FUTURE IMPERFECT:
UTOPIA, DYSTOPIA, AND THE CRITIQUE OF THE PRESENT

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JUNE 2024

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by

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Submitted

in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

to the

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI

June 2024

THESIS CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**Future Imperfect: Utopia, Dystopia, and the Critique of the Present**" being submitted by **Shikha Vats** to Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is a bona fide record of the research work done by her under our guidance and supervision. In our opinion, the thesis has fulfilled the requirements and has reached the requisite standard for the submission relating to the degree. The contents of this thesis, in full or in parts, have not been submitted to any other Institute or University for the award of any degree or diploma.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this thesis has been nothing short of a rite of passage. The years spent on this research have taught me much about life, hope, and above all, gratitude. For all these lessons and more, I owe a debt of gratitude to my advisors, Professor Angelie Multani and Professor Simona Sawhney. This thesis has become possible due to their constant guidance, counsel, and care.

I would like to thank the members of my committee: Professor Subarno Chattarji for his insightful suggestions and words of encouragement; Dr Stuti Khanna for her interest in my work and for always asking the most fundamental questions; Dr Milind Wakankar for his advice on conceptual frameworks, and Professor Bijoy H. Boruah for his quietly provoking interjections. I am grateful to Professor Sanil V for his incisive feedback during the annual presentations, Dr Divya Dwivedi for her advice on the structure of the dissertation, and Dr Dickens Leonard for motivating conversations about the possibilities of the project. I thank Professor Jatindra K. Nayak for his inspiring presence as a mentor of the kind one can only hope for in academia. I thank Dr Lalit Kumar for his help with the Hindi translation of the thesis abstract.

I am indebted to IITD administration for providing generous travel grants to attend the 20th annual conference of 'Utopian Studies Society' at Monash University Prato Centre in Italy and a GIAN course at IIT Kharagpur. I am thankful to the HSS staff including Ms Neelam Sindhwani, Ms Monika Chauhan and Mr Pankaj for patiently answering all my deadline-related queries, and to our erstwhile department librarian Ms Shweta Verma for her help in procuring books.

I am grateful for Nishtha's enlivening presence in the department. Conversations with Bharat and Siddharth helped me stay afloat during difficult phases of writing. I thank Nazia, Wing-Kwong, and Sevali for enthusiastically engaging with the chapter drafts. I am fortunate to have shared this very trying journey with my hostel-mates and lifelong friends– Aparna, Moulshree, and Sandhya. I thank Gourab for his welcoming company and Ankur for his steadfast friendship. I thank Priyam, Saumya, and Bela for their steady support despite my phases of disappearance. Pooja Katara thought I will write a book some day; I am beholden to her for this entire journey.

I thank my brother Rohit Vats for being my first and most consistent ally. I am indebted to my aunt Krishna Devi for her watchful care. I thank Yogita Sharma for instilling in me an early and abiding love for literature. I am indebted to Ankit Ashirbad for his immeasurable generosity. I am blessed to have my nieces Diya and Vedika whose unbounded affection kept me going.

I will be forever grateful to my parents Daya Krishan Sharma and Rajbala Sharma for always believing in me. I thank my parents-in-law Padmanava Panda and Nirupama Panda for their love and support. To Shaswat, I owe it all.

Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to my grandmothers Ganga Devi and Tilottama Panda, one who taught me the value of learning and the other who inspires me in its pursuit every day.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines contemporary Anglophone fiction from the Indian subcontinent by situating it within the critical history of utopian/dystopian fiction. The project locates discernible new trends in utopian/dystopian fiction in the subcontinent in the twenty-first century under the shaping influence of postmillennial modernity and neoliberal capitalism, and their detrimental effects on postcolonial societies and environments. I contend that the dystopian impulse in the texts under study offers a strong political critique of the nation in the novels' treatment of traumatic historical events and contemporary crises. In foregrounding issues such as man-made disasters, widening inequalities, rising poverty, climate change, xenophobia, migration, and displacement, these narratives imagine alternative forms of coexistence.

In my reading, these texts grapple with the difficulties of depicting devastating historical and contemporary disasters, and representing the subaltern and the nonhuman in such worlds. I find that this difficulty of representation in these texts is rendered legible through scenes of delirium, uncanny occurrences, madness, and events that reveal a peculiar relation to memory. By critically analysing such moments as ruptures, the thesis highlights utopian and dystopian enactment of the past and future in these novels as a trenchant critique of the present. These texts advance a perspective where global and local concerns merge while displacing the 'national'. Finally, the thesis demonstrates how the call to use utopia-as-method is crucial to understanding the integral relationship between literature and crisis, storytelling and community-building, capitalist realism and alternative futures– especially from the vantage point of the global South.

KEYWORDS: utopia, dystopia, climate fiction, postmillennial modernity, capitalist realism

सार

यह शोध प्रबंध यूटोपियन/ डायस्टोपियन उपन्यासों के आलोचनात्मक संदर्भ में भारतीय उपमहाद्वीप के समकालीन एंग्लोफोन उपन्यासों का विश्लेषण करता है। इस परियोजना में उपमहाद्वीप में रचित इक्कीसवीं सदी के यूटोपियन/ डायस्टोपियन उपन्यासों पर उत्तर-सहस्त्राब्दी आधुनिकता और नवउदारवादी पूंजीवाद के प्रभाव के परिणाम स्वरूप उभरती हुई नई धाराओं को दर्शाया गया है और उत्तर-औपनिवेशिक समाजों और वातावरण पर उनके हानिकारक प्रभावों का पता लगाया है। मेरी विवेचना दिखलाती है कि शोध के लिए चुने हुए उपन्यासों में हृदय विदारक ऐतिहासिक घटनाओं और समकालीन समस्याओं का चित्रण और डायस्टोपिया के अवधारणा की उपस्थिति आधुनिक राष्ट्र की एक सशक्त राजनीतिक आलोचना प्रस्तुत करता है। मानव निर्मित आपदाओं, बढ़ती असमानताओं, बढ़ती गरीबी, जलवायु परिवर्तन, ज़ेनोफोबिया, प्रवास और विस्थापन जैसे मुद्दों को सामने रखते हुए, यह वर्णनात्मक अध्ययन सह-अस्तित्व के वैकल्पिक रूपों को पेश करता है।

मेरे विश्लेषण के अनुसार, ये ग्रंथ विध्वंसकारी ऐतिहासिक और समकालीन आपदाओं को चित्रित करने और समाज के नीचले पायदान पर रहने वालों और गैर मानवों की समस्याओं का वर्णन करने में कठिनाइयों का सामना करते हैं। मुझे लगता है कि इन पुस्तकों में समस्याओं के प्रतिनिधित्व की कठिनाई को पाठकों के लिए सुपाठ्य बनाने के लिए उन्माद, अजीबोगरीब घटनाओं, पागलपन और ऐसी घटनाएं जिनका स्मृति से एक अजीबोगरीब संबंध है का सहारा लिया गया है। यह शोध प्रबंध इन घटनाओं का आलोचनात्मक विश्लेषण सामाजिक अलगाव के तौर पर करता है और इन उपन्यासों में अतीत और भविष्य के यूटोपियन और डायस्टोपियन विचारों को वर्तमान की सशक्त आलोचना के रूप में उजागर करता है। ये ग्रंथ एक ऐसे नजरिये को आगे बढ़ाते हैं जहाँ वैश्विक और स्थानीय चिंताएँ 'राष्ट्रीय'समस्याओं को विस्थापित करते हुए विलीन हो जाती हैं। अंत में, शोध प्रबंध, साहित्य और संकट, कहानी और समुदाय, पूंजीवादी यथार्थवाद और वैकल्पिक भविष्य के बीच अभिन्न संबंध को समझने के लिए यूटोपिया के अवधारणा की महत्ता को रेखांकित करता है - विशेष रूप से वैश्विक दक्षिण के दृष्टिकोण से।

कीवर्ड: यूटोपिया, डायस्टोपिया, जलवायु कथा, उत्तर-सहस्राब्दी आधुनिकता, पूंजीवादी यथार्थवाद

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