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Born or Broken: Psychopathology, Trauma, And Justice in the Silence of the Lambs and Asur

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Abstract

In a world where good and evil coexist as dual facets of the human psyche, the boundaries between sanity and madness, justice and obsession often blur, reflecting a complex interplay of trauma, identity, and moral ambiguity that challenges conventional understandings of criminality and the ethical perception of one's mind. This paper examines whether violent criminals are “born” evil or “broken” by experience through a psychoanalytic interpretation of Thomas Harris’s The Silence of the Lambs, placed briefly in discourse with the Indian web series Asur: Welcome to Your Dark Side. Focusing on Hannibal Lecter and Jame Gumb, the study emphasizes criminal minds and detectives as psychological constructs shaped by early trauma, social abandonment, and institutional failure rather than by fixed biological drive. By drawing on Sigmund Freud’s model of the id, ego, and superego, Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage, and trauma theory (Caruth, Herman), it analyses how unresolved childhood traumas are transformed into 'twisted moralities,' where perpetrators develop internally coherent but socially destructive ideas of justice that blur the line between predator and protector. In exposing how justice itself can adopt pathological features, the proposed research reframes arguments about responsibility, morality, and the ethics of representing violence in modern-day crime fiction. By bringing a Western psychological thriller into conversation with an Indian crime series, the paper highlights how popular narratives of criminality can illuminate India’s emerging concerns around resilience, healing, and early intervention for at-risk youth. Ultimately, the study argues that literature and screen media not only represent psychopathology but also offer trauma-informed, socially ingrained reflections on what counts as a healthy self and a just society in the Indian context.

Keywords: Psychopathy, antisocial personality disorder, gender identity, ethical and moral ambiguity, moral perspectivism.

INTRODUCTION

What is good and evil? Is it something universal, or is it formed by an individual's perception, pain, and experience? Thomas Harris’s novel The Silence of the Lambs (1988) questions the very idea of evil and good, which transcends the boundaries of the contemporary thriller genre by delving deep into the psychology of both killers and those who hunt them. It is a riveting narrative that shapes the complex game between the predator and the prey, driven as much by intelligence and manipulation as by instinct and fear. From the moment Clarice Starling steps into the dimly lit corridor of the Baltimore State Hospital to face the notorious cannibalistic serial killer, Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the novel pulls us into an unsettling world where intellect and savagery coexist in a disturbing balance. Just as Lecter articulates his autonomy

in rejecting reductionist behavioral psychology, stating that 'Nothing happened to me, Officer Starling. I happened. You can't reduce me to a set of influences. You've given up good and evil for behaviorism ... nothing is ever anybody's fault. Look at me, Officer Starling. Can you stand to say I'm evil? Am I evil, Officer Starling?' (Harris 24–25), the remark itself questions conventional conceptions of morality and prompts viewers to reevaluate ethical boundaries. Scholars like Julie Bethany Wiest mention in her thesis "Creating cultural monsters: A critical analysis of the representation of serial murderers in America," that 'Serial murderers have become perverse icons in the United States–and American culture may facilitate their development, as well as intensive public interest' (Wiest 1). This reflection offers a two-fold question: first, what social and psychological circumstances give rise to serial violence; and second, how do narrative representations of that violence themselves shape collective introspection of crime, trauma, and morality?

When Thomas Harris published The Silence of the Lambs in 1988, Hannibal Lecter and Jame Gumb entered cultural memory not simply as fictional criminals but as archetypes of 'Nefarious genius' and 'flawed humanity,' forming Western concerns about rationality, desire, and the fragile boundaries of the self. Three decades later, the Indian web series Asur: Welcome to Your Dark Side (2020) directed by Gaurav Shukla, depicted the serial-killer narrative through Indian lenses–mythological, spiritual, and techno-urban. Its antagonist, Shubh Joshi, is a prodigious child turned mass murderer, whose crimes mirror Vedic apocalypse myths and whose origin story reads as a Bildungsroman gone disastrously wrong. Where Harris's killers emerge from broken American relations and psychiatric institutions, Shubh's trajectory introduces a non-Western variable into the behaviour-sequence model, which is the combination of intense giftedness with misfortune and religiously sanctioned parental rejection. Instead of a detached event of institutional humiliation, his decisive trauma is an ongoing arrangement in which he, who is born into a Brahmin priestly family in Varanasi, loses his mother in childbirth and is immediately marked as inauspicious. His horoscope falls under an 'Asur nakshatra'; a constellation his father associates with demonic forces. His father repeatedly calls him 'asur,' 'rakshas,' beating and humiliating him (Season 1, episode 1 "The Dead Can Talk").

Cultural Monsters and the Nature Nurture Debate

This research's central aim is that both narratives converge on a central question: are serial killers born broken–products of inherited aberration (prakriti, or nature), environmental violence (samskara, or nurture), or do they simply reject the simple opposition between being 'born evil' and being 'made evil'? Peter Barry's book Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory provides a detailed introduction to psychoanalytic literary criticism, which concedes the literary text to be understood as ideas of hidden desires, repression, symbolic repetition, and unconscious meaning. Barry mentions Freudian 'notion of the unconscious' [97], where he explains that Freud's entire work centers on the idea of the unconscious, which is a hidden layer of the mind that operates beyond consciousness yet 'strongly influence upon our actions'. . .. Closely linked to this is the idea of 'repression', where our mind finds a way of 'forgetting' or ignoring the unresolved childhood conflicts, forbidden desires, or traumatic memories, by burying them deep in the unconscious and that they are forced out of conscious awareness [97–98]. Critics like Panji Perdana Putra and Yuktha Lakshmi K. in their papers, emphasizes on the psychoanalytical lens of the two criminal minds, where they use Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality which is composed of three elements; the id which represents one's instinctual desire, the superego which internalizes morality and prohibition, and the ego which mediates between the desire and

the reality (Putra 6; Lakshmi K. 135). Putra highlights the process by which one protects oneself from awareness of the 'undesired and feared impulses', which is also known as the 'defence mechanism' [6]. He further states that 'In psychoanalytic theory, defence mechanisms represent an unconscious conciliation by the ego of id impulses which conflict with the wishes and needs of the ego and/or superego. By altering and distorting one's awareness of the original impulse, one makes it more tolerable. However, while defence mechanisms are used in an attempt to protect someone from unpleasant emotions, they often result in equally harmful problems [6]. Both these critics highlight Freud's psychoanalytical technique of interpreting a literary text, which is central to portraying Harris' novels' criminality, which in turn insinuates that monstrosity is an intricate consequence of fractured psychological development rather than innate evil. According to what Peter Barry implies in the Freudian context, the 'idea of repression' [98] is described as trauma that does not erase and forces itself into the unconscious, where it returns in hidden, compulsive, and often destructive forms. This is significant to Harris' construction of all the characters. Jame Gumb, also known as Buffalo Bill, is not inherently evil, but he suffers from a fragmented identity caused by abandonment, rejection, and cognitive displacement. Several critics assert in their papers that 'Gumb is portrayed as an unwanted child whose mother is already pregnant when she fails to place in the Miss Sacramento Contest: 'His mother had been carrying him a month when she failed to place in the Miss Sacramento Contest in 1948' (Putra 7; Anggraini 147; Harris 411). Her disappointment gradually turns into 'alcoholism and prostitution', abandoning Gumb at the age of 2 without any emotional stability, paternal recognition, or maternal care (Harris 411). His childhood events thus support the argument that Harris' characters are more than aberrations; they are narrative symbols of what happens when human suffering is misinterpreted or simply unacknowledged.

This paper further argues that the creation of what Julie Bethany Wiest calls 'cultural monsters'–figures whose violence is simultaneously pathologized, mythologized, and instrumentalized (Wiest 5–7)- is the result of the complex interaction between biopsychosocial aggregation in which childhood trauma, attachment failure, neurobiological vulnerability, and cultural scripts are present. Together, these works are not just crime narratives from different media and cultures, but they also challenge the system for making evil comprehensible. Ultimately, this paper compels the readers to ask the question: when society creates monsters through its neglect, what becomes of those tasked with stopping them, and what damage is done when the explanation arrives only after the trauma has already become a worldview?

Perverse Allegiance and Moral Revaluation

Critics such as Aaron Taylor, in his article "A Cannibal's Sermon: Hannibal Lecter, Sympathetic Villainy, and Moral Revaluation," discuss the concept of 'perverse allegiance,' where audiences develop sympathy for morally reprehensible characters like Lecter, despite their atrocious actions. As Taylor asserts, perverse allegiance is the acceptance of the villain on his own terms. It is the affirmation of Milton's Lucifer: in making evil one's good, one finds gratification in the villain because of, and not despite, her immorality (Taylor 186). It is essential to note that such revaluation is not accepted to diminish villainy's reprehensibility or explain it away. This complex response does not justify evil but rather acknowledges its psychological understanding. As well as employing Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of 'moral revaluation,' he emphasized that a villain's cruelty is not always an act of necessary evil, but can occasionally be recognized as an important, albeit neglected, aspect of our conception of kindness [186]. Hence, this research analyses the psychological and ethical intricacies entrenched in Harris's novel, uncovering how criminality, when shaped by trauma, intelligence, and repression, distorts the lines between predator and

protector, sanity and madness. Hannibal Lecter is not simply a serial killer–he is a paradox: an intellectual gentleman who speaks in riddles and kills with precision. His brilliance seduces, even as it terrifies.

Hannibal Lecter and the Architecture of Trauma

According to another critic, Aron Karasek, he mentioned in his thesis, "The Monstrous Other in Thomas Harris' Hannibal Lecter Novels and Their Film Adaptations," that 'Lecter's intellect is also presented through his ability to construct his own 'memory palace.' He uses this palace as his mental getaway and to alienate himself from the real world/human realm while in pain or suffering the boredom of imprisonment' (Karasek 39–40). On the contrary, Jame Gumb, aka. Buffalo Bill is not evil by nature but has a shattered identity formed by abandonment and cognitive displacement. Karasek then asserts that Lecter's monstrosity originates from trauma–the loss and cannibalization of his sister Mischa during the Second World War. This seminal experience pushes him into Klein's 'paranoid-schizoid' position, where others are split into persecutory or idealized figures (Karasek 52). In this state, Lecter does not merely seek justice; he punishes those who offend his sense of internal order.

Buffalo Bill and the Fragmented Self

Trauma is not just a memory for him–it becomes an organizing principle, repressed but ever-present, surfacing in the way he orchestrates his violence. Karasek mentions Derrick Hassert in his thesis, where Hassert writes in his paper "The Psychiatrist as Sociopathic God" that 'our moral compass quickly points to 'evil' when thinking about such an act as the cannibalistic murder of Hannibal's beloved sister by Nazi collaborators. According to St. Augustine, 'evil is simply the destruction, corruption, or removal of a preexisting good.' Hence, the merciless murder of a child constitutes 'an epitome of an evil act,' . . .' (Hassert 72). Buffalo Bill, on the other hand, is a more fragmented figure–a man so alienated from himself that he seeks transformation through another's skin. His desire to become female is not, as Clarice eventually discovers, genuine gender dysphoria. Rather, it is rooted in what psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan would identify as a failure in the mirror stage: a misrecognition of the self that creates a permanent lack, a void that he attempts to fill through violence and mimicry (Barry 110). Lecter tells Clarice, 'Billy's not a transsexual... but he thinks he is. He tries to be. . . He's tried to be a lot of things, I expect' (Harris 189). The characterization of Jame Gumb can also be presented as an albeit unsettling, subtle area for the study of queer theory, particularly in his contempt for fixed biological and social categories.

As Peter Barry explains in Beginning Theory, queer theory is cognizant of the idea that identities we consider 'givens', such as gender identity and individual selfhood, and the notion of literature itself are actually 'fluid and unstable things' rather than 'fixed and reliable' [36] essences. Jame Gumb represents this inferiority to a monstrous extent; as scholar Kawain Lo argues in her article "Tailored Bodies and Reconstructed Illusions", that Gumb exists as a 'confused mosaic of signifiers' who refuses to comply with the 'greater cultural understanding of the gender dichotomy' [2]. Rather than owning a fixed identity, Gumb is a 'failed transgender figure' who exposes the immense detachment between a nonconforming condition and the 'cisheteropatriarchal' [2] norms of society that attempt to categorize him. The notion of 'gender performativity' is a basis of queer theory founded by Judith Butler. In the book Beginning Theory, Barry mentions Judith Butler, where 'she argues that all identities, including gender identities, are a kind of impersonation and approximation . . . a kind of imitation for which there is no original' (Barry 147; Gender Trouble 21). Critic Judith Halberstam, in her book Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters, notes that 'Bill's extreme violence against women lies not in his gender confusion or his

sexual orientation but in his humanist presumption that his sex and his gender and his orientation must all match up to a mythic norm of white heterosexual masculinity' [165]. Thus, for Halberstam, she states that Gumb is, 'what he constructs is a posthuman gender, a gender beyond the body, beyond the human, and a veritable carnage of identity' [175]. In this context, several critics agree that Gumb challenges the 'power dynamics that protect cisgender heterosexual white men' (Lo 10–12; De Boer 46) by becoming both the 'objectified and the objectifier' (Lo 10–12), disrupting the traditional male gaze theory and compelling the readers into a state of self-awareness and discomfort. As mentioned in the novel, Hannibal Lecter observes that Gumb 'hates his own identity' and feels a 'total lack' that he tries to complete through his killings (Harris 187). However, the justice giving institution dismisses Gumb's request for transsexual surgery, as revealed by Lecter to Clarice, 'There are three major centers for transsexual surgery: Johns Hopkins, the University of Minnesota, and Columbus Medical Center. I wouldn't be surprised if he's applied for sex reassignment at one or all of them and been denied' (Harris 189). Consequently, as author K.E. Sullivan points out in the article "Ed Gein and the Figure of the Transgendered Serial Killer, " Gumb's queerness becomes the privileged signifier for psychotic violence, allowing society to treat him as an 'abomination' rather than a human formed by 'chaotically gendered upbringing' and institutional rejection (Lo 9–11).

Objectification Gender and Clarice Starling

Peter Barry describes, through the argument of Freudian fixation, how unresolved attachments can distort both sexual and emotional relationships of an individual in the future. Referring to Freud's idea of degradation in erotic life, Barry notes that unresolved 'maternal fixation' can direct men to segregate women into contrasting categories: vulgarized sexual 'objects' on one side and idealized maternal figures on the other (Barry 109). Harris reveals that 'The film of the beauty contest that Jame Gumb watched as an adult was real footage of his mother, but the woman in the swimming pool film was not his mother, . . .' (Harris 411). The beauty contest footage connects Gumb's feminine fantasy to his mother's failed acting career, which was followed by rejection. This psychoanalytic motif becomes relevant because his relation to women is not about acknowledgement, intimacy, or love, but about possession, degradation, and violently objectifying them for their skin. This becomes even more evident when explained through Melanie Klein's object relations theory. Gumb does not perceive women as complete human beings and tends to dismiss their individuality, feelings, and agency. He reduces them to an object that can be of use to him. Harris makes this dehumanization explicit when Clarice realizes that 'Gumb thought of women as 'skins', the way some cretins call them 'cunts'' (Harris 363). The word 'skins' reveals how entirely he separates the body from an individual.

Catherine Martin is also stripped of her identity as a human when Gumb refers to her as 'it': 'It definitely has lost weight. This one is so special . . .' (Harris 236). His language reveals that she exists for him not as Catherine, but as an object being ready to be violated. His brutality, therefore, is not arbitrary. It follows a grotesque and like a ritualized sequential order: he lures his victims by performing 'helplessness' (Harris 123–127), confines them in his basement, more specifically a 'deep well' [156–157], he then starves his victims to make their skin loosen while also forcing them to apply lotion so that the skin remains clean, smooth, and usable for his purpose [174–178], murders them, skins them, and finally attempts to complete his symbolic metamorphosis by constructing a 'skin suit' [232–236]. This repetitive method showcases 'the explosive form of sadism', as Nina Nova Anggraini proposes in her paper, "The Sadism of Jame Gumb in Thomas Harris' Novel the Silence of the Lambs". She asserts that people having this form of

sadistic personality are known to be 'unpredictably violent' as they are disappointed or frustrated with their normal lives. They lose control when they feel rejected, humiliated, or hopeless and seek retribution for the exploitation and deprecation to which they sense they have been subjected [145–146]. Her paper underlines that 'after analyzing the data, a scholar can conclude that Jame Gumb has a personality disorder where his sadistic acts – particularly the murder and mutilation of at least eleven women – as manifestations of his unresolved trauma and deep-seated desire for control, one of them is Klaus, the very first victim who was scalped and had a pupa inserted in his throat [148]. Anggraini infers his actions not as inherent evil but as symptoms of psychological disorders, which are triggered by early-life abandonment and constant rejection. It points toward his repetition compulsion, where an unresolved psychic trauma returns through ritualized violent behaviour.

Harris introduces Clarice as a woman navigating through the predatory gaze of men, both within and outside the FBI, which is male-dominated. The very statement from Lecter to Clarice implies this 'Do you think Jack Crawford wants you sexually? I'm sure he's very frustrated now. Do you think he visualizes . . . scenarios, transactions . . . fucking with you?' (Harris 69). Scholar Lynne Stahl describes in her article "Assuming Identities: Gender, Sexuality, and Performativity in The Silence of the Lambs" primarily the complex interplay of gender and sexuality as performed and represented in the film adaptation of the novel by Jonathan Demme. She further analyses The Silence of the Lambs as 'a film about what it's like for women to be stared at by men' (Stahl 34). Yet, Starling does not simply endure this gaze; instead, she overcomes it and emerges with a refined determination.

As an FBI trainee, she is introduced into a male-dominated association governed by law, hierarchy, and patriarchal authority. In the Lacanian framework, the FBI serves as the Symbolic order, where it is represented as an area of rules and regulations, language, legitimacy, and social recognition. Yet Clarice's presence in this order remains ambiguous because she is constantly seen first as a woman and only then as a detective. Harris makes this gendered analysis visible through the comments of the male deputies, who judge her appearance before they know her ability. One deputy remark, 'She doesn't look half as good as she thinks she does,' while another vulgarizes her body by saying, 'Well, if she just thinks she looks pretty God damned good, I'd have to agree with her myself, I'd put her on like a Mark Five Gas mask' (Harris 90–91). These commentaries serve as a paradox because, as it reduces Clarice to an object of sexual evaluation, it is also representing how the institution of justice itself becomes contaminated by the theory of 'male gaze' by Laura Mulvey in her work "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Even Jack Crawford, her mentor, partakes in this gendered exclusion when he tells the sheriff, 'This kind of sex crime has some aspects that I'd rather say to you just between us men, you understand what I mean, Sheriff' (Harris 92). His remark positions Clarice as an uncomfortable presence in the autopsy room, not because she lacks professional ability, but because she interrupts the masculine territory of law enforcement. Raphael Albuquerque De Boer's dissertation "Who Is Going to Save the Final Girl? supports this argument by mentioning that 'female figures in The Silence of the Lambs" remain subjected to a patriarchal system, even when they appear to occupy heroic roles' (De Boer 99). Similarly, in Aaron Taylor's thesis "A Cannibal's Sermon: Hannibal Lecter, Sympathetic Villainy, and Moral Evaluation" identifies the FBI as a 'patriarchal institution' whose authority often limits rather than validates Clarice's accomplishments (Taylor 192). Therefore, Clarice's struggle is not only against Buffalo Bill or Hannibal Lecter; it is also against the Symbolic order that questions her compliance while rejecting her full acknowledgement.

Shubh Joshi and the Trauma of Being Named Asur

Asur's Shubh Joshi suggests an Indian variation on this psychoanalytic theme, which is grounded in caste, astrology, and ritual. According to trauma theorist Judith Herman, she elucidates in her book Trauma and Recovery that childhood abuse creates a harmful environment that compels the development of unusual abilities, both creative and destructive. It leads to abnormal states of consciousness where the usual connections between body and mind, reality and imagination, knowledge and memory break down. These altered states enable the emergence of a wide range of symptoms, affecting both the body and the mind (Herman 57). Shubh's identification with the 'asur' is therefore not an inherent metaphysical essence but the internalization of a traumatic label. Over time, he comes to see himself as Kali's avatar, rationalizing his emotional numbness through the very mythic jargon used to condemn him. In episode 1, it is shown that Shubh's grandfather's recurrent protection and the psychologist's ignored warning become what trauma theorists call 'failed witnesses', where adults who partly see the child's suffering but cannot alter its course (Herman 96–99). Shubh's first killing is where he poisons his father during a funeral rite on the river, staged as a cold, ritualised act rather than an impulsive outburst, which functions as the centre of his developmental system. It is both parricide and spiritual revolt, by murdering the priest who named him a demon, Shubh symbolically separates himself from the human community and steps fully into the asura identity that has been imposed on him since birth (Season 1, episode 1 "The Dead Can Talk").

Western Pathology and Indian Mythic Violence

Professor Julie Bethany Wiest argues that American serial killers are culturally constructed as much as psychologically real–media, law enforcement, and fiction collaborate to produce a 'profile' that reinforces racial, gender, and class hierarchies while sensationalizing white male violence (Wiest 22–25). The Silence of the Lambs contributes to this allegory: Lecter is an aristocratic monster, whose European refinement (he speaks Italian, quotes Dante, and plays Bach) codes him as a 'civilized savage'–a figure that both fascinates and reassures white audiences by positioning evil in exotic scholarly culture rather than everyday American life. Maysaa Husam Jaber's analysis of trauma in her paper "The 'Unclaimed Experience': Trauma and Crime Fiction" notes that 'Crime narratives can be said to be utilized to address difficult issues around trauma as well as healing' (Jaber 122). The narrative achieves this by externalizing trauma onto monsters, while offering Clarice Starling as the traumatized yet resilient heroine. Her flashbacks to her father's death and the screaming lambs function as controlled re-experiencing–she narrates her trauma to Lecter, who 'treats' her by listening, and in return she gains the psychological insight to stop Jame Gumb. This thus enacts a therapeutic exchange, where trauma is made discrete and speech becomes power. On the other hand, Asur rejects the Western monster/hero binary in favour of a mythological grey zone ingrained in Shubh's childhood as an 'Asur child' of a Brahmin house. The web series constantly returns to flashbacks in which the boy, precociously reciting the Gita and mastering complex texts, is nevertheless beaten and reviled by his father as a walking bad omen whose very birth killed his mother. In one of his most chilling monologues, Shubh Joshi declares: 'Anant andhkaar hi param satya hai… lagaav hi peeda hai, karuna hi krurta, aur ant hi prarambh' (Asur, Season 1), meaning 'Endless darkness is the ultimate truth; attachment is pain; compassion is cruelty; and every ending is only a new beginning.' This line forms the psychic outcome of a childhood in which maternal death, astrological stigma, and paternal abuse teach an intellectually gifted child that intimacy is indistinguishable from harm and that the cosmos itself is rigged against him. Thus, followed by Shubh's embracement of his identity as the demon who has the position of power rather than shame. His later claims of being Kali's avatar,

orchestrating murders that imitate sacrificial and obituary rites along the Ganga, extend this childhood trauma into a grandiose perspective in which his trauma is being altered as an indication that the universe itself is moulded against the 'Asurs.' The viewer is forced to oscillate between condemnation and understanding, much as Clarice does with Lecter as irreversibly the 'Other', Asur asks whether Shubh could have been saved by healthier, non-toxic parenting, or improved institutions for prodigies like him. This change reflects an Indian discourse on mental health and modernity that is distinct from Western psychiatry. Where American serial-killer narratives pathologize aberration, Asur spiritualizes it, as Shubh's madness is not a DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) diagnosis but a karmic imbalance, and the detective (Dhananjay Rajput) who hunts him is himself traumatized, alcoholic, and seeking moksha (liberation) through his work. The web series thus stages the nature–nurture argument in Indian metaphysical terms, which questions whether Shubh's violence is the consequence of his karma from past lives (nature as metaphysical destiny), or of his samskara (environmental conditioning) in this life? The nature–nurture question, finally, is not a scientific mystery to be solved but an ethical call to action. Wiest writes that 'American cultural values–especially as they emphasize competition and individual achievement; white, male privilege; and hegemonic masculinity–along with the emotional appeal of crime commission appear to contribute to the development of serial murderers' (Wiest 4–5). The same could be said of India, where our values–academic meritocracy, family honour, gender hierarchy outline who breaks and how. If we want fewer Shubh Joshis, we need not only better mental-health infrastructure but also different narratives that establish resilience over revenge, community over competition, and healing over honour.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both narratives are not just a thriller genre–it is a disturbing psychological inquiry into what shapes human monstrosity and who holds the moral authority to name it. Thomas Harris's novel and the Asur web series interrogate not only the criminal mind but also the societal frameworks that foster, ignore, or exploit trauma. Through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, Shubh's and Lecter's refined brutality, and Gumb's fractured identity, become more than narrative devices–they become mirrors for the unconscious desires, fears, and failures of the society that produces them. Both Lecter's and Shubh's unsettling charm and cruelty demand the audience's uneasy complicity. As Aaron Taylor suggests, our 'perverse allegiance' to him stems from the way he rewrites morality on his own terms, not because he is redeemed, but because he refuses to be reduced to cause and effect (Taylor 186). Buffalo Bill, meanwhile, represents the tragic consequences of trauma neglected and identity rejected–not a representation of gender dysphoria, but of a society that pathologizes and abandons its most suffering. The novel and the web series ultimately offer no clear answers. It resists clear binaries of good and evil, sane and insane, and justice and obsession. Instead, it immerses us in a world where violence is not only external but also internal, institutional, and often invisible. Where the real horror lies is not just in what Lecter, Shubh, or Gumb does, but in the ultimate consequences of the society's involvement in making them become what they are–and how it moulds characters like Clarice and Dhananjay to survive them. In the final chapter of the novel, Lecter's unsettling letter to Clarice– 'I have no plans to call on you, Clarice, the world being more interesting with you in it. . .' (Harris 421) is more than a farewell. It is a challenge to us, the readers, whether we really can accept the coexistence of brilliance and brutality, innocence and ambition, and good and evil within the same human? In that question lies the enduring influence of The Silence of the Lambs–a narrative where the monster is not someone we know, but exists within us.

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