

A Study of Satish Alekar's *Dynasts* (2003): A Greimassian Semiotic Analysis of Literary Discourse

[Satish Alekar'ın *Dynasts* (2003) Kitabı Üzerine Bir İnceleme: Edebî Söylemin Greimassçı Göstergibilimsel Analizi]

[Une étude des Dynastes de Satish Alekar (2003): Une analyse sémiotique greimassienne du discours littéraire]

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Abstract

This study analyses Satish Alekar's narrative style in his play *Dynasts* by applying semiotic square analysis technique, with the following aim: to uncover the underlying meanings and symbols within the text, shedding light on Alekar's artistic choices and their impact on the overall message of the play. The aesthetic chronotope, the struggle in the plot, and the use of symbolism are examined in relation to the semiotic analysis of literary discourse in *Dynasts*. Furthermore, the analysis delves into the portrayal of power dynamics and the exploration of morality while highlighting how Alekar challenges societal norms and values through his characters. The story implies that deliberate consent to immoral lifestyles can lead to personal and societal downfall. This theme is further reinforced through the recurring motif of decaying relationships and corruption throughout the play. The play highlights the universal nature of greed and its impact on characters, regardless of their gender or societal roles. This exploration of human nature and societal norms provides a thought-provoking socio-political critique within the text.

Keywords: Semiotics, Greimas, Meaning, Narrative, Corruption, Greed, Power dynamics

Özet

Bu çalışma, Satish Alekar'ın *Dynasts* adlı oyunundaki anlatım tarzını göstergibilimsel dörtgen analizi tekniğini uygulayarak incelemektedir. Amaç, metnin altında yatan anlamları ve sembolleri ortaya çıkarmak, Alekar'ın sanatsal seçimlerine ve bunların oyunun genel mesajı üzerindeki etkilerine ışık tutmaktır. Estetik kronotop, olay örgüsündeki mücadele ve sembolizm kullanımı, Hanedanlar'daki edebî söylemin göstergibilimsel analizi ile ilişkili olarak incelenmektedir. Ayrıca analiz, Alekar'ın karakterleri aracılığıyla toplumsal normlara ve değerlere nasıl meydan okuduğunun altını çizerken, güç dinamiklerinin tasvirini ve ahlakın keşfini inceliyor. Hikâye, ahlak dışı yaşam tarzlarına kasıtlı olarak rıza göstermenin kişisel ve toplumsal çöküşe yol açabileceğini ima etmektedir. Bu tema, oyun boyunca yinelenen çürüyen ilişkiler ve yozlaşma motifiyle daha da pekiştiriliyor. Oyun, açgözlülüğün evrensel doğasını ve cinsiyetleri ya da toplumsal rolleri ne olursa olsun karakterler üzerindeki etkisini vurgular. İnsan doğası ve toplumsal normlara ilişkin bu keşif, metinde düşündürücü bir sosyo-politik eleştiri sağlıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göstergibilim, Greimas, Anlam, Anlatı, Yolsuzluk, Açgözlülük, Güç dinamikleri

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Résumé

Cette étude analyse le style narratif de Satish Alekar dans sa pièce *Dynasts* en appliquant la technique de l'analyse sémiotique carrée, avec l'objectif suivant : découvrir les significations et les symboles sous-jacents dans le texte, en mettant en lumière les choix artistiques d'Alekar et leur impact sur le message global de la pièce. Le chronotope esthétique, la lutte dans l'intrigue et l'utilisation du symbolisme sont examinés en relation avec l'analyse sémiotique du discours littéraire dans *Dynasts*. En outre, l'analyse se penche sur la représentation de la dynamique du pouvoir et l'exploration de la moralité, tout en soulignant la façon dont Alekar remet en question les normes et les valeurs sociétales à travers ses personnages. L'histoire implique que le consentement délibéré à des modes de vie immoraux peut conduire à la chute personnelle et sociétale. Ce thème est renforcé par le motif récurrent de la dégradation des relations et de la corruption tout au long de la pièce. La pièce met en évidence la nature universelle de la cupidité et son impact sur les personnages, indépendamment de leur sexe ou de leur rôle dans la société. Cette exploration de la nature humaine et des normes sociétales constitue une critique sociopolitique du texte qui incite à la réflexion.

Mots-clés : Sémiotique, Greimas, Signification, Narration, Corruption, Cupidité, Dynamique du pouvoir

1. Introduction: Author and text

Satish Vasant Alekar (Jan. 30, 1949) is a prominent actor, director, and playwright. The Padma Shree awardee playwright has in his credit a number of well-known plays like *The Dread Departure* (1974), *Micky and Memsahib* (1973), *Deluge* (1975), *Begum Barve* (1979), *The Terrorist* (1990), *Dynasts* (2003) etc. In the record of productive Indian playwrights, Satish Alekar is proudly included and also known as the Man of Theatre, who "practiced existentialist-absurdist theatre at large; therefore, influences of Antonin Artaud, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, and Tom Stoppard are apparently observed in his plays" (Dharwadkar, 1955, p. 70). Through his plays, he sheds light on the struggles faced by individuals in a rapidly changing society and explores the complexities of human existence. The use of existentialist and absurdist themes adds depth and complexity to his narratives, allowing audiences to reflect on the meaning of life and the human condition. By analysing the conflicting core values in *Dynasts* through a Greimassian semiotic framework, we can gain a deeper understanding of the play's intended messages and explore its potential goals. This approach allows us to uncover the intricate layers of meaning within the narrative and appreciate Alekar's innovative approach to storytelling. Ultimately, this study aims to elucidate the significance of the work and its contribution to the broader literary landscape. Furthermore, it seeks to examine how the play's exploration of dilemmatic existential themes resonate with contemporary audiences, inviting them to question their own beliefs and values in the face of life's uncertainties.

1.1. *Dynasts* (2003): A Glance

With special reference to *Dynasts*, Samik Bandyopadhyay concedes that "in *Dynasts* (originally *Pidhijaat* (2003)", Alekar "focuses on the rampant corruption, particularly at the upper echelons of the political parties to the Left and the Right alike, with a sharp directness that is quite a departure for the playwright" (Introduction 12). On the surface level, the play delves into the complexities of human nature by addressing the sensitive issue of caste and exposes the hypocrisy that exists within society; however, at the deepest level, "it is a devastating satire on the malleability of morality in both 'tradition' and 'modernity'" (Back Jacket). Alekar has tried to divulge a decayed husband-wife relationship between Radha and her unnamed husband 'Father' as he is known to us in the text. Radha, who is in an extramarital relation with a soon to be cabinet minister Mahadev (OBC Uncle), is mostly out of home till late night under one pretext or another. She has forsaken all her domestic duties towards her son Ashu and her husband. Her husband connives at her illicit relation with Mahadev as he is expecting political and economic advantages in return. Despite their unconventional arrangement, it is evident that both have chosen to prioritize their personal desires over their familial responsibilities. This situation raises questions about the stability and emotional well-being of their son Ashu, who is neglected by his parents. The play highlights how open mindedness, when taken to the extreme, can lead to the downfall of society. The portrayal of power politics, corruption, and a deteriorated education system serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of unchecked abundance. The characters in *Dynasts* navigate a web of social relationships tainted by moral disregard, illustrating the far-reaching impact of wealth on human values.

1.2. *Dynasts* as a system of signs

Dynasts is a system of signs as the complexity of the text requires readers to carefully analyse the interactions between characters and decipher the underlying messages. By doing so, readers can uncover the hidden meanings and themes that Alekar has embedded within the text, allowing for a deeper understanding of the

consequences of unchecked abundance and moral disregard in society. The intricate web of signs encourages readers to critically reflect on their own values and consider the potential ramifications of allowing power politics and corruption to go unchecked. The literary discourse of the text is not restricted to the opulent descriptions of the riches belonging to the characters. Instead, it delves into the depths of their subconscious minds, exploring the intricate emotions and fears that fuel their dreams. The juxtaposition of their opulent lifestyles with the turmoil within their psyches creates a haunting and thought-provoking narrative that leaves readers questioning the nature of reality and the power of our own minds. It is only then, "a literary discourse is created when the universe of things is transformed into the universe of signs" (p. 77) says by H. S. Gill (1996). The universe of things like dark and old house of Radha with cracks becomes universe of signs when the same begins to speak about split in the family. The commonplace realities like the feelings of love between Radha and Mahadev; hate between Father and Appa; and anger between Radha and Father (her husband) are transformed into a system of signs as the author deliberately does not stick to the obviousness of the facts. Instead, the author explores the deeper layers of meaning and symbolism within these relationships, using them as a means to convey larger societal and psychological issues. Through this exploration, the Greimassian semiotic square becomes a powerful tool for understanding and dissecting familial disequilibrium, shedding light on the intricacies that lie beneath the surface while offering a more nuanced interpretation of the text, revealing hidden meanings and themes that may not be apparent on the surface.

1.3. Central theoretical statement

Many Satish Alekar scholars have agreed to the fact that the playwright is associated with absurdism (Rajguru, 2016 and Dharwadkar, 1955). Their focus was mainly on the authorship and absurd elements present in most of his plays. However, a closer examination of Alekar's works reveals that his association with absurdism is just one aspect of his artistic vision. Alekar (2009), in an interview with Reema Gehi a popular theatre enthusiast, defends his art of playwrighting by saying, "Why I write plays is that I wish to write about "truth" as I see it in relationships, society, and values. I don't write realistic plays. I adopt devices that are realistic. To me, theatre is make-believe." His intention is not to write preachy plays but to portray reality with an amalgamation of devices like distancing effects, a pinch of absurdism, some historical and mythical references, comics, fantasy, and surrealism. These various devices allow the playwright to challenge conventional narratives and explore complex themes in a thought-provoking manner. By incorporating multiple elements, the playwright creates a rich tapestry of perspectives that encourages audiences to question their own preconceived notions and engage with the deeper layers of his work. Therefore, it is crucial to appreciate the holistic approach taken by the playwright in order to fully grasp the intended impact of his plays. As Kanonge (2010) affirms "narratives are written to make sense when considered as a whole" (p. 25). Propp's Morphology of the Folktale (1968) is the point of departure of a narratology which derives its elementary units from the narrative text as a whole and/or from a corpus of narratives. Unlike other plays of Alekar, Dynasts pushes the boundaries of storytelling by blending surrealistic elements with absurd and historical elements. By presenting a cohesive story, the audience is able to follow the development of characters and events, which adds depth and meaning to the overall message of the play. This holistic approach not only enhances the audience's understanding but also creates more immersive and impactful theatrical experience. Semiotics, thus, is an appropriate lens that takes into consideration all the formative elements, from figurative to thematic levels, because,

Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands for it. (Eco, 1975, p. 7)

Semiotics, therefore, allows us to delve into the deeper meanings and symbols within a theatrical production, uncovering the layers of communication and representation. Thus, this study contends that the possible purpose of Dynasts can be revealed from the data gathered in the text, irrespective of the opinions of above-mentioned scholars, by means of studying the contrasting core values in the text, as guided by the Greimassian semiotic approach.

1.4. Methodology

The Greimassian literary-semiotics approach is a general theory of meaning, which is used in the present study in relation to analysing the understudied literary text. Whereas meaning remains inscrutable, propounds Greimas, signification "is the key concept around which all semiotic theory is organized" (Greimas & Courtés, 1982, p. 298). In this respect, Greimas proposed three-stage analysis levels such as discursive, narrative, and thematic that take place in the "surface narrative structures and deep narrative structures" (Greimas, 1971, p.

793). The approach consists of exploring semiotic objects at three different levels of analysis: the discursive or figurative level, the narrative level, and the deep abstract/thematic level. The semiotic analysis of the understudied text commences with an examination of surface textual phenomena. A process of decoding to uncover deeper and more abstract levels of meaning is then attempted until the fundamental values underlying the text are arrived at.

2. Analysis

2.1. The discursive level

2.1.1. The figurative components of Dynasts

"The figurative elements are those elements in a text that correspond to the concrete physical world. They are essential ingredients in the construction of a reality effect or illusion of a real world" (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 149). Figurativization involves analysing the language and descriptions used by the author to bring the characters, time, and place to life. By examining the author's choices in terms of imagery, symbolism, and descriptive details, we can better understand how they have constructed a vivid and believable world for readers to immerse themselves in. This step is crucial in creating a reality effect or illusion that allows readers to fully engage with the story being told.

Actorialization

Actorialization refers to the art of characterisation by an author in order to communicate a message. Dynasts comprises only six actors. Radha, the main character, appears in every scene and is central to the story's development. Mahadev, known as OBC Uncle, plays a significant role in shaping the narrative and interacts closely with Radha. Father, Ashu, and Appa also have substantial presence throughout the story, each one bringing his own unique contributions to the unfolding events with his/her attributes and actions as "functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled" (Propp, 1968, p. 21). The actors who appear over the course of the story are listed in the following table in decreasing frequency of appearance.

Actors	Frequency [Act {Scenes, Page Numbers (no. of times)}]
Father	150 [1 {2: 241 (3X), 242 (9X), 243 (12X), 244 (7X), 245 (7X), 246 (3X), 247 (2X), 248 (2X), 249 (3X), 250 (10X), 251 (8X), 252 (4X), 253 (3X), 254 (3X), 255 (4X)}, [2 {2: 261 (7X), 262 (7X), 263 (9X), 264 (6X), 272 (5X), 273 (8X), 274 (1X), 275 (1X), 276 (1X), 277 (7X), 278 (9X), 279 (6X), 280 (2X), 281 (1X)}
Ashutosh (Ashu)	125 [1 {2: 241 (2X), 242 (9X), 243 (12X), 244 (7X), 245 (7X), 246 (3X), 248 (2X), 249 (3X), 250 (8X), 251 (8X), 252 (5X), 253 (2X), 254 (3X), 255 (4X), 256 (6X)}], [2 {2: 258 (3X), 267 (7X), 268 (10X), 269 (9X), 270 (6X), 271 (5X), 280 (4X)}]
Radha	98 [1 {1:233 (5X), 234 (3X), 235 (9X), 236 (5X), 237 (4X), 238 (6X), 239 (1X), 240 (6X)}], [2 {2: 259 (7X), 260 (7X), 261 (8X), 262 (7X), 263 (8X), 264 (6X), 265 (8X), 266 (3X), 280 (2X), 281 (1X)}
Appa (the grandfather)	96 [1 {2: 256 (6X), 257 (1X)}], [2 {2: 258 (2X), 259 (8X), 260 (7X), 261 (1X), 265 (7X), 266 (6X), 267 (8X), 268 (9X), 269 (7X), 270 (5X), 271 (5X), 272 (3X), 273 (7X), 274 (3X), 275 (2X), 276 (3X), 280 (4X), 281 (2X)}
Mahadev (OBC Uncle)	69 [1 {1: 233 (4X), 234 (4X), 235 (8X), 236 (5X), 237 (5X), 238 (5X), 239 (2X), 240 (4X)}], [2 {2: 265 (3X), 266 (7X), 276 (1X), 277 (6X), 278 (8X), 279 (6X), 281 (1X)}]
Alka	14 [2 {2: 269 (2X), 270 (9X), 280 (2X), 281 (1X)}]

Table 1: Actors and the frequency of their occurrence in the text

Radha

Radha is the first primary character introduced in the play. Her life style 'rich' but 'worrisome' is central to her action in the play. In act I, scene I of the play, she begins by introducing herself as following which, according to her, is a 'bold action' to perform:

Married woman. Caste Brahmin. Husband government employee and politician. Fundraiser and treasurer for his party. Lots of money on hand. All cash. More than needed. Ashutosh our only son, is deep in his studies for the dreaded Board Exams for High School graduation. The Twelfth! As for me, I have all movie screen

goddess's hour after hour. I don't know how or when, but some of their seductive charm rubbed off onto my skin like fresh cream. I began to crave for fulfilment beyond the confines of marriage. And at this point, Mahadev, you entered my life. Your percussive beat melted into the slow adagio of our conjugal dance. I woke up to the possibilities of my own self. Bells on my anklets began to jingle. Well, you cannot copy Madhuri Dixit's tempo. You are a bit breathless and feel your age when you try to match her movements. Oh! These worries! Our son's preparation for the twelfth! So difficult to share these tensions. My son's tensions for the Board Exam, my husband's tensions, balancing his government job and political responsibilities. And to add to this the tension of my friendship with you! Now your turn... (p. 234).

In brief, she is a 'married' woman, 'Brahmin'[†] by caste, in an extra-marital relationship with Mahadev. She is anxious due to the 'board exams' of her son Ashu and her husband's job affairs. Her life style divulges many things about her. She is a rich woman with lots of leisure that she spends in watching television. Radha's confession about the influence of 'movie screen goddesses' highlights the profound impact these women have on her perception of freedom and self-expression. These movie screen goddesses also serve as a source of inspiration for Radha, shaping her desires and aspirations. Their portrayal of strong, independent women fuels her longing for personal liberation and the ability to express herself fully. Through their on-screen portrayals, they embody a sense of liberation that transcends societal and cultural boundaries. Though Radha openly acknowledges her relationship with Mahadev yet the true nature of their connection remains unclear. Their connection seems to go beyond mere friendship, as Radha seeks solace and comfort from Mahadev. However, whether their bond is purely platonic or if there are deeper romantic feelings involved is a mystery that lingers until the introduction of Mahadev's character.

Mahadev (OBC Uncle)

Mahadev is the second major character. He is introduced as OBC uncle to us. His introduction is brief but significant. In a short line Mahadev reveals about himself, "Adult. Unmarried. Age fifty. Caste OBC" (234). Soon we also come to know that he is a politician. Mahadev's introduction as an OBC Uncle highlights the significance of his caste in Indian society. Being an adult and unmarried at the age of fifty, Mahadev's choice to remain single is driven by his desire to stay actively involved in politics. This decision is facilitated by the privilege afforded to the OBC caste in India's constitution, which he likely utilized to secure a seat in his political party. Mahadev is soon to be a cabinet minister in Cabinet of his state. Thus, he got certain privileges by the virtue of his caste. He is the only character in the play who enjoys all power and political favours and who appears as a relief to the worries of Radha and her family, which proves that Radha's motivation to be with him is resultant of her selfish desires and aspirations for a better life. However, this dynamic also highlights the deep-rooted societal inequalities and the influence of caste politics in India, as Radha's attraction towards Mahadev is not solely based on love or compatibility, but rather on the advantages and benefits she hopes to gain from their relationship.

Father

Father shows up in act I, scene II. He is acquainted to us as Radha's husband and Ashu's father. He is addressed as 'Father' that divulges his marginal role as biological father of Ashutosh. His character in the play is overshadowed by the presence of Mahadev, who becomes the central figure in Radha's life. Father's character serves as a contrast to the traditional expectations placed on men in Indian society. This adds an interesting layer to the play's exploration of caste dynamics and personal choices, as Father's refusal to conform highlights the potential for change and growth within individuals and communities. We learn from Radha's introduction that he is a government employee and a treasurer in the same political party to which Mahadev serves. He is a corrupt employee who gobbles money as a treasurer of his party on the name of charity. Despite his knowledge of Radha's affair with Mahadev, the allure of power and wealth keeps him silent, allowing him to maintain his position as a corrupt treasurer in their shared political party.

Ashu

Ashu is a twelve-year-old son of Radha. He is a frustrated boy whose perplexities are not just limited to his studies; they extend to his family life as well. Despite being troubled by his parents' dysfunctional relationship, he puts on a brave face and tries to maintain a sense of normalcy. Constant reminder of the unfairness in the education system adds to his frustration and disillusionment. He feels trapped, as though his hard work and abilities are being overlooked and undervalued, which only deepens his sense of hopelessness for the future.

[†] According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, "Brahmin: A Hindu of the highest caste traditionally assigned to priesthood". (Def. 1)

Appa (the grandfather)

Appa died twenty-five years ago. Despite his physical absence, Appa's presence looms large in the family's daily life. His large photo in the living area of the house serves as a constant reminder to the family members that they are being watched. Appa's character serves as a cautionary tale, showing how corruption can infiltrate even the closest of families. His absence may be physical, but his presence continues to influence the characters' actions and decisions. The family members are faced with the challenge of resisting the temptation to follow in Appa's corrupt footsteps. The twenty-fifth death anniversary of Appa is an expression of the dynamicity of corruption. The odyssey to the corrupt world begins with the remembrance of the death anniversary:

Father: ...Tomorrow is Appa's Death Anniversary! It was so sudden – his death.

(Light on the photograph. Silence.)

Ashu brings out some heavy, expensive ornaments from under the table. As he is putting them on himself, his father sees and stops him.)

Ashutosh: The jeweller left these. (p. 246)

His death marked the end of an era, but also served as a reminder of the corrupt practices that he had introduced into their family. The heavy, expensive ornaments that Ashu brings out symbolize the material wealth that was acquired through these corrupt means. As Ashu puts on the heavy, expensive ornaments, his father's face contorts with a mix of sadness and anger. An uncomfortable silence between them represents a dark chapter in their family's history.

Alka

Alka is Ashu's girl-friend. He calls her 'Al' lovingly and Alka calls him 'Ash'. Ashu can call her anytime even in late night hours because her father is a 'powerful bureaucrat', as seen in the below example,

Ashu: She can come any time of the day or night. Like you did. Her Dad is very powerful.

APPA: Powerful? Like WWF people?

Ashu: Come on! Don't throw around these PJs! Powerful means powerful bureaucrat. He is an IAS officer and will soon be Chief Secretary! (p. 269).

Alka's presence in Ashu's life is a testament to the power dynamics within society, where women without any authority and status are often subjected to societal regulations and expectations. Alka's influence over Ashu goes beyond societal norms, as she challenges the traditional power dynamics by asserting her own importance and significance in his life. Her presence makes her a central figure in his world, elevating her to a star-like status in his eyes.

The following section discusses spaces in which actors are placed to contribute to the meaning of the story, in terms of spatialisation.

2.1.2. Spatialization

Spatialization constitutes the environment or space in which the actors are placed in the narrative and this placing of characters contributes to the meaning of the story (cf. Martin & Ringham, 2000, pp. 124-125), as illustrated in this section. 'The stage' is the only noticeable place in the play where the entire story unfolds. It serves as a canvas for the actors to bring the story to life, with various props and set designs enhancing the overall narrative. In his very influential essay on folk theatre *Les Signes du théâtre* (1938), later on translated as "Semiotics in the Folk Theatre" (1976), Petr Bogatyrev advances that everything described on stage undergoes a profound transformation, giving them an overwhelming symbolic power that they do not have, or at least is not as obvious, in their everyday social function: "on the stage things that play the part of theatrical signs...acquire special features, qualities and attributes that they do not have in real life" (pp. 35–36). The stage in *Dynasts* is compartmentalised into two sections: 'a bar & restaurant' in one section and 'the house' on the other. The metaphorical quotation marks placed around these divisions mark their importance so that the audience is able to infer their significance in the represented dramatic world. The bar and restaurant section of the stage serves as a public space where characters interact with each other and reveal their true intentions. This setting allows for the exploration of social dynamics and the unveiling of hidden motives. On the other hand, the house section provides a more intimate and private space, where characters' personal lives and relationships are further explored. The contrasting settings of the bar & restaurant and the house enhance the

depth of the narrative by highlighting different aspects of the characters' lives and their interactions with each other.

The setting is more than a stage division. The deliberate separation of the bar & restaurant and the house also serves to create tension and anticipation for the audience, as they wonder how these two distinct worlds will eventually intersect or collide. Bar is a place where the illicit relationship of Radha and Mahadev is revealed in the following words, “the area where the man and woman are, is a bar”, and “the way they move and eye each other shows the intimacy of lovers of long standing” (p. 234). The bar and restaurant setting serves as a symbolic backdrop for the actors' hidden desires and forbidden love, mirroring the blurred boundaries between their public personas and private desires. The neon sign ‘Bar and Restaurant’ is as an apt place for Radha and Mahadev as the vibrant atmosphere creates an intimate setting, allowing them to indulge in their clandestine affair away from prying eyes. However, the well-lit bar is overshadowing the house of Radha and her husband. This disconnection between their home and the bar could symbolize the growing distance between Radha and her husband, as well as their fading connection to traditional values. It implies that their home lacks the vibrancy and liveliness that the bar exudes. This juxtaposition invites reflection on the actors' choices and raises questions about the consequences of their clandestine affair on their personal lives.

The bar's vibrant atmosphere and lively ambiance further accentuate the contrast between Radha and her husband's sombre home where nearly every corrupt activity takes place. The ‘house’ they built with their relationship could never become ‘home’. The dilapidated state of Radha's house mirrors the decay and deterioration of their relationship. The cracks in the walls symbolize the fractures in their connection, emphasizing the emptiness and lack of stability in their affair. The large photograph of Appa in the house is the primary object of the stage to be accounted in stage semiotization. The playwright has deliberately chosen the place of the photograph to be visible from the bar & restaurant and the house in order to imply particular interest and importance with respect to the actor and his attributes. Its prominent placement suggests that Appa's watchful gaze weighs heavily on Radha and her husband. The photograph of Appa serves as a constant reminder of his presence and influence, adding a layer of tension and unease to their already strained relationship. The representation is not mere the interior of their house but a reflection of the gloomy picture of the broken family. In Act II, scene II when Radha returns home in midnight, we observe the first encounter between the husband and wife. A sense of guilt is observed in their following conversation, “we built a new house here with our relationship!” (p. 261), however, soon the guilt is wiped out shamelessly:

Radha: Long ago, I had put up a warning sign! As money began to come in. I told you. The craving will grow on you. You will cultivate a taste for it. But the warning sign was wiped out by the flow of funds. From somewhere inside the urge came. Our relationship got tangled in it.

My wedding necklace stretched itself shapeless. It did not break...

Father: but it didn't break. We certainly found a good designer for our wedding necklace! (Both laugh) (p. 262).

The wedding necklace didn't break physically, but its significance and value diminished. It became a symbol of their greed and desire for more. The weight of material wealth overshadowed their true meaning of our marriage. Their house hold dark secrets hidden within its walls. There is a huge, big cellar with dark murky corners at the bottom of this house that serves as a hub for the family's illicit activities, hidden away from prying eyes. Its eerie ambiance adds to the sense of secrecy and danger that permeates the house. The family members navigate these dark corners, even knowing that their lives are constantly at risk within the confines of their own home. The cellar serves as a symbolic representation of the deteriorating state of their marriage, mirroring the decay and corruption that has seeped into their lives. The house's facade may deceive outsiders, but its true nature is known to those involved in the illicit activities. The family's living conditions are constantly threatened by the dangerous atmosphere that surrounds them within their own home.

2.1.3. Temporalisation

Temporalization, a component of figurativization analysis, focuses on the author's decision to use particular times in the story. According to Kanonge (2009, p. 40), the passage of time is a crucial component of a narrative. As crucial as location selection is insistence on certain times. According to Martin and Ringham (2000, p. 132), “temporalization is a required component for a referential illusion or reality effect to function”, just as spatialization and actorialization.

The specific indication to time has significance, because it turns a narrative arrangement into a story (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 132). The whole action in the play takes place on the eve of Appa's twenty-fifth death

anniversary. This temporal context to Appa’s twenty fifth death anniversary brings heightened emotions in the narrative, as the present condition of the actors largely owes to Appa’s corrupt dealings. This temporal context also allows for reflection and introspection, as the actors confront their own growth and transformation over the past twenty-five years. The clever use of time also highlights the significance of Radha's decision to meet Mahadev on such a crucial day. This pivotal moment sets off a chain of events, for example, if Radha had not been out to meet Mahadev on the eve of death anniversary of Appa, the story would not have preceded by the situation of return of Appa to life, immodest meeting of Radha and Mahdev with Appa in the bar, conflict between father and Ashu, thence between father and Appa on the issue of corruption; that shape the entire plot, showcasing the interconnectedness of each character's actions and their consequences. Without this carefully crafted sequence, the story would lack its compelling nature.

This study observes that the reference to the time of Radha’s encounter with Appa is intriguing, when Radha states, “At seven our feet turn automatically toward this bar” (p. 240). She often returns quite late in the night. Her first encounter with Appa (her father-in-law) happens in late night in the bar. This time is “a time of enchantment when anything might, even should, happen” (Kanonge, 2009, p. 101). The author uses this specific time of evening to late night to highlight absence of conjugal love between Radha and her husband. It is during this enchanted time that the true nature of their moral disregard and the erosion of their familial bonds are brought to light, allowing the reader to fully grasp the depth of their deteriorating relationship.

2.1.4. Oppositions in the play

For any semiotic study to achieve its goal, there must be a proper analysis of the existing oppositions in the story (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 7), that are foregrounded through dialogues. “The dialogue is immediate ‘spoken action’ rather than reference to, or representation of, action, so that the central personal, political and moral oppositions which structure the drama are seen and heard to be acted out in the communicational exchange” (Elam, 1980, p. 99). In *Dynasts*, the oppositions serve to intensify the conflicts and tensions within the characters' lives as well as a reflection of the larger societal issues that exist outside of the family unit. These oppositions can be seen in the contrasting themes of moral duty and desire, and loyalty and deceit. The corrupt world that Radha, Ashutosh, Mahadev, Father, and Appa find themselves in, highlights the challenges they face in maintaining their familial bonds and moral values. Their actions demonstrate how the desire for wealth and power can overshadow personal values and onus towards relationships, ultimately leading to a loss of identity and connection with oneself. *Dynasts* is a story of the following oppositions: Familial love vs. material love and the game of politics vs. the game of life.

Familial love vs. material love

The main semantic binary opposition in the play is constituted between the familial love and material love. This relationship, its pertinent contradicting concepts, and their deixes on the semantic level of the semiotic square can all be graphically represented as following:

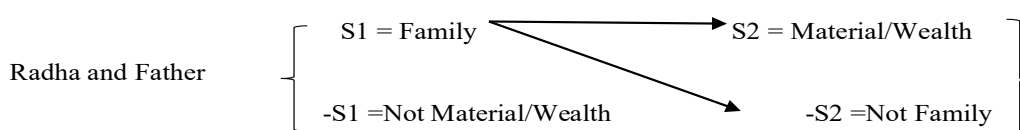


Figure 1: (Family vs. material on the semantic level)

The above semiotic square underscores the proclivity of the family towards material pleasures. The corrupt nature of Father is metaphorically presented as a creator of wealth in the following words of Father himself, “I create wealth – wealth for nation” (p. 254). This contradiction emphasizes on the complexity of his role in the play. This repetitive action of money gobbling in Father’s traits is known as “action as passion” in Greimassian (1993) taxonomy, which is further understood in the latter’s words as, “The concept of an actant, freed from its psychological frame and defined only by its doing, is the sine qua non-condition for developing a semiotics of action” (Greimas & Fontanille, 1993, p. VII-VIII). Due to such mentioned passion, we can enhance the artistic abilities of the playwright in character building process. The passion of corruption is a proof of his way of existence within a socially conventional world. It also raises questions about the true intentions behind his actions and the extent of his corrupt deeds. His actions demonstrate an apparent disregard for the well-being of his family, as he prioritizes personal gain and power over their happiness. Taxonomically

speaking, such passions as greed and materialistic cravings are permanent in Father's character in the sense that we can identify them in other related or discussable contexts. Additionally, his alliances with high officials not only showcase his manipulative nature, but also expose the systemic corruption that exists within the political landscape of the play. He uses Radha strategically to solidify his alliance with Mahadev. Radha's willingness to participate in his plans further emphasizes upon the theme of greed and destructive power. In this way, familial love succumbs to the material pleasures.

As the tension between his parents escalates, Ashu finds himself caught in the middle, torn between their conflicting desires and values. He becomes a casualty of their deteriorating relationship, struggling to navigate the emotional turmoil and longing for a sense of stability and unity within his family. He suppresses the worries of his father's devious plans to gobble money, the worries of caste vulnerable education system and the truth of his mother's daily excuses to meet Mahadev under the anxiousness of impending board exams, The innocent child's soul is hardened as a rock. Therefore, the realm of -S2 not family belongs to all the family members. This is a metaphor for the distance to the emotional and adoration side of their lives.

Game of politics vs. game of life

In Act I, scene II, Ashu plays a game with his father. He holds a wooden ruler in one hand and asks his father to repeat after what he says to him, as exemplified below:

Ashu: So! What am I asking! How's your study going?

Father: What...what's this?

Ashutosh: Answer me. How's your study going? Speak!

(Strikes hard the table in front of him with his wooden foot ruler. The sudden noise startles his father.)

If you can't answer, say, how's your study going? Again, how is your study going?

(Strikes the table with his wooden ruler.)

Father: How's your study going?

Ashutosh: How are your classes? Say it.

(Strikes the ruler on the table)

Father: How are your classes? (p. 242).

His actions, like striking the table with his ruler, serve as a cry for attention and a way to express his frustration with the neglect he feels. As Ashu's father repeats his words, it becomes clear that this game is not just a playful interaction, but a reflection of the larger power struggles in their lives. The game of politics is mirrored in their game of life. The sound of the ruler hitting the table echoes through the room, symbolizing the power dynamics at play in their relationship where Ashu wields his authority and control over his father. As the game continues, it becomes evident that this dynamic extends beyond their current interaction, permeating their entire relationship and influencing their roles outside of this moment.

Apart from the psychic significance of the freaking game, it also serves the playwright to continue his "performance tradition than the textual and literary" (Bandyopadhyay, 2009, p. 417). The playwright uses the players of the freaking game to highlight the complexities and consequences of the reservation policy in Indian society. Through their dialogues, he sheds light on the potential harm caused by this policy, bringing attention to a critical moment in the system. This exploration of social and political issues encourages reflection on its broader implications.

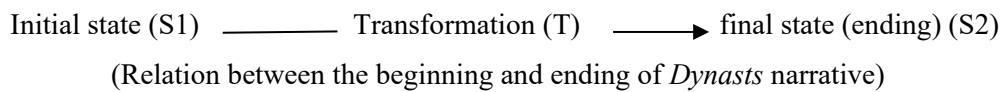
Towards the climax, Father reflects on his exhaustion and weariness. He realizes that he cannot cast aside the consequences of his actions. He understands that he is responsible for the choices he has made and the impact they have had on his life and those around him. The weight of his culpability weighs heavily on him. He realizes that facing the consequences head-on is the only way left for him. Pathetically, he confesses when the game is over:

Father: Yes, I am tired! Systematically tired! Politically correct – tired! Now all life's energy is flowing in you. You are the pillars of life. We will go to attend some religious discourse or tune in to our own spiritual channel. Twenty-four hours channel. Whether anybody watches or not – the channel is on 'You are the architect of your own life' (p. 279).

The confession highlights his exhaustion and weariness. The ‘you’ in his words point towards Mahadev who is the driving force behind his life. All lives are surrendered to Mahadev to seek all sorts of worldly pleasures while proving the old maxim ‘there is no vice like avarice’ true. In this way, the contrast between familial love and material love demonstrates the detrimental effects of prioritizing material possessions and status over the bonds of family and emotional fulfilment. Similarly, the game of politics versus the game of life emphasizes the consequences of prioritizing political manoeuvring and power struggles over living a meaningful and authentic life.

2.2. The narrative structure of *Dynasts*

The first dimension of the thematic analysis focused only on the classification of opposing values in *Dynasts*. The semiotic square is now used to track their trajectory, from the initial state to the final state. The concern is to find out which values the story seeks to reject, and which it seeks to maintain. Commendable values generally complete their course in a narrative but non-commendable values stop halfway (Kanonge, 2010, p. 58-61). As examined above, Radha and Father reveal two opposing attitudes with regard to the family ethics and political ethics. The infringement of ethics in both familial and social realms are permeated throughout the text. By analysing the discursive organization of *Dynasts*, we can gain insights into how the narrative unfolds in order to track the transformations. According to Kanonge (2009, p. 126), transformation is the main prerequisite for the existence of narrative structures. Further, this notion is supported by Martin and Ringham (2000, p. 136), who assert that "there must be a transformation for there to be any story." According to Greimas (1987, p. 123; 167), transformation explains what occurs when a narrative shifts from one state to another or when a category moves from one state (the initial state) to another (the final state). Additionally, examining the opening and closing episodes allows us to evaluate their relevance in shaping the overall narrative arc. Lastly, understanding the logic behind *Dynasts*' conclusion helps us grasp the underlying themes and messages conveyed by the narrative structure. The following part of the study focuses only on the itinerary of the corruption as it shows up with various faces in the personal and political lives of the characters, following the main segments of the story. According to Martin and Ringham (2000, p. 136) the general passage from one state of affairs to another can be illustrated on a semantic axis as follows:



The situation in S1 introduces the problem (lack) to be addressed, while S2 presents the settlement of the lack. The situation in T is the critical point of transformation in the story. The problem of corruption in the social and personal lives of actors of *Dynasts* seeks to be addressed. Therefore, the situation in S1 is that of the marital life of Radha and her husband is in crisis. The narrative indicates, in Act I, scene I, that there is a purpose behind Radha and Mahadev’s secret affair; that is to secure good future for her son and to protect her husband’s gobbled money, just after the introductory note of Radha. Thus, a reading focused on the troublesome lives of the family can be presented as follows in the structure:

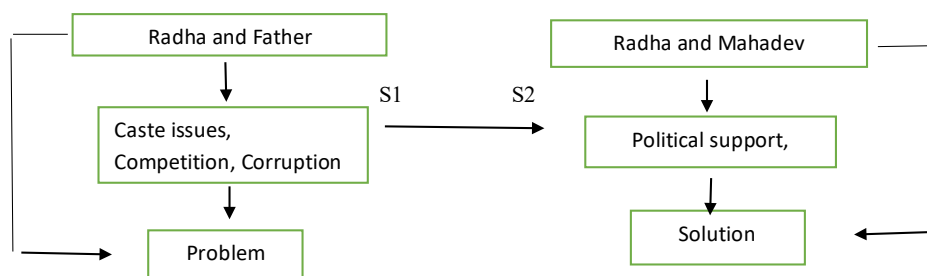


Figure 2: Relation between the beginning and ending in *Dynasts*

The schematic representation (Figure 2) shows that Radha’s family is grappling with certain caste and corruption related issues that are solvable with the help of Mahadev’s political status. Ashu, being a grown-up, is fully aware of the caste and corruption problem that is prevailing in his family. Despite knowing the potential consequences of their immoral acts, the family members do not make any effort to mend their ways. Instead, they rely on Mahadev to seek solutions of their problematic lives. Radha's motherly instincts towards her child are not as obviously demonstrated. The innocence of the child vanishes unadorned by the parents. Besides, the lopsided relationship between Radha and the father continuously distresses Ashu. The playwright portrays Ashu's inner turmoil as he grapples with the conflicting emotions caused by his mother's actions and his desire

for a peaceful home. Additionally, by exploring Ashu's fears of abandonment, the playwright sheds light on the vulnerability and fragility of childhood innocence.

Next, the study focuses on the significance of the surrealistic return of Appa from the large photo frame that had been his abode for last twenty-five years. The schematic representation (Figure 2) shows that unless something is done to stop the corrupt dynasts, they will always be in crisis. Therefore, the whole story of Dynasts can be summarized by the following transformational function after the surrealistic return of Appa:

$$F \wedge T \longrightarrow F_1 \vee T$$

Figure 3: illustrates the transformation in the family (F) before and after Appa's return (F1).

The unfolding of the story is a transformation from a state of disjunction (mission to be accomplished by Appa) (\wedge) to a state of conjunction (mission accomplished) (\vee). The surrealistic element adds a layer of mystery and intrigue to the play, as it raises questions about the boundaries between reality and imagination. Through Appa's return, the playwright deliberately and unsuccessfully explores the power of redemption and the potential for positive change even in the face of a corrupt dynasty. The transformation in the story can be presented as follows in the structure:

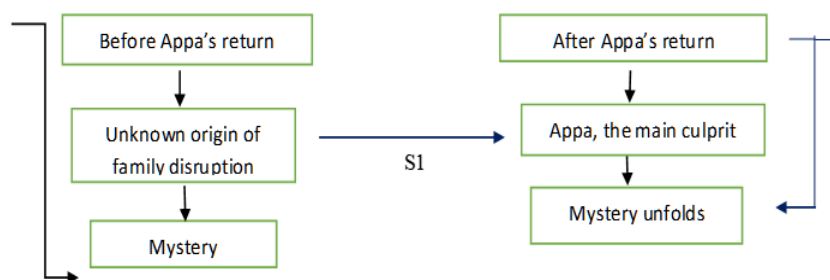


Figure 4: Relation between the beginning and ending in *Dynasts* focusing on the presence of Appa

The central argument of the play is that corrupt politics and disintegrated family systems are core concerns. Appa is shocked to witness the paradigm shift in the ways of leading after his death. Alekar has very cleverly presented generation gap and the changed ways of thinking. As Ashu inquires of his father, similarly Ashu's father torments Appa. He does not allow him either to interfere in his family affairs or even in his ways of making money. On the contrary, he counter-attacks him by accusing him of having an illicit relationship with a lady named Malatibai in his school. He admits that feelings of regret have passed with the generation of Appa and that the present society is devoid of righteousness and regret of loss. He calls the contemporary socio-political system "the shallow Ganga," where the essence of truth is lost and ethics have gone lost.

2.2.1. The logic of the ending

Kanonge (2009) mentions that the ending of a narrative is generally the place where the audience learns something to practise or avoid. Success or failure at this stage is revealed. The *Dynasts* narrative in this instance, is no exception to this kind of literary art by the playwright. Therefore, following the Greimassian semiotic approach, the logical structure of *Dynasts*'s ending, focusing on Radha's family, can be presented graphically as following:

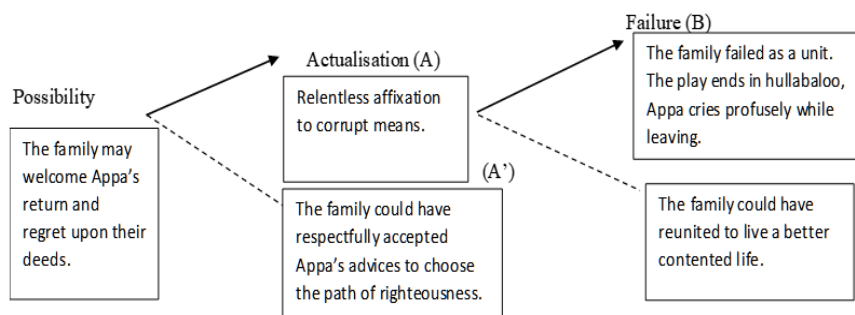


Figure 5: The ending of the *Dynasts*

Kanonge (2009, p. 136) states that the choice of the author to tell the story as he/she prefers, reveals his/her motivation for the story. The choice of the author may also reveal the conviction. Figures 5 shows that the playwright of *Dynasts* had at least one other possibility for ending his story. A and B (with continuous lines)

in each diagram, illustrate the intentional choice of the playwright to tell the story of *Dynasts* as we know it today, whereas the dotted lines A' and B' showcase the otherwise possibility of the ending of story.

In the illustrious A' and B' the playwright had the options to meet the climax conditions by showing the family members regretful (non-actualisation). Secondly, an open possibility was available for the author to portray Appa's setting the moral order. The alternative possibilities of endings to the narrative from which the author could have chosen suggest that the current ending of *Dynasts* with an anti-climax was an intentional choice of the author. The decline in morality is what Alekar is interested in showing by foregrounding the clash between the generations. From this discussion, it becomes clear that the structure of *Dynasts* was purposefully designed by the playwright. This intentional choice by the playwright to tell the story of *Dynasts* in a particular manner serves to emphasize the consequences of the family's actions and the potential for redemption. By presenting different possibilities, such as regret or persuasion, the playwright highlights the importance of individual choices and their impact on the characters' lives. This narrative approach allows for a deeper exploration of themes such as moral growth within the context of the story. The following section examines the actantial organization of *Dynasts* in order to contribute further to the semiotic exploration of the narrative.

2.3. The configuration of *Dynasts* actantial model

According to Martin and Ringham (2000, p. 19), all narratives consist of six key actantial roles or functions arranged in three sets of binary opposition: viz.: addresser/addressee, subject/object, and helper/opponent (cf. also Greimas, 1987, pp. 107-108 and 1983, pp. 146-147). Together, the six actants and their organization account for all possible relationships within a narrative and also within the sphere of human action in general (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 19). The actantial model of *Dynasts* has following configuration:

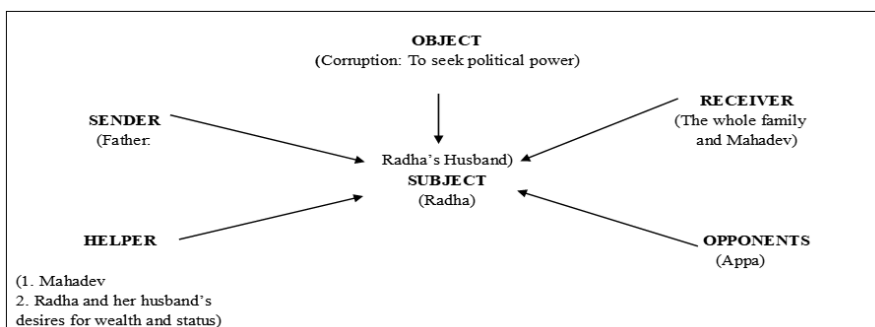


Figure 6: The actantial model of *Dynasts* focuses on Radha as the subject with the Corruption as main object of quest in the narrative

According to Act II, Father illustrates the actantial schema of Subject's attempts to seek the Object. He, as Sender intrigues to bring Radha and Mahadev into a love relationship so that he can win all sorts favours from Mahadev. He exemplifies unflinching longing for the political favours from Mahadev. Thus, corruption becomes the object of the story. In fact, the main theme is the pervasiveness of rampant corruption in personal, social and political lives. In the quest, the incessant desire for wealth act as Helper as Radha and her Husband completely ignore the effects of their desires on their marital lives. Radha's orientation towards Mahadev runs against the marital confines. The whole family is the Receiver of all the monetary and political advantages, except Appa who opposes his son for doing such immoral acts.

2.4. The thematic step of analysis

The deep abstract or thematic level includes the text and the context. "This is the level of the abstract or conceptual: it relates to the inner world of the mind as opposed to the outer physical world of the figurative level" (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 161). In the thematic analysis, the aim is to map out the core values generated by *Dynasts*. The main device of investigation here is the semiotic square. This mechanism will serve first to classify values and second, to track their trajectory. The findings from the figurative and narrative steps of *Dynasts*' analysis are what drive this paradigmatic use of the semiotic square (Kanonge, 2010, p. 58). The significance of the figurative oppositions revealed by *Dynasts*'s figurative analysis on the one hand, and the opposition of values embodied by the object/anti-object, subject/anti-subject, and sender on the other, is here.

Contrasts between Radha and her husband and Appa emerged, as was previously stated. As a result, conflicts based on moral principles are developed between members of the family but soon they are vanished. Appa fails in his attempts to bring back the peace. The disappointments can stand on the semiotic square as following:

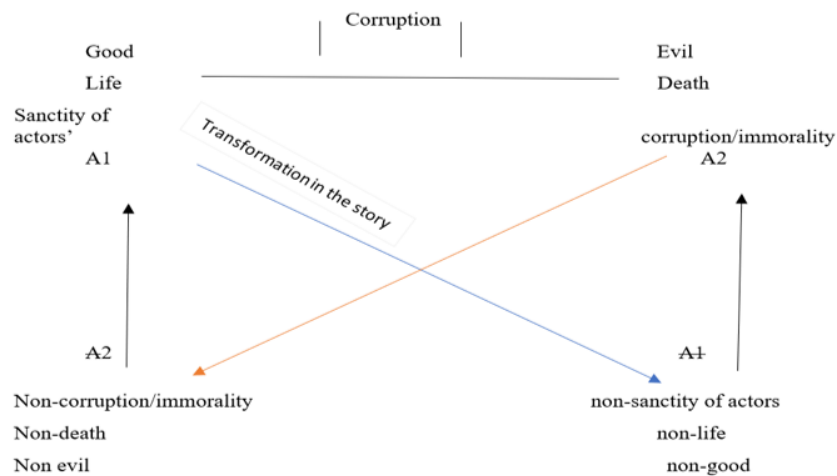


Figure 7: Semiotic square of all transformations in the story

Corruption and immorality take the central position as a destroyer of the institutions of family and marriage largely. However, in a larger context than discussed in the text, corruption like a disease affects the political, economic and social fabrics of a society and destroys the functioning of government. It is also observed from the text that corruption in the contemporary Indian administration is a common evil, but it is stubbornly entrenched in the high ranked echelons of the political parties. Father has no regrets and guilt for his corrupt doings. Albeit, he calls his corrupt practices a process of ‘creating wealth for party’. In his wealth creation process “transactions are made on Trust orally. No accounts – no audits” (p. 253). The initial positions of the Father, Radha, and their companion Mahadev are seen on the A1 line. As the narrative progresses, the circumstances of Radha, her husband, and Mahadev undergo a significant shift. Their once peaceful and contented life takes a turn as they face new challenges and obstacles. These changes in their positions bring forth a different perspective on the value of life characterised by the value of GOOD. The transformation occurs on A2 where Radha and her begin to experience a split life. This transformation challenges the notion of non-corruption and non-sanctity of actors, as they are forced to adapt and make choices that may go against their initial beliefs. Additionally, this transformation also blurs the lines between non-death and non-life, as Radha and her husband navigate through various challenges that test their resilience and survival instincts. As Father explains, Mahadev who quickly became a beloved member of their family, was an acquaintance to him when he joined politics. He gradually developed an addiction to the behaviour of accumulating cash by dishonest methods, and in order to obtain more of these favours, he pushed his wife to get close to Mahadev. This decision puts a strain on their marriage and causes them to question their own moral compass. As Mahadev's influence grows, the family is forced to confront the consequences of their actions and grapple with the true meaning of integrity and loyalty. Radha and Ashu's states are substantially impacted by Father's ethical decadence, which is a non-life and a NON-GOOD state for them. The next stage is to proceed along the blue line, which represents the story's conclusion. The final stage of all actors' transformations is shown on A2 point. On A2 point, the father transforms into a disturbed man who realises that he has lost the most precious bliss that is family. Subsequently, he shares the grief with Radha to which her cold response shatters him. Therefore, absolute split is the ending state for the whole family. Additionally, A2 point shows the ending of the narrative; as Mahadev taking oath as Cabinet Minister, Father and Radha offering garland to Appa while his return inside the photo frame. All of these incidents at the end of the story can be evaluated under the umbrella term EVIL, which is the opposite side of the term GOOD, constituting text values of the semiotic square.

5. Conclusion

This study examines Satish Alekar's play *Dynasts* using semiotic square analysis to uncover the underlying meanings and symbols within the text. The analysis delves into the portrayal of power dynamics and the exploration of morality, while highlighting how Alekar challenges societal norms and values through his characters. The play demonstrates that deliberate consent to immoral lifestyles can lead to personal and societal downfall. The recurring motif of decaying relationships and corruption throughout the play reinforces this theme. The study set out to explore the following problem in the play: "the modern social structure is on the brink of collapse due to pervasive corruption." By using the Greimassian method, it becomes clear that the play has its message on the way of the world of corruption perpetrated by power wielding politicians who establish their dynastic power through machiavellian politics. The play is a mingling of realism with absurd

mode of expression. It is not realistic, but rather a make-believe one. The dead grandfather's return is an eye-popping phantasmagoria which the playwright has used as a theatrical technique to convey his regretful sensibility on the sordid actions of his son and his daughter-in-law. He is helpless in getting everything right in the household, as corruption looms large. The Greimassian semiotic square becomes an apt tool for understanding and dissecting familial disequilibrium, shedding light on the intricacies that lie beneath the surface while offering a more nuanced interpretation of the text.

The play explores the universal nature of greed and its impact on characters, regardless of gender or societal roles. The exploration of dilemmatic existential themes resonates with contemporary audiences, inviting them to question their beliefs and values in the face of life's uncertainties. The play exposes the hypocrisy within society and the malleability of morality in both tradition and modernity. The characters navigate a web of social relationships tainted by moral disregard, illustrating the far-reaching impact of wealth on human values.

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of Satish Alekar's *Dynasts*, shedding light on the complexities of human existence and the consequences of unchecked abundance. *Dynasts* is a complex text that requires readers to analyse the interactions between characters and decipher the underlying messages. The literary discourse delves into the depths of the characters' subconscious minds, exploring the emotions and fears that fuel their dreams. The juxtaposition of their opulent lifestyles with the turmoil within their psyches creates a haunting narrative that leaves readers questioning the nature of reality.

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