

Thuggee as Counter-Narrative: Resistance and Subversion in P Sachidanandan's *The Book of Destruction*

**Abstract**

Peripheries are produced by every community. A society and nation state's agency and discourse are controlled by the prevailing sociocultural and hierarchical power structures (national, patriarchal, or both), which silences and marginalizes some segments of the population. These oppressive and dominating practices have, nevertheless, always been contested. Subcultures' existence and expression can be interpreted as a form of critique of the prevailing national and societal structures. This essay examines the book *The Book of Destruction* by Malayalam author P Sachidanandan (Anand) and makes the case that the book offers a counterargument to state-sponsored violence by depicting the Thuggee subculture.

According to Stephen Duncombe's definition in *The Cultural Resistance Reader* (2012), subcultures are built systems that are different from the wider civilizations. Additionally, he contends that subcultures are:

“Macro worlds created by those who feel that they do not belong in the world at large....This cultural space offers great political potential for subcultures provide a place to test out new identities, ideas and activities that deviate from the status quo” (135)

Subcultures are able to cultivate a sense of ownership over their creations thanks to this freedom of "self construction" (Duncombe, 135). Therefore, it is believed that subcultures alert the "straight" world to the existence of diversity (Hebdige, 15). Furthermore, subcultures are seen as those that "contradict the myths of consensus," undermine the idea of unity and coherence, and disrupt the process of "normalization" (Hebdige, 18). Stated differently, subcultures represent a type of cultural opposition to prevailing structures. This essay contends that, in contrast to the national rhetoric and state-sponsored violence, the Thuggee subculture is represented in P. Sachidanandan's (Anand) 2005 book *The Book of Destruction*, which was released as *Samharatinte Pustakam* in Malayalam.

Wars, encounter killings, and other forms of violence can be categorized as nation-state sponsored violence for the purposes of this essay.

In addition, the nation's macro discourse might be described as its hegemonic discourse, which excludes a number of minor voices and societies and silences many others.

To begin, P Sachidanandan (born 1936) is a contemporary Malayalam novelist who writes under the pen name Anand (henceforth referred to as Anand in this paper). He has won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for story and novel in 1981 and 1985, respectively, and has authored more than twelve novels, seven collections of short stories, and numerous essays on current events. His tenth book is *Samharatinte Pustakam*. A translation of the 2005 novel, *Book of Destruction*, was released in 2012. "The Gardener," "The Hotelier and Traveler," and "The Tailor" are the three sections that make up the book.

The narrative begins when the narrator encounters Seshadri, an old coworker who has been absent for a while, in a hospital when he is en route to a surgery. Seshadri requests a meeting with the narrator. However, he passes away during the procedure. He informs the narrator that the former was a Thug in a message he leaves for him before he passes away. The message and Thug's description take up the remainder of the first section. When the narrator discovers that there are additional covert assassination groups, the second section, "The Hotelier and Traveler," intensifies his quest. The story then moves forward by describing the groups, their methods of execution, and their ideologies. The novel's third section takes on mystical dimensions as it connects these secret groups to the idea of destruction and elevates it to a mystical level, portraying destruction as cyclical and an essential component of creation.

As was previously said, the majority of the story is devoted to describing the secret societies' methods and beliefs. Additionally, the novel challenges the uniformity of discourses by establishing an alternate discourse that symbolizes a subculture and marginalizes multiple perspectives through this description. These elements will be examined in the paragraphs that follow.

The author's narrative concentrates on Seshadri's portrayal of criminals in the section titled "The Gardener." The assertion that thugs transcend castes, religions, languages, and regional identities, as well as the reality that only thugs can identify one another, are among the narrative's most important elements (Anand, 28). The custodians of their cult, according to Seshadri, are "Bhavani and Allah the Great" (Anand, 28). The early Indian nationalist movements and the mythical and legendary formation of a largely Hindu nation have already been extensively documented. An alternative discourse that challenges the elitist nationalist discourse that has been repressed in the interest of a nationalist elite to establish a homogenous "nation based on Hindu iconography" is created by the emphasis on the transcendence of socio-religious and ethnic boundaries as well as the worship of both Islam and Hinduism (Sethi, 28). This feature is also demonstrated in the novel's second section, which describes a covert murder organization with Central Asian roots that has its roots in a Muslim cult.

Additionally, the depiction of thugs and the practice of thuggee calls into question the widespread devastation that occurs both with and without government action. Seshadri contends in his letter to the narrator that their cult and destructive deeds can be compared to the "wholly new kind of violence that has taken over the world in the last half century or so, in which the "arenas of huge armies and nations at war have given way to small individualized groups" (Anand, 42). The analogy between the state's and thugs' violence supports the idea that Thuggee is a subculture that creates its own customs to challenge the prevailing structures. Therefore, it is possible to interpret the portrayal of Thuggee as a subculture as a response to the state-sponsored violence and destruction.

In conclusion, one may claim that the novel's depiction of the Thuggee subculture serves as a form of resistance against the nation state's hegemonic discourses and ideological frameworks. The subculture's portrayal challenges the nation state's practice of inflicting injustice and brutality

y on its population. This is accomplished by describing a cultural system that prioritizes their role as system members over their caste or religious ties and holds an inclusive set of beliefs. A different discourse that affirms the existence of marginal subcultures and challenges the national and state discourse is produced by the thorough explanation of the cult's activities (both the thugs in part 1 and the assassination gangs in part 2).

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