for Meenakshi's journey, exploring the complexities of her dual identity and the consequences of her celestial heritage in a human world.

### **Feministic Hauntology in Yakshini :**

In a remote village in Tamil Nadu, a girl named Meenakshi is born under mysterious circumstances as the seventh daughter of the family. During her birth, Yakshini's spirit merges with her, making her a host to this ancient being. Her parents are unaware of the spiritual possession.

From an early age, Meenakshi displays strange powers and attracts attention due to her beauty and odd behavior. She is bullied at school and feels like a misfit. Her inner struggles begin to surface as the Yakshini starts awakening within her.

As Meenakshi enters adolescence, her body undergoes significant changes because Yakshini's powers begin to awaken more strongly. Her physical beauty becomes almost hypnotic, causing chaos in her village and fear in her parents. Men begin behaving abnormally around her, drawn by an unnatural force.

As Meenakshi grows up she starts hearing voices and witnessing terrifying visions. It becomes clear that she is battling a dual identity which means a human girl with a demonic celestial spirit growing inside her. The Yakshini is seductive, violent, and power-hungry, in contrast to Meenakshi's innocent and confused self.

When Meenakshi gets emotional or stressed, the Yakshini takes over, causing violent outbursts that can be deadly. Anyone who tries to harm or control Meenakshi meets a terrible fate. Yakshini initially tries to shield Meenakshi from harm but ultimately destroys her.

The villagers suspect Meenakshi of witchcraft due to her unusual behavior and the mysterious deaths surrounding her. The villagers gossip and threaten Meenakshi, accusing her of witchcraft and seeking punishment. Meenakshi is trapped in a battle with the Yakshini, feeling lost and frightened as she struggles to maintain control over her own life.

Meenakshi's family, fearing her powers, tries to control her through rituals and arranging her marriage at the age of 15 years only, hoping to cure her. They agree to the match with Harikumar only when they have no other way to protect Meenakshi. However, this only makes the Yakshini stronger, as she resists being tamed and asserts her divine nature.

Meenakshi falls in love with a man named Tejas, who initially accepts her. However, he cannot understand the extent of her possession and power, so he betrays her and his betrayal becomes a turning point for Meenakshi, causing the Yakshini to fully take over.

Meenakshi's inner struggle becomes unbearable, and she finally gives in to the Yakshini's power. The Yakshini takes complete control, merging with Meenakshi's body and becoming a force of both beauty and destruction.

Even when Harikumar comes to see Manda who is Meenakshi's eldest sister for marriage proposal, he sees Meenakshi and falls in love with her. He says to the family that he likes their younger daughter Meenakshi not Manda, everyone gets shocked after hearing this. The family gets furious and reject this proposal. But after this incident Meenakshi gets so stunned that she locks herself in a room and she literally could fear creeping within her.

After this incident Meenakshi's parents discuss about the strange changes in her personality that something is really wrong, Her mother reveals to her father that something is strange, "*I am a woman. I know, She*

*is....growing up very fast. Do you know about her woman's thing? She started at just ten, imagine. Why else do you think I don't take her to the temple on some Saturdays? But it is so precise that it astounds me. It always starts on a Saturday morning and dries up that same night. She bleeds just for a few hours every fourth Saturday. That's not natural at all..(Yakshini, Chapter2)* This dialogue also reveals that Meenakshi has some strange powers or something is just so unnatural within her. She is a fully grown woman in child's body.

In this way the novel reflects feminist hauntology as it deals with the themes like Feminine power and rage, Inner conflict and identity, Mythology vs modernity, Sexuality, repression, and transformation. In the novel there are two mysterious deaths and some horrible events linked to the Yakshini within Meenakshi, there are some deadly actions spark fear and accusations, labelling Meenakshi a witch that makes a novel a haunting tale. It contains supernatural elements that haunts the male characters specifically.

### **Shakchuni - Arnab Ray**

Shakchuni by Arnab Ray is a deceiving story of spectre believed in the folklore of Shakchuni. Shakchuni and the history of Raibahadur is distinctively utilised to perform the incidences touching the lines of ghosting and Hauntology. The entire set of the story dates back during the British empire in India. It also embodies the episodes of great famine of Bengal setting the stage for further incidences. Derrida's Hauntology speaks volumes of the intersection of past, present and future by intermingling the confused state of affairs in the story. The frenzy son of Raibahdud, Narayanpratap proves to be a personality with two shades to it having the possession of a demonic side to his personality. The past events frenzied Narayanpratap more to take revenge on the family members making it deceiving for the readers to understand the plot. Taking it to the true sense, hauntology deals with haunting with past and affecting the present. The story proves to concur every bit of Derrida throughout the reading.

### **Feministic Hauntology in Shakchuni :**

Shakchuni as a Folkloric spectre gains its roots from Bengali Folklore. *"Because Amabassaya ,the night of no moon is when Shakchuni dances. That is when all her enemies, all those who have hurt her drop dead like flies"* – (Shakchuni ,page 6 ) Shakchuni dances to take revenge from all her past enemies on a moonless night by killing them. This story happen to take place in a haunted village of Shyamalapur. The folklore mentions the presence of gold and silver in the lair of Shakchuni. She casts spells to make invisible during the day and wanders in search of souls at night. The treasure was sighted near the bank of the river Pagli. Potol , a village boy wanted to steal the gold and silver from Shakchuni's lair. His crops had failed that year too. He and his family had gone to Raibahadur's place to ask for mercy. Raibahadur was a zamindar. He gave a month of relief. Raibahadur was a treacherous, corrupted zamindar. He would store the grains in the granary and would sell it to the sahebs ten times more. Potol unfortunately couldn't survive and died in the fate. The constant presence of Shakchuni in the village created an aura of fright and pressure in the village people. They were haunted by the spectre a number of times.

Raibahadur had two sons. Eldest son Narayanpratap a Barrister and youngest son Rudrapratap helps his father in zamindari. Narayanpratap comes from London devastated as the love of his life Catherine rejects him. His family plans to get him married to a beautiful bride. Shakchuni's presence is felt in the entire novel throughout through the various incidences experienced by the village people . One such incident was experienced by a tantric. He wore a necklace of skull beaded in red thread around his neck and arm.

The eerie mention by the tantric about Shakchuni creates chill in the body. He talks about Shakchuni tasting soul and she being awake in the forest. He professed that death was coming their way and Raibahadur will have pay for his sins. He mentioned that Shakchuni will dance and devour the souls by taking revenge, with that he dies too. The recurrent appearance of deaths in the story catalysis to understand the actuality of Shakchuni. There was something sinister that was regularly persistent. Derrida's Hauntology explains the reoccurrence of past events in the presence haunting the present and future both. The Life and zamindari of Raibahadur had blood on his hands. He was responsible for endless atrocities on innocent people. This past haunted him in the present scavenging him to fight for his existence. Rudrapratap once was looking over the work of his men near the temple where Shakchuni seemed to be present. After several warnings by his men, Rudrapratap didn't hesitate to enter the place. To their shock and surprise, Rudrapratap was covered by blood on his shoulders which was evidently seen by the men around. Kalinkar one of the men took his blood stained shirt wrapped it in a rock and threw it in the water. Folklores have a deep relevance for the village men as they said, some things cannot be explained in science. Rudrapratap after this incident had gone weak, he changed completely. His bones were showing from his skin. He first got jaundice, then was infected with malaria as if the curse of Shakchuni followed him.

Narayanpratap was wedded off to a beautiful girl called Soudamini. Nevertheless, Narayanpratap did not recover after marriage as he missed Catherine. He only used Soudamini to meet his physical needs. Soudamini's friend Handi had told her to visit Shakchuni to get her husband in her control. Handi felt only Shakchuni could bring Soudamini out of the problem. Raibahadur had purchased foreign horses in his stable and handed over it to Narayanpratap to ride first but the horse went out of control due to which Narayanpratap's dhoti was pulled off and his underwear was ripped off. He lied naked on the ground. Abdul one of Rudrapratap's helper told that it was Soudamini due to which the horse bolted. The horse looked in Soudamini's eyes in fear and jumped off. The terror shook the horse away. There was something strange happening with Soudamini. The repercussions was what turned out to be even more worse. The horse died in its stable in a pool of blood. The presence of blood, fear seemed to be very ungodly proving to the existence of a monstrous and devilish spectre. The head was cut off and the eyes were scooped out. Shakchuni believed to be possessing married women married in a wrong family, in a wrong circumstances, she does it all. It was believed that when kings went greedy then Shakchuni rises and devours soul. She had entered the house of the Zamindari and Soudamini was her abode. She wrote a letter to Narayanpratap in English and called him near the river to be one with him. She had told him that Kalinkar and her daughter Handi had been cheating in the accounts and so the zamindari. Narayanpratap reported this to Raibahadur and sent the accounts for auditing. It was all the possession of Shakchuni. One of the important elements of Hauntology by Derrida is the intersection of past and present crossing the lines of time. Shakchuni lured Narayanpratap by speaking in English, writing poems raking back to his past memories. Bouthukuran, Raibahadur's wife was poisoned by Handi about Soudamini being Shakchuni. Bouthukuran tried to raise her hands on Soudamini and Soudamini tried all her might to fight her back. Bouthukuran told this to Raibahadur. Raibahadur understood that it was the dark past following him. Many years ago, Raibahadur's brothers had killed a beautiful woman, her husband and her son. They had hid in the midst of the forest where Shakchuni believed to be present. Shakchuni had killed his brothers too in rage and now Raibahadur knew it was his turn. This recurring events of past haunted him to the core. Shakchuni had danced tonight and all drop dead like flies is a repetitive tone throughout the narration filling the chills to the throat. Bouthakuran was dead presumably because of Shakchuni. She twisted her neck to the side.

Ramprasad, the Superintendent of Police was supposed to investigate the case. He was bribed by Raibahadur to just leave the case. Raibahadur told Ramprasad his story and Shakchuni. Ramprasad to his surprise knew exorcism. He wanted to expel Shakchuni out of Soudamini. He used dolls and voodoo to understand the position. He told Raibahadur that Soudamini is pregnant with a male heir. Shakchuni as the folklore says wants husband's love and craves for maternal love too. Ramprasad made a potion to be given to Soudamini and made Raibahadur carry her to the old house near the river and exorcised her. Soudamini was left open, punched and injured very hard. When Narayanprasad came to know about this, he was shocked. Narayanpratap looking at the pain of his wife strangled her to death. He kissed her and asked her to be one with him. He was now one with Shakchuni. Narayanpratap had turned frenzy. He then twisted the neck of his father spluttering the blood all over. It was done. He was drop dead like a fly. Narayanpratap then followed the forest in the dark. Ramprasad was also killed upside down.

What really happens in the end is something of a twisted story. In fact all the murders are actually done by Narayanpratap. The story of Shakchuni is just used as a way to take revenge on his father, mother and the horse. The folklore of Shakchuni and the past events narrated by Raibahadur makes it evidently to believe to be a narration of Hauntology. The language, use of words, style, incidents, storytelling, dialogues, all depicts the various elements of Derrida's Hauntology.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, India's rich cultural heritage blends modernity with traditional myths and superstitions, particularly in rural areas where folklore and mysticism remain an integral part of life. In this society women who are sexually assaulted are often blamed, which takes away their dignity. The Yakshini that lives under Meenakshi, is antithetical to such society. She defends herself and thus Meenakshi, refusing to let herself be a victim. To protect herself, a woman may have to take drastic measures, even resorting to harming the man, we can see all these things in both the novels – Yakshini and Shakchuni. . So we can conclude that Female folkloric spectres haunt specifically males in the society that has a social background attached to it.

By employing a Derridian reading, we uncover the ways in which these texts subvert traditional notions of femininity, power, and trauma. The Yakshini and Shakchuni figures represent the complexities of female experience, haunting patriarchal structures and challenging dominant narratives, This analysis shows the power of Indian folklore in understanding and rethinking women's issues

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