

The Cost of Being Complete: Masculinity, Lineage, and Male Trauma in Devdutt Pattanaik's the Pregnant King

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Abstract

Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Pregnant King* is a radical and unconventional reinterpretation of the theme of masculinity, set within the context of Indian mythology. Through the narrative of "Yuvanashva, the king who becomes pregnant and gives birth," the novel challenges the interlocked dualities of masculinity, power, and responsibility, which have constructed the notion of masculinity within Indian society. In this paper, "The Pregnant King" is explored as a "trauma narrative," specifically exploring the notion of masculinity as it is constructed, maintained, and smothered through familial and spatial discourses. Using the frameworks of masculinity studies, trauma theory, and spatial theory, it will be posited that the suffering of "Yuvanashva" is more social and psychological than biologically or mythologically constructed. The demands of lineage script his life, Putra-pitru moksha, and royal duty, reducing his life to the single function of fathering a child. The novel, therefore, reveals how men, too, are forced into their roles no less than women, forbidding emotions and bodily integrity from them. By locating male trauma within mythological space, Pattanaik dismantles dominant narratives of heroic masculinity and makes possible reconsiderations of gender, wholeness, and selfhood beyond patriarchal completion.

Keywords: Male trauma, masculinity, spatial theory, mythology, fatherhood, patriarchy.

Introduction

The Indian mythological lore has been interpreted through the ages as a "lexical formation of male ideals of heroism," where "kings, warriors, and gods are portrayed as epitomes of male strength and male authority." The suffering, weakness, and disintegration of male flesh are encompassed within the ideals of "duty (dharma)" and sacrifice. The story of *The Pregnant King*, written by Devdutt Pattanaik, breaks away from this tradition of interpretation because it revolves around a male flesh and psyche that resists definition and integration within traditional male ideals. The story rewrites the lesser-known myth of King Yuvanashva, who inadvertently drinks the brew intended to fertilise his queens and ends up pregnant as a consequence. The writer transforms such seeming improbabilities into a deeply insightful study of male trauma inflicted through sociocultural and spatial factors.

This paper aims to examine how 'The Pregnant King' explores male trauma via the perspective of masculinity studies and spatial theory. This paper is not only about Yuvanashva's pregnancy but also about the life of suffocation that Yuvanashva undergoes as a male who is compelled to live for the sake

of other people's desires to fulfill his parents' need for offspring, to satisfy society's demand for fatherhood, and to fulfill the belief in 'putra-pitru moksha', the notion that a son is required for the salvation of one's ancestors. Yuvanashva's body is a space where all these forces meet.

In reading the novel as a commentary on patriarchal completeness, this paper contends that 'The Pregnant King' reveals the unseen price of perfect fatherhood and kingship. It illustrates how the construction of a male identity based solely on procreation and paternal duty leads to trauma, alienation, and loss of self. The mythological context, rather than rendering the text irrelevant to contemporary experience, actually heightens its relevance, echoing the same social demands placed on men in contemporary Indian culture.

Theoretical Framework: Masculinity, Trauma, and Space

Indian Theoretical Context: Dharma, Lineage, and Ritual Masculinity

To better understand the trauma of men in 'The Pregnant King'

, it is necessary to contextualise the notion of masculinity in indigenous Indian philosophical and cultural traditions, rather than merely using Western gender theory. In the Indian tradition, masculinity cannot be thought apart from 'dharma' (duty), 'vamsha'(lineage), and ritual obligation. A man's identity is not individual but relational, constructed through his relationships as son, husband, father, and ancestor.

The Dharmashastras and Grihya Sutras of classical Hinduism stress the need for the male householder (grihastha) as a means of maintaining social and cosmic order. Fatherhood becomes a ritual necessity rather than a choice. The need for putra-pitru moksha, or the son's obligation to liberate the ancestors from the cycle of rebirth, makes procreation a divine duty. The absence of a son, therefore, not only leads to social ostracism but also to metaphysical worries.

In this framework, masculinity functions as a form of what could be labelled "ritual masculinity," wherein the value of males is assessed via the successful enactment of prescribed rituals rather than emotional or ethical satisfaction. The trauma of Yuvanashva stems from the fact that his body fails to enact this ritual function.

According to Ashis Nandy, Indian masculinity is defined more by moral duty and sacrifice rather than by aggression. However, *The Pregnant King* shows the other side of this equation: when sacrifice is mandatory and endless, it becomes a site of psychological violence. Yuvanashva's pain is the example of how dharma becomes a tool of control rather than morality when it is imposed dogmatically.

Through the incorporation of Indian philosophical thought and the study of masculinity and spatial theory, it is possible to interpret the novel as a commentary on ritualised patriarchy that consecrates the suffering of men but refuses them the language to speak of trauma. Masculinity studies, specifically the idea of hegemonic masculinity as described by R.W. Connell, are a valuable tool in the interpretation of Yuvanashva's situation. Hegemonic masculinity favors power, control, reason, and procreation, while subordinating other forms of male expression. In 'The Pregnant King', Yuvanashva is expected to live up to this ideal as a king and a husband, but his failure to procreate at first makes him incomplete and inadequate.

Trauma theory also helps to explain how this inadequacy is internalized. Trauma, according to Cathy Caruth, is not only the product of a single catastrophic incident but can also be the product of a long-term exposure to oppressive structures. Yuvanashva's trauma is cumulative, the product of years of being defined by what he lacks—a son—and the constant reminders of his failure to live up to patriarchal norms. The spatial theory brings in an important element to this discussion. Theories developed by Henri Lefebvre, among others, highlight the social production of space and its close relationship with power. In

the novel 'The Pregnant King' by Pattanaik, the spaces of the palace, the forest, and the womb itself are symbolic of confinement and control. The palace, which is supposed to be a space of power, turns out to be a prison where Yuvanashva's body and decisions are watched over. His pregnant body turns him into a space of contradictions, embodied in an individual who upsets the gendered structuring of the social and mythological space.

The combination of all these theoretical approaches enables the construction of a reading of 'The Pregnant King' where male trauma is positioned at the point of intersection of body, space, and social expectation.

Yuvanashva and the Burden of Masculine Incompleteness

Right from the start of the novel, Yuvanashva is presented as a king tormented by the absence of his son. He is a king with power and status, but he is also a king who has failed in his most significant role in life: to father a son. In the social construct of the kingdom, a man without a son is incomplete, his life hanging in limbo between duty and embarrassment.

The prospect of fatherhood is a disciplinary tool. Yuvanashva's queens, his ministers, and his subjects are all complicit, consciously or unconsciously, in the reinforcement of the notion that his value is conditional upon his ability to reproduce. The notion of putra-pitru moksha heightens this by making fatherhood a holy obligation. The son is not only a social necessity but also a spiritual one, tasked with the duty of securing the salvation of his ancestors. Yuvanashva's failure is thus exaggerated into a macro-problem. This creates a situation of deep-seated psychological suffocation. Yuvanashva's desires, fears, and uncertainties are made irrelevant in the face of the collective will. He lives for others, living a life written by tradition and not his own doing. The narrative by Pattanaik shows how this suffocation is a form of male trauma that is largely unacknowledged because it is normalised as a form of duty.

Pregnancy and the Crisis of Masculinity

Yuvanashva's pregnancy is a critical moment in the novel, as it upsets the existing definitions of masculinity. Pregnancy has long been associated with femininity, motherhood, and passivity, but it is now mapped onto the male body. This reversal highlights the instability of gender categories and the arbitrariness of the roles assigned to bodies.

However, the pregnancy does not emancipate Yuvanashva; rather, it heightens his trauma. His body becomes a spectacle, a cause of consternation and confusion for the people around him. Instead of challenging the system that requires offspring at any cost, society tries to deal with the anomaly by re-establishing control. Yuvanashva is isolated, hidden away, and deprived of control over his own body.

This is a pivotal moment in which the essential paradox is revealed: although Yuvanashva meets the final patriarchal requirement of procreating a child, he does so at the expense of his own identity. This is important in that it illustrates how masculinity is not about physical ability but about adherence to social norms. The pregnant king is both idealized and erased, lauded for becoming a father but not for being a feeling, suffering human being.

Spatial Suffocation: Palace, Body, and Social Order

Spatial theory enables us to recognise how Yuvanashva's trauma is inscribed in the spaces he moves through. The palace, as a signifier of power, becomes a space of surveillance and control. "Every nook and cranny of royal space reinforces the notion of lineal and filial obligations." Yuvanashva's actions, interactions, and even his physiological processes are controlled in order to ensure dynastic succession.

The forest, which is often a place of transformation in Indian mythology, provides only temporary respite but no escape. Although it provides Yuvanashva opportunities for introspection, the forest is ultimately unable to liberate him from the pressures of society. The most important spatial location is Yuvanashva's own body, which becomes a site of conflict where cultural fears about gender and power are enacted. In making the male body a reproductive space, Pattanaik reveals how patriarchy uses bodies for its own ends, irrespective of gender. Yuvanashva's asphyxiation is therefore both spatial and psychological, in terms of environments that do not provide him with privacy, choice, or autonomy.

Living for Others: Duty, Desire, and Sacrifice

One of the most moving things about 'The Pregnant King' is the way it captures the idea of a life lived for others. Yuvanashva's choices are always driven by the will of parents, ancestors, subjects, and gods. His own desire for something more than mere duty is constantly deferred to the will of others.

This is a reflection of the larger cultural phenomenon in which men are appreciated not for who they are, but for what they offer—sons, stability, continuity. Emotional expression, vulnerability, and self-doubt are pushed aside in favour of stoic sacrifice. The repression of this in Pattanaik's novel is what brings it to the forefront and shows what the cost of this repression.

Yuvanashva's trauma, thus, is not an anomaly but a result of a system that associates masculinity with self-annihilation. His pain problematizes the idealization of sacrifice and encourages the reader to interrogate the moral underpinnings of such demands.

Mythology as a Site for Reimagining Masculinity

In placing this story within the realm of mythology, Pattanaik thus accomplishes a double critique. On the one hand, he reveals the patriarchal presuppositions underlying traditional myths; on the other hand, he employs mythology as a fluid domain of reinterpretation. 'The Pregnant King' thus proves that mythology is not a fixed domain but can encompass alternative notions of gender and identity.

The story of Yuvanashva challenges the reader to think about the nature of completeness. Is it something that can be attained by fatherhood and doing one's duty, or by accepting oneself and being independent? The novel also implies that completeness cannot be attained by force, no matter how holy the reason for it may be.

Conclusion

The Pregnant King is a very insightful look into the trauma of the male and the limitations of hegemonic masculinity. In the story of Yuvanashva, Pattanaik shows how men are stuck in roles that are determined by family, culture, and society, and are expected to live for the fulfillment of the desires of others, even if it means the sacrifice of their own well-being. The need for fatherhood as the completion of masculinity, and the role of putra-pitru moksha, is seen to be a cause of suffocation rather than satisfaction.

Through the integration of masculinity studies, trauma theory, and spatial theory, this paper has demonstrated that Yuvanashva's pain is systemic, not individual. Yuvanashva's pregnant body is a space of resistance that lays bare the violence of fixed gender roles. Finally, 'The Pregnant King' urges a transformation of masculinity that recognizes vulnerability, choice, and multiplicity. In this way, 'The Pregnant King' not only transforms mythological discourse but also engages with pressing issues in contemporary gender and identity politics.

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