

**A FORMALIST PATH TO THE COMPLEXITY OF
LITERARY FORM**

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by

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Submitted

in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

to the



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*Dedicated
to
my mother
Krishna Chakraborty*

Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, **A Formalist Path to the Complexity of Literary Form** being submitted by Ravi Sekhar Chakraborty to the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, for the award of **Doctor of Philosophy** is a record of bonafide work carried by him under my supervision. In my opinion, the thesis has reached the standards of fulfilling the requirements for submission relating to the degree.

The contents of the thesis have not been submitted in part or full, to any other university or institute for the award of any other degree or diploma.

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Abstract

With the increasingly instrumental usage of computational techniques, the discipline of digital humanities risks degenerating into another instance of scientism. Instead, the currency of these cultures of formalization calls for a fundamental reconsideration of formalisms. The concept of complexity is appropriated to provide a telos to this reconstruction of the formalist project. The thesis shows that formalisms in literature draw from the power of mathematical thought as a source of both metaphysics and method. There is an extended engagement with three thinkers: Albert Lautman for defining the notion of the ‘mathematical’ with which to interpret formalisms, René Thom for exemplifying a mathematically oriented metaphysics of literary form and Alfred North Whitehead for developing a critique of the mathematical and yet retaining the idea of formal thought. Starting from furnishing a basis for how formalisms engage with mathematical thought, the thesis progresses to detect the limitations of the mathematical in grasping the complexity of literary form.

सार

यह थीसिस गणित और साहित्य के बीच संबंधों की एक कठोर खोज है। मेरा तर्क है कि गणित साहित्यिक रूप की जटिलता को व्यवस्थित रूप से समझाने में मदद कर सकता है। जिस प्रकार एक के बाद एक प्रतिमान के उत्तराधिकार पर विचार करके प्राकृतिक घटनाओं की जटिलता को समझने में प्रगति होती है, उसी तरह हम साहित्यिक रूप के सिद्धांतों को उसी तरह के क्रम में व्यवस्थित करते हैं।

साहित्यिक रूप की प्रकृति को समझने में गणित की शक्ति को छोड़ने के बजाय, हम महसूस करते हैं कि गणित हमें साहित्यिक रूप की नई समस्याओं को स्पष्ट करने में मदद करता है। यह हमें डिजिटल मानविकी को एक नए परिप्रेक्ष्य में देखने में मदद करता है और ऐसा नहीं लगता कि यह डिजिटल तकनीक का अंधा अनुप्रयोग है। इसके बजाय, डिजिटल मानविकी भविष्य के तत्वमीमांसा का इनक्यूबेटर है।

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