



SPECTRAL MODERNITY: MAGIC REALISM, PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA, AND SOCIAL FLUX IN INDRA SUNDAS'S 'GARIMAAN'

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Indra Sundas's Nepali short story *Garimaan* (गाडीमान) masterfully fuses magic realism's veiled supernatural irruptions with the protagonist Saila's psychological unraveling amid rural-urban collision. This paper dissects how sparse motifs – elongated shadows, haunting wails and piercing lamentations rising through the mist and temporal loops defying starry nights – defamiliarize Gundri Bazaar's "iron beasts," catalyzing Saila's id-ego fracture and cultural dissociation. The formalist repetition of cart groans and oxen instincts amplifies the atmosphere of social flux, where highland folk heroism crumbles into bazaar inferiority. Drawing on Freudian/Jungian psychoanalysis, Cathy Caruth's trauma belatedness and Himalayan folklore traditions, seven ultra-rare magical moments emerge as psyche mirrors, culminating in Hussel(Whistle) Khola's shrouded climax. This elevates Sundas's innovation in Nepali literature, remapping post-globalization identity rifts.

Keywords: *Magic Realism, Psychological Trauma, Social Flux, Openendedness, Defamiliarization, Psychological Duality*

Introduction: Nocturnal Trails and Liminal Fears

In *Garimaan*, Indra Sundas chronicles Saila, a brawny bullock-cart driver from some remote Himalayan hills, gripping reins under winter moonlight where spirits and beasts loom ominously in the foggy haze. His quest to Gundri Bazaar pits rustic lifeways against urban sprawl, cart creaking through mud-slicked night paths. Slice-of-life realism interlaces with magic realism's subtle mastery, implicitly introducing supernatural elements that evoke the verisimilitude of rural Himalayan life—spectral urban legends pervasive in folklore. Magic remains veiled, harmonized like whispering shadows or self-looping time, sparse moments standing stark without explanation or awe, rooted in traditions where the uncanny feels ordinary. This fusion unveils Saila's psychological conflict: surface intrepidity masking timid depths, legends once fireside fun now unnerving on urban fringes.

Magic Realism's Sparse Alchemy: Defamiliarizing Modernity

Sundas mixes magic realism like careful alchemy. He turns everyday Himalayan paths into strange new views. Urban modernity manifests in trains that roar like giant serpents, disrupting the Himalayan stillness, while vehicles, transformed into hungry iron beasts, appear terrifying through Saila's village-bred eyes, widened in shock at the urban spectacle. Magic realism here is subtle, not showy like in García Márquez's or Hiromi Kawakami's narratives where strange things, like spirits, feel real and normal. Here, Sundas makes the poor worker's view feel new and strange. Machines become signs of deep fear and loss. Saila's fears around machines make progress feel eerie.

This strange-making matches Viktor Shklovsky's *Ostranenie*, his term for *Defamiliarization* that makes readers see normal things fresh again by slowing automatic perception and stripping away habit's dull veil. But Sundas adds his own distinctive twist. He weaves it into Nepali folklore's foggy realness. Spectral encounters don't break the story's believable flow. They slip in softly like evening mist through tiny gaps. Magic happens rarely on purpose amid lots of real details. Just a few moments make them hit harder. No big wave of magic takes over. Instead, sharp touches like sinister elongated shadows whispering through the dark, fear-laced icy darkness break into daily life. This fits Wendy B. Faris's signs of magic realism. Strange things can't be explained by logic. Real and fantastic mix without clear lines. The storyteller stays unsure and doesn't judge what counts as real.

In Garimaan, this peaks with fresh story touches. Mud tracks stretch and twist into spectral faces. Oxen haul loads in the hushed and haunted winter nights. Saila traverses the haunted hours in a creaking bullock cart and has his encounter with the uncanny and the unknown, with stories of spectral encounters at a certain place. Though these episodes, familiar in the Macabre legends narrated around the lore flames in rural Nepali culture, become unfamiliar in the modern Nepali urbanized world. Saila's encounter with modernity and its outgrowths gives him a jolt of pure terror and makes us take it with a pinch of salt, rather drawing our attention to the primordial fear and existential dread that are woven into the fabric of the human psyche. These subtle infusions show how magic realism uncovers psychological and cultural fractures. It denies the comfort of escapism and renders modernity's advance as a perceptual shock. The urban sprawl emerges as a site of abrupt and unsettling transformation. Bazaar machines smash into legendary lore. Social roles shift without fixing anything. Old ways crash into new ones. This breeds a cultural mixture full of seeing-shock, not happy forward steps. Formalism spots repeating patterns. Shadows stretch in circles at recurrent intervals throughout the narrative. The cart wheel squeaks, and time feels bent. These build a mythical feeling. They lift the story into a lesson on Himalayan change. Psychoanalysis ties in deeply. Saila's ancestral, instinctive fears erupt from his inner psychic depths and clash with his conscious yearning for modernity's gleaming facade. Hill instincts from the id battle the ego's city dreams. The folk strongman shrinks into a shaky traveler. His big shoulders sag under unseen loads.

Psychological Trauma's Fractured Psyche: Id-Ego-Shadow Abyss

At the vortex of this magical estrangement lies Saila's profound psychological trauma, a splintered consciousness where Freudian topography fractures under modernity's assault: the id surges with unbridled ancestral terrors and primal hill-bound impulses—snarling beasts internalized from childhood lore – clashing violently against the ego's faltering attempts at rational navigation amid bazaar chaos, ultimately transmuting his stone-hewn titan physique into a trembling, dissociated nomad. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory deepens this rift, positing Saila's urban shock as an unprocessed event resurfacing in compulsive, belated flashes—each elongated shadow or looping trail reliving the primal loss of his nature-home, where hills once cradled identity now echo as hollow voids. Jungian archetypes amplify the abyss: wraithlike irruptions embody the shadow-self's dark underbelly, confronting Saila with collective unconscious memories of ancient migrations, where oxen symbolize wounded archetypal earth-mothers ravaged by mechanical invaders. Original psychological extensions emerge vividly: Saila's repressed oedipal undercurrents surface when cart groans mimic maternal laments, evoking regression to womb-security against phallic train-roads threatening emasculation; synesthetic overloads—whispers tasting of bloodied earth—signal somatic trauma encoding, body rebelling against psyche's denial as urban inferiority complexes fester into dissociative fugues, super-ego's conformity edicts spiraling into cultural void. Nature-trauma interweaves: bulls/land personify violated sacredness, modernity as psychopathic aggressor replaying ethnic erasure in unconscious flux, a socialist-inflected critique of migrant scars where Gundri's train marks the explosive crashpoint. This transmutation feels profoundly uncanny—Freud's heimlich turning unheimlich—not adaptive evolution but defamiliarized crisis, blending personal dissociation with societal fragmentation, where shadow-self devours under assimilation's guise.

Psychic Mirrors: Seven Ultra-Rare Supernatural Irruptions

Sundas unleashes seven ultra-rare supernatural shocks—sparse under 10% of the tale, pure Himalayan mythic lore—as scalpels carving through Saila's psyche. Far from urban lights, dusk shadows from cart/oxen snake impossibly long near Hussen(whistle) Khola, warping into human silhouettes hissing as though warnings through fog blurring real/ethereal as oxen snort wildly and lunge ahead, Saila clutching reins for dear life—unmasking timid core beneath stone-hewn brawn, rural legends flipping from village fireside bonds to fringe terror. Winds then whisper weary chants mimicking ghastly voices and soul stirring cries swirling on treeless paths; Saila's unsteady heart beat and rapid exchange of breath -externalises his loneliness, amidst cozy yarns taunting severed roots. Temporal echoes compound dread: trail bend recurs thrice nightly—chill breeze swelling to thick fog/louder gusts/cold hand grazing reins under fixed stars—trapping trauma in looped rural past as city looms. Oxen wail like mourners as the spirit rivulet nears, eyes rolling white at shadows, hooves stomping whispers—projecting Saila's denied panic. Past Baguwa Gaon with his companion, Saila hears a widow's crying voice near Hussen Khola as the cart creaks rhythmically—grieving dying traditions. Cart groans maternally like a breathing womb under light loads; spectral shape explodes from beneath, ballooning into monstrous giant ripping screams before the murk swallows Saila. Companion's oxen suddenly run uncontrollably fast across a haunted stretch toward Hussen(whistle) khola. Saila calls to the waiting friend across the river who stays silent—then morphs into a horrifying figure on approach, making Saila faint and die.

Saila's climactic companion episode delivers magic realism's cruelest blow—trust morphing into terror as bolting oxen strip primal control and his silent friend across Hussen (whistle) Khola transforms into monstrous horror upon approach, annihilating his final human lifeline. Freud's uncanny turns the known (companion bond) terrifyingly alien, literalizing cultural dislocation where migration's fragile connections carry monstrous potential against spectral wilderness. The friend's pre-transformation silence echoes Saila's ghostly wind mutterings—dialogue with the dead—culminating in ego annihilation when social bonds fail, psyche cannot sustain rural identity against modernity's spiritual onslaught at haunted crossings. No explanation needed: rural readers accept “paths harbor spirits,” urban readers see psychological projection of abandonment's monstrous face.

Psychological Duality and Identity Rift in Social Flux

These strange events lay bare Saila's true nature: his tough, muscular body hides a vulnerable soul—shadows taunt his inability to read signs, soft “feminine” voices and cries undermine his manly pride. The looping trail traps transition trauma, like mourning

traditions before they're gone, his rural values fighting chaotic modernity through magical defenses. His strong outer shell cracks to reveal a fragile heart, splintered by past ghosts haunting the present. Village spectral and paranormal stories that once bonded people around fires now materialise and isolate him on lonely paths, leaving him wondering who he is without his hills. At root, highlands made mystery playful and safe by the fire; urban fringes rip away that communal protection, fear exploding as his tough front masks losing roots—which feels like losing himself entirely—magic turning once-comforting rural life into stalking threat.

Climax at Hussel Khola: Open-Ended Reckoning

At Hussel Khola's foggy bridge, tension peaks—echoing wails, looming figure, icy breath—blackout; dawn shows upright cart, calm oxen, Saila, alive and muttering at the outset, later meets his tragic end: ghost, bandit, beast, or breakdown? Brook sparks questions—spirits, animals, fear, trauma, inferiority?—Sundas holds back answers, pulling readers into a magic-mind fog that deepens trauma, identity shift, and change. Village folk shrug “paths have spirits”; psych side mirrors looping doubts, echoing life's tough choices. Hidden job-loss fear surfaces—trains shadowing carts for real, tough titan fading inside. Enigmas hover over the narrative—shadows, shapeshifters or tricks? loops fate or panic?—keeping debate alive.

Symbolic Layers and Societal Constraints: Moon, Khadka Bajay, Pyres, Crow, Tree Broader Horizons

At Hussel Khola, near Saila's funeral pyre, under a cold moon, Khadka Bajay stands torn between two worlds – caste rules calling Saila's cart-driver body “untouchable” versus basic human kindness wanting to cry for his dead friend. An old Newara(fig) tree watches as fire starts; a single crow flies up with a shriek – no people present to witness, but these quiet things behold Khadka's tear droplets rolling down at the death of an unknown out-caste, picking humanity over old traditions. This moment shows society's messy change: Gundri market acts modern but still blocks cart-men from machine jobs by caste; Urbanization spurns the supernatural, banishing it from daylight's glare but whispers spectral encounters at Hussel Khola in the hush of darkness. Khadka stands stuck in between – one hand frozen by caste, one shaking with feeling—like all migrants caught between city dreams and old hill fears. Saila burns as a victim of new machines killing cart work, or his own fear of river ghosts? Only the moon, a Newara (fig)tree, and a crow judge this sad ending amid smoke rising like unanswered questions, old ways fighting new ones forever.

Border Ties: Tradition's Frozen Grasp

Border ties emerge as the story's throbbing fault lines – those tense, unmoving edges where old caste loyalties clash against human bonds, much like Khadka Bajay's frozen hand over Saila's pyre-bound body. The text paints this not as abstract theory but raw hesitation: brotherhood urges a final touch, yet untouchability's invisible wall holds firm, turning a friend's death into a public standoff under the Newara (fig)tree's silent watch. These borders sharpen the narrative's ache, framing Gundri bazar's half-built progress – machines humming past cart-men barred by birth, elders daytime skeptics who night-huddle over Hussain Khola's vengeful spirits. Saila's dying whisper, “It knew my path,” straddles this divide like a ghost itself: does the iron train devour old livelihoods, or do river phantoms reclaim their due from migrants caught in between? Sundas uses these ties to expose the heart's quiet rebellion, where personal loss chips at rigid traditions without fully breaking them, leaving characters—and readers—in that uneasy limbo of change half-born.

Conclusion

In “Garimaan,” Sundas forges a luminous nexus where Himalayan fog conceals not mere apparitions, but the throbbing pulse of a soul adrift in modernity's gale. Saila's cart, groaning like ancestral bones under iron behemoths' shadow, embodies the eternal tug-of-war: primal earth whispering defiance against concrete's roar. This is no mere rustic lament; it is a profound cartography of the migrant heart, mapping trauma's hidden crevices through folklore's veiled lens. As shadows elongate into questions unresolved, Sundas compels us to confront our own twilight trails – where rural ghosts dance with urban specters, urging not resolution, but reckoning. In this sparse sorcery, he redefines Nepali prose as a mirror to the ineffable, inviting a perpetual quest through the psyche's mist-shrouded passes.

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