

## The Rashomon Effect and Polyphony as Narrative Strategies in M.M. Kaye's novel *The Far Pavilions*

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### Abstract

M. M. Kaye's novel *The Far Pavilions* intertwines the Rashomon effect theory and Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony as narrative strategies to offer a rich tapestry of perspectives and multi-layered narration. It explores the complexities of identity and questions the nature of truth and human experience. Derived from Akira Kurasawa's film "Rashomon" (1950), dramatizing the variance in witnesses' accounts of a brutal rape and murder, the Rashomon effect is a phenomenon whereby different people construct subjective and contradictory accounts of the same event. *The Far Pavilions* reflects the multifaceted portrayal of the cultural, historical and social milieu of colonial India, where British rulers and Indian natives inhabit overlapping yet distinct worlds. Narrative strategies are coloured by characters from diverse social strata and ethnicities with conflicting perceptions and cultural backgrounds, each with their unique perspective on the unfolding story. Bakhtin's polyphonic narrative, where multiple voices exist independently and are given equal weight, further enriches the novel's complexity. The protagonist, Ashton Pelham-Martyn, a British officer raised as an Indian, serves as a central node, connecting the various threads and voices without overshadowing them. By presenting contrasting viewpoints on a long series of insurgencies and rebellions that fueled the Indian Rebellion in 1857, the novel becomes a discourse on the nature of narrative and how history is understood. The book's deliberate fracturing of time and setting takes on a new mantle where the departure from the conventional focus on displaced army officers intertwines with the concept of polyphonic narrative and the Rashomon effect.

**Keywords:** *Michael Bakhtin's poly polyphony; M.M. Kaye; Rashomon Effect; the dialogical self; The Far Pavilions*

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## Introduction:

The Rashomon effect theory and Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) polyphonic narrative and the dialogical principle are powerful analytical tools for understanding the complexities of truth, perception, and narrative construction within a literary work. Set against the backdrop of British colonial India in the 19th century, M. M. Kaye's novel *The Far Pavilions* provides a fertile ground for Bakhtin's narrative 'multiplicity of perspectives' (Todorov xii), in his understanding of the terms dialogism, the dialogical principle and the reading process hence allows for a rich, dialogic interaction between characters, cultures and ideologies. By presenting diverse voices beyond the colonial gaze, the novel not only diversifies the portrayal of India but also engages with subjectivity, echoing the Rashomon effect's exploration of varying truths within a single narrative, thus inviting a deeper examination of cultural representation and power dynamics in postcolonial literature.

Mary Margaret Kaye (1908-2004), also known as M. M. Kaye or Mollie Kaye, is a prominent British author who wrote historical novels set in exotic places. Born in Simla, near the Himalayas, she lived a great portion of her life in India before Independence, where her family served in the Army, including her father, Head of the Directorate of Central Intelligence there. Mollie went to England for school when she was ten years old,

returning to India at the age of 17. Because of her tight relationship with her family's Indian servants, she spoke Hindustani, a dialect of Hindi, and her nurse often took her to the local market for storytelling. This upbringing provided Mollie with rich cultural experiences and a deep affection for India, which she skillfully captured in her writing. She was also a painter and artist and began writing when she realized she could make more money.

Mollie's first book, *Six Bars at Seven*, earned her £65. She then switched to writing thrillers, such as *Death in Kashmir*, *Death in Cyprus*, *Death in Kenya*, and *Death in Zanzibar*, set in countries where her husband was posted. Mollie also wrote three autobiographies and they were reprinted by an American publisher. Written over 15 years while battling illness and travelling extensively for her husband's military occupation, Kaye's most popular work was *The Far Pavilions*, a 960-page novel published in 1978 and set in 19th-century India (*Los Angeles Times*, Feb 4, 2004). In 1963, she returned to India to research *The Far Pavilions* but discovered she had lung cancer. This led to a fictional representation of her life in India, and shared her life with her grandchildren, with the belief that few people will have that kind of life again. She is already beginning to forget dates and names and wants to set it all down before her memory fails her completely. The book, which sold 15 million

copies after two years of its release, was adapted into a miniseries in 1984 and was praised for its captivating and action-packed nature. It is a sprawling narrative that spans over a thousand pages, covering 37 years of Indian-British history, starting before the 1857 Great Mutiny and ending with Major Sir Louis Cavagnari's and his escort's massacre in 1879 in Kabul and the outbreak of the second Afghan War.

### **1. The Narrative Strategies:**

The narrative writing process requires certain elements such as prefiguration or planning, setting the goal, place and time, and memory retrieval. *The Far Pavilions* is characterised by certain narrative strategies such as polyphony, self-reflexivity, and the Rashomon effect to achieve one goal: The essence of understanding the truth primarily transcends the boundaries of a single consciousness and lies at the intersection of various consciousnesses converge. The next section will delve into the Rashomon effect theory and Bakhtin's concept of polyphonic narrative in literature, exploring its manifestations and implications.

#### **1.1. The Rashomon Principle: Perspectives, Truth, and Narrative Complexity**

The Rashomon effect is a perspective principle introduced by Picasso and Braque in cubist art. As articulated by Barry Sandywell, the concept is also used as a narrative strategy and

literary style to produce “the effect of simultaneous, co-existing multiple perspectives” (493-94). Inspired by Akira Kurosawa's 1950 great film "Rashomon," this concept has become a compelling lens through which a crime witnessed by multiple people is recounted in several conflicting ways. Based on Ryunosuke Akutagawa's short story “In a Grove,” the film portrays a rape and murder from the perspectives of four witnesses. The theory suggests that differing perspectives shape the interpretations of the same phenomenon, like “a landscape viewed from different vantage points, one room viewed from different windows;” each perspective constructs its version of reality, where “the landscape-as-seen becomes one 'possible world' defined by its particular conditions of perception” (Sandywell 493-94). This radical perspectivism extends across various domains of “cognition, behaviour, imagination, thought and culture,” suggesting that knowing is a continual process of deferring the complete truth. The Rashomon effect underscores the necessity of exploring “a *multiverse* rather than a universe,” allowing time for understanding to unfold, echoing Bergson's metaphor of waiting for the "sugar to melt." (Sandywell 493)

As literature evolves, the Rashomon effect challenges traditional notions of objective reality and linear progression, questioning readers' assumptions and biases. It serves as a reminder of the subjective nature of storytelling, encouraging

critical reading by revealing the characters' perspectives, impressions and inner thoughts, formulating a multi-layered story. It fosters the significance of curiosity and open-mindedness in understanding the truth, especially in an interconnected world with multiple narratives, hence creating new worlds, or world interpretations (Sandywell 493).

## 1.2. Polyphony and Narrative Composition

Polyphony praises pluralism by admitting multiple voices and layers within the narrative structure resonating with the Rashomon Effect. Through the 20th-century's Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's framework of the novel, characters' voices intersect, clash and harmonize, creating a rich tapestry of storytelling. Bakhtin's influential book *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) offers insights into the novel composition, particularly in his lengthy essay "Discourse in the Novel" that explores the concept of polyphony, heteroglossia and dialogism. Moreover, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984) encompasses "larger concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia, and is at the core of his dialogism" (n38). His concept of 'polyphony,' which contrasts with monophony (a single dominant voice), allows the characters to express multiple voices independent of the author's within a novel; these voices have their own perspective, validity and narrative weight. The fragmentation of the author's context shows "a higher level of

unity” as contended by Bakhtin. “The problems encountered by the author and his consciousness in the polyphonic novel are far deeper, and more complex than those to be found in the homophonic (monologic) novel” (Todorov 75, 14). Only the novel, “with its supreme realization of the potentialities inherent in prose, offers the possibility of doing justice to voices other than the author’s own” (Bakhtin, 1984: n23). Its structure is ‘energized’ by its inherent dialogism (Todorov 65).

Dostoevsky in his works creates dissimilar characters or thinkers with diverse views of the world: Ivan Karamazov, Myshkin, Raskolnikov, Stavrogin, and the Grand Inquisitor. Therefore, he generates conflicting narrative perspectives within his polyphonic construction of the novel to represent the dialogical attribute of human life, namely human languages and voices in various genres and times.

*A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky’s novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world,*

combined but are not merged in the unity of the event. (Bakhtin, 1984: 6).

The author's voice is not placed between the characters and the reader but rather allows them to subvert reality. Polyphony arises when the author's position allows freedom of interaction with characters, enabling them to argue with each other and the author, "all the voices playing a truly essential role in the novel are actually 'convictions' or 'points of view on the world'" (Bakhtin, 1984: 33). This results in "a plurality of consciousnesses" located in different worlds, rather than a multiplicity of characters within a unified world.

Bakhtin's novelization explores *heteroglossia*, the different strata within a language, such as social, professional, dialects and jargon. It is a blending of world views in language, or the 'diversity of languages,' creating a complex unity. For Bakhtin, the prose writer encounters "a multitude of routes, roads and paths that have been laid down in the object by social consciousness," and that object is "a focal point" of heterological voices, including the writer's own voice. Therefore, he "create[s] the background necessary for his own voice, outside of which his artistic prose nuances cannot be perceived, and without which they 'do not sound'" (Bakhtin, 1981: 278).



### **1.3. Dialogicality and Society of the Self: The Multi-voiced Self and the Environment:**

To generate a literary text, there is a creative relationship between dialogical reflexivity and the external eco-aspects (environmental, social and physical) that are mimicked in the inner self. In his theory of language and communication, Mikhail Bakhtin argues that words serve as expressions of dialogue or a connection between the author and the reader. Writing then is the product offered to the “other” or the reader, occurring through internal and external dialogues, voices or ideological frameworks that enable the individual to develop a sense of self. (Motta et al. 610). Reflexivity, the human ability to think about oneself, is essential in understanding one's consciousness and attitudes. It is a psychological phenomenon of the dialogical self, that is, the conscious awareness of one's own conscience. This dialogical self, also known as ‘self’, ‘sense of self’ or as Bakhtin puts it ‘self-consciousness,’ is “the main artistic element in the structure of his heroes” who can “embody a kind of special view of both the world and himself” (1984: 121, 82).

The Dialogical Self Theory (DST), established by the American psychologist William James and Mikhail Bakhtin, and developed by Dutch psychologist Hubert Hermans in the 1990s, whose Personal Position Repertoire (PPR) method (Hermans, 2001b, 323-365), assesses the self as an "extended" entity, the

self's 'society of mind,' incorporating both internal and external self-positions or communication processes through dialogue. The extended self-theory posits that the *other* is an inherent part of the self, including both the actual and imagined other. This 'extension' includes individuals and groups in society as positions within the self's mini-society, encompassing both internal (e.g., I as the son of my mother, I as a teacher, I as a lover of jazz), but also external positions (e.g., my father, my pupils, the groups to which I belong). "Opposed to the individualistic view of self, the dialogical self proposes that the same person may occupy many self positions, in which he/she may disagree, understand, oppose, contradict, and ask for the 'I' in another position" (Motta et al. 610-11). Each position has a distinct voice, functioning as many characters in a narrative, allowing dialogical interactions with society, forming a complex, narratively structured entity.

For Bakhtin, language is dialogical, intertextual, and unfinished, refusing closure. Polyphony is more than creating an "empty juxtaposition of opinions," it involves "the dynamic interplay and interruption of perspectives ... to produce new realities and new ways of seeing. It is incommensurability which gives dialogue its power" (Robinson, n.p.). English literature features several polyphonic works that resonate with the Rashomon Effect, such as *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf and *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell. It is essential in the current

paper to examine the intertwining of the Rashomon effect, Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, and the dialogical self as narrative strategies in M.M. Kaye's 1978 novel *The Far Pavilions*, elucidating the narrative's diverse perspectives and independent voices within a single text.

## **2. The Far Pavilions: Multiple Perspectives**

In the context of M.M. Kaye's *The Far Pavilions*, published in 1978, the Rashomon effect and the polyphonic novel theory are employed to analyze the varied perspectives of its characters, particularly in the complex socio-political backdrop of 19th-century British India that the novel portrays. The narrative is a kaleidoscope of perspectives, each of which offers a deeper understanding of the different aspects of human experience: identity, love, adventure, and the clash of cultures. The dialogical self goes beyond the post-modernism idea of the decentralization of the self and the notion of fragmentation; i.e., fragments. It highlights the malleability of truth, as each character's viewpoint contributes to a fragmented whole, that Bakhtin called the "underlying unity." (Todorov 75). The novel's narrative structure, as minimal that appears in a larger context, did effect an important change in the process of multi-voiced storylining, much like a musical composition with various independent voices. This polyphony is evident in the way the story explores the characters' lives and struggles, and the broader historical context of the

British Raj. This genre-defying novel comprises interconnected stories across different time periods, creating a literary multiverse where characters' actions ripple through time.

### **2.1. Character Subjectivity: Interplay of Truth and Perception**

The narrative complexity of *The Far Pavilions* deepens our understanding of the characters and themes, inviting readers to engage with the text on multiple levels. It explores how characters construct their realities and how these realities conflict or align with the narratives of others within the story. Rich with characters from diverse backgrounds and interactions, the novel reflects the complex cultural and political dynamics of British-Indian history. It features diverse voices from the lives of various characters, including the British Raj's pukka sahibs, despotic Maharajahs, princes, princesses, courtiers, grooms, horsemen, maids, and ordinary people in the subcontinent. The stories of these characters often intersect, echoing the Rashomon Effect, as they grapple with memory, history, and identity. Ashton, Princess Anjuli, and Captain Alex Randall embody diverse and conflicting cultural identities, resulting in a dynamic exchange of perspectives. They offer their accounts of events, which often diverge due to their subjective experiences and motivations. Some characters are straight from life, like Kaka Ji, and are based on people Mollie once knew. Through the interplay of these characters, their cultural dissonance, beliefs and backgrounds, and

the use of multiple narrators, each with their own biases and points of view, Kaye creates a richly layered narrative that challenges the conventional notions of truth and morality and contributes to its polyphonic nature. Here are some aspects where the Rashomon effect might be relevant in M. Kaye's polyphonic novel, *The Far Pavilions*.

## **2.2. Contrasting Cultural and Religious Perspectives:**

Applying the Rashomon effect theory and Bakhtin's polyphonic structure and dialogism to the analysis of *The Far Pavilions* allows us to explore the complex multi-dimensional nature of the journey of identity, loyalty, and cultural conflict of the charismatic protagonist, Ashton Pelham-Martyn/Ashok/Ash. From an early age, Ash experiences cultural conflicts that form one of the main themes of the book. From one perspective, the story narrates the life of a young English boy born in 1852 on the road in colonial India before the Second Sepoy Uprising to British parents. His mother, Isabel, dies shortly after his birth, and his distracted, bookish father, the botanist Hilary, never gets around to informing anyone official of Ash's birth, and later succumbs to cholera. Entrusted to his Hindu *ayah*, wet nurse, Sita, and a retired ex-cavalry officer, Sirdar Akbar Khan, Ash is raised as an Indian orphan in a nobleman's household in the kingdom of Gulkote. He befriends the Hindu princess Anjuli and others within the palace.

Caught between his Hindu ayah and his Muslim mentors, he straddles both English and Indian cultures, shaping his worldview and character development. At age 11, he uncovers a murderous conspiracy against the crown prince, Lalji, and when historical events overtake the nomadic camp they live in, he escapes with Sita, who reveals his true parentage before dying.

Once, following a rumour of successful risings throughout Oude and Rohilkund, there had been a tale of mutiny and massacre in Ferozepore and far-off Sialkot, and it was this last that made Sita finally abandon a nebulous plan that she had briefly entertained, of taking Ash-Baba to Mardan where his mother's brother would be stationed with the Guides. (Kaye 43).

Sita's concern for Ash-Baba's safety clashes with the harsh realities of unrest and danger. His innocence contrasts with the ominous backdrop of 'mutiny and massacre'. These contrasting voices, Bakhtin argues, exist independently and unmerged, not subordinated to a single authorial voice, with the boy's voice being distinct from the narrator's.

The loss of Ash's foster mother, Sita, is central and presented directly, and Bakhtin's polyphony allows readers to feel the weight of this loss through the boy's perspective:

The river was bright with the sunset as he knelt on the wet sand and scooped up the water and drank greedily, and afterwards splashed handfuls of it over his aching head and hot, dry eyes. He had not cried again after Sita died; and he did not cry now, for the boy who had wept so bitterly in the dawn was dead too. He was not yet twelve years old, but he would never be a child again. He had grown up in the short space of a single afternoon and left his childhood behind him forever. For it was not only his mother whom he had lost that day but his identity. There was no such person — there never had been — as Ashok, son of Sita who had been the wife of Daya Ram, syce. There was only a boy whose parents were dead and who did not even know his own name or where to find his own kin. An English boy — a *feringhi*. He was a foreigner, and this was not even his own land ... (Kaye 105)

The passage explores various perspectives, including the narrator's description of the scene by the river, the boy's inner thoughts and emotions, and the factual details about his identity and loss. Its polyphonic nature reflects the absence of a fixed identity, and the boy's developmental transformation from a child to a foreigner - a *feringhi* - is full of significance. Overall,

the text exemplifies polyphony by giving voice to various perspectives, allowing readers to engage with the characters' distinct consciousnesses.

As the "dialogical self" or the society of mind theory suggests that individuals engage in dialogues to understand themselves and their social context, Ash addresses his self-conflicts and self-criticism in various self domains, including internal conflicting identities and external influences on his decision-making. In adulthood, Ash is expected to adhere to the rigid colonial code of Anglo-Indian society where the story veers into the more traditional ground for this genre. Later in the story, forced to accept his British heritage, he travels to Victorian England to receive a formal education and becomes an officer. His journey can be paradoxically seen as a heroic quest for self-discovery and identity reconciliation and as a tale of betrayal and disillusion. His polyphonic thoughts and internal dialogue reflect how conflicting cultural and personal loyalties are merged within an individual. As he joins the British Army, he grapples with his true identity as an Englishman, despite constant rejection from his English peers. He is trapped between his Indian heritage sympathies and the Raj's biases and duty. His unwavering desire for acceptance in both circles leads him through forbidden romance, political intrigue, and cultural



clashes. So, he absorbs ‘two worlds’: that of a British officer and an Indian prince, never fully belonging to either.

Ash returns to India, grappling with his dual identity as Ashton and Ashok. His return coincides with a rebellion against British rule, challenging his loyalty and reflecting the cultural divide between both cultures once more. Ash comes to the profound realization that:

[Ash] would never be able to fit into any groove formed by nationality or creed. Therefore, the only thing for him to do was to cut his ties with the past and start again, begin afresh as an individual who was neither British nor Indian, merely a member of the human race. (Kaye 816)

Religion and creed form another important context in the novel, especially through Ash whose inability to conform to a single nationality or creed illustrates his internal conflict and divergent viewpoints. His resolution to “cut his ties with the past” and reinvent himself as an individual beyond British or Indian identities showcases the complexity of personal truth in the context of cultural and national allegiances.

Dressed in Punjabi costume as ‘Seyyid Akbar’ on a spy mission for the British, Ash embodies the tension between the three major faiths of modern India. Inspired by his own ideology, Ash worships Dur Khaima, Far Pavilions; it is his

deity. Viewed through the lens of the Rashomon effect, Ash's choice suggests that identity is not a singular, monolithic construct; instead, identity is fragmented with various perceptions. The quest for an alternative 'other' way for Ash to become truly himself – by transcending nationality and religion and situating himself in a broader identity as a whole.

Bakhtin's dialogical self theory emphasizes the interaction of inner voices and perspectives in the individual's mind, but such *I*-positions may embrace external voices, beliefs or points of view of the other. The following quotation exemplifies two different views of religion. As Kaye goes into more detail, we also get a glimpse into the complex Hindu belief of rebirth. Upon death, the body of the deceased becomes reabsorbed into the Panchatatva, or the fundamental elements, *Prima Materia*, of the universe: Earth, Water, Air, Light, and Sky.

He must be as brave now, and remember that death came in the end for everyone — Rajah and Beggar, Brahmin and Untouchable, man and woman. All passed through the same door and were born again . . .

‘I do not die, *Pzara* [dear one]. I rest only, and wait to be reborn. And in the next life, if the gods are kind, it may be that we shall meet again.’ (Kaye 105)

Ash's statement reflects this dialogical quality: He acknowledges mortality as "death came in the end for everyone," yet he asserts continuity "I rest only, and wait to be reborn". His society of the self includes not only his internal voice, due to his belief in rebirth and continuity, but also the external other's perspectives of death, due to cultural and religious voices (Rajah, Beggar, Brahmin, Untouchable). Additionally, Sita's voice articulates the Hindu concepts of death, rebirth and the possibility of a reunion, and the narrator's voice conveys the universal truth about these shared human experiences. The dialogical tension between mortality and rebirth adds depth to Ash's worldview. These voices exist independently to enrich the narrative, reflecting a multifaceted understanding of truth.

Furthermore, the same theological concept can be perceived and interpreted differently by individuals from distinct cultural and religious backgrounds. The following quotation is relevant:

The talk would range widely, from tribal matters to theology; and once a Pathan sowar who had recently met and conversed with a missionary (to the mystification and deep misunderstanding of them both) had demanded of Ash an explanation of the Trinity: 'For the Missionary-Sahib,' said the sowar,

‘says that he too believes that there is only the One God, but that his god is three gods in one person. Now, how can that be?’ (Kaye 167)

The passage presents diverse voices and interpretations, reflecting the complexity of human communication, regarding sensitive topics such as theology and the truth of God through polyphony. The narrator’s voice sets the scene and describes the conversation; Ash’s voice engages with the Pathan sowar’s question, and the Pathan sowar’s voice represents a different cultural perspective. These voices interact independently, creating a rich dialogue. However, diverse lenses and religious backgrounds lead to varying interpretations, and hence potential misunderstandings. The passage touches on theological complexity: How can one God be three in one person? The Pathan sowar and the missionary have deeply divergent understandings of the concept of the Trinity. Dialogically speaking, the missionary’s voice asserts the triune nature of God, while the Pathan sowar questions this concept. Ash, caught between both viewpoints, must navigate the clash of beliefs and act as a mediator, reflecting the novel’s polyphonic nature.

Ash and Anjuli-Bai have different views on religion, spirituality and duty. As a Hindu princess, Anjuli-Bai represents India’s ancient traditions and spiritual beliefs. Her faith

symbolizes resilience and hope, serving as a guiding force for herself and Ash amidst chaos and violence. Through Anjuli's devotion to the Hindu deities and her deep understanding of karma, Kaye explores the power of faith, focusing on the characters' conflicting views on their identities and relationships. Anjuli-Bai: "Your world and mine are not the same. Your gods and mine are not the same" (Kaye 317). Ash struggles with his dual heritage, while Anjuli-Bai emphasizes the cultural and religious divide between them, reflecting the subjective realities each character inhabits.

### **3. Historical Interpretations and Socio-political Context**

There is no single narrative of history, a diversity of histories, or counter-histories, narrated from the side of the 'ex-centric' or different perspectives on history, instead. In this respect, the past must be positively revisited in the process of selective remembrance, reflecting on both the author's autobiographical events and the environmental aspects, including other people, yet narrating them through rewriting a literary history. However, it "is not a history of triumphant masterpieces but an inclusive history of writing, and more so of writing in process and thus, of necessity, a history of fragments, attempts and aborted productiveness" (Hotho 393). Kaye is obviously at her core a historian in *The Far Pavilions*, taking into account the era she was writing in as well as her own

family history, that's why her novel is "well balanced" (Kilcannon). As articulated by Bakhtin, to produce a new form of literary history, the author's voice will depart from the text. Kaye is radical as she utilizes the multi-voiced self to rewrite history in such a way that it remains a literary experiment yet paradoxically contributes to its wider understanding. Her complex narrative structure intersects with the concept of narrative time standing between the internal (or psychological expressing thoughts, ideas or feelings) and the external (or social describing environments) (Motta et al 613-15).

Self-reflexivity within the narrative structure of Kaye's *The Far Pavilions* not only enriches the narrative as a historical epic but also serves as a commentary on storytelling and historical representation. Through metafictional elements, it draws from the novelist's childhood, personal and familial experiences in India, and biographical writings by her grandfather, blending historical facts with fiction. "I have had to make up my own mind about what really happened and fight the battle according to my own ideas - helped by the fact that the collected accounts tally to a certain extent; at least as to the order in which the various events took place," Kaye asserts (958). She creates a polyphonic novel characterized by mutual dialogues between characters, self-talk or inner speech, forming the basis for dialogicality between the author's self and the other in exchange roles. So many of the

characters express their thoughts and emotions through the author's multi-voiced 'Self' or her multiple *I*-positions, transcending the characters' self-descriptions of themselves and providing an in-depth understanding of their worldview.

### **3.1. Mesmerizing Setting and Temporality in the Land of “gods and gold and famine”**

Like the film “Rashomon” which depicts a dark forest as the setting of an attack on a woman, *The Far Pavilions* has the magnificence and vastness of the Himalayas as a vibrant landscape of 19th-century India. This Indian historical setting depicts the clash of cultures and belief systems during the British Raj, between the indigenous Indian people and colonial rulers. The majestic mountains symbolize the resilience and strength of the Indian people, while cantonments represent the rigid structures and limitations imposed by British colonization. Kaye's meticulous research work and storytelling make her a renowned historical fiction writer. She adds to her writing by intimately offering her readers, through every descriptive detail, all the human symbols of sights, sounds and even smells of this enchanting setting. In a fascinating book, Kaye paints a vivid image that overflows with color and contrasts, varying from the grandeur and vast Maharaja palaces to the busy bazaars of the old city, and the roughness of the deserts on the brink of rebellion.

Different characters describe India and its customary beliefs and traditions in vastly separate ways based on their culture and social backgrounds. Thus, complex and contrasting images coexist within the same narrative space, reflecting a multitude of experiences, viewpoints and emotions. “Wally was working for his Lieutenancy and Ash coached him in Pushtu and Hindustani, and talked to him: India, a land full of gods and gold and famine. Ugly as a rotting corpse and beautiful beyond belief...” (Kaye 213-14). India is described as both ‘ugly’ and ‘beautiful’, denoting a contradictory polyphonic view of the same place (India), characterized by both its splendor and its squalor. This juxtaposition creates a dialogic interaction within the text, allowing for a more layered understanding of the country.

The narrative setting in *The Far Pavilions* constitutes a setting for the sense of the self as well, weaving together past and present events. It blends multiple timelines, real and imaginative, to create a rich story with different temporal perspectives. To create a non-linear narrative, Kaye skillfully uses flashbacks, foreshadowing, and dynamic storytelling experiences through which readers are engaged in a vividly rendered world or a multifaceted journey through time. This intersection of narrative timelines adds depth and complexity to the novel, inviting readers to consider the long-reaching consequences of actions and how the real-time events past shape the present. They are symbols of



the broader socio-political context, indicating the interconnectedness of the characters' lives and their past experiences.

The Rashomon effect, used to characterize individual historical events, places the brooding battles of Madhogarh and Rashtan into sharper focus. A significant event in the story is the deportation of the heir to the throne of Awadh by the British in 1856, which is seen as a precursor to the violence that ended partition in 1947. The Indian Rebellion of 1857, known as the Sepoy Mutiny, also impacts the characters' understanding and their respective journeys. It is depicted from various viewpoints, including those of British officers, Indian soldiers and civilians. Each perspective offers unique insights into the rebellion's causes and consequences. It symbolizes the rising opposition against British rule, giving voice to the suppressed natives and their fight for independence.

Bakhtin's concept of polyphonic novel enriches the narrative tapestry by allowing multiple voices to interact within the text. *The Far Pavilions* includes real characters such as Prince Jhoti who faces killing three times, yet the author changes it to avoid focusing on the royal family. She also creates Rana of Bhithor, a complex character portrayed as an amalgam of diverse political and personal characters, power and influences. His dual identity as a traditional ruler and modern leader

highlights cultural differences and personal tensions, impacting his own life and shaping the lives of those around him. Rana's involvement in Anjuli's fate adds a tragic dimension to the narrative. Anjuli's decision to marry Rana is at stake, denoting a central conflict in the story.

### **3.2. Suttee Ritual**

Ash's advice to Anjuli not to marry Rana of Bhithor reflects his concern for her safety and his cynical attitude toward the suttee ritual. 'If I were you, Juli,' said Ash thinking it over, 'I wouldn't get married at all. It's too dangerous' (Kaye 83). Marriage, in his view, is perilous due to the potential fate of becoming a suttee. A Suttee (also spelled as "sati"), a real historical practice in India, is portrayed as an amalgam of diverse views as it requests a wife voluntarily or involuntarily self-immolating on her husband's death. Anjuli's dilemma—whether to defy or conform to tradition—reflects her inner dialogue and conflict. She negotiates societal expectations, personal desires, and cultural norms, eventually transforming her from naivety to maturity and courage, from an innocent isolated girl to a woman shaped by love, loss, and dual heritage.

Actually, Ash's cynical view of marriage reflects the oppressive gender roles prevalent in society, describing an undesirable husband whose marriage can lead his wife to become a suttee. "And an old, fat, bad-tempered husband who

will beat you, and then die years and years before you do, so that you will have to become a suttee and be burned alive with him” (Kaye 82), Ash wonders. Kairi’s reaction reveals her vulnerability and fears of past negative experiences:

‘Don’t say that.’ Kairi’s voice shook and her small face turned pale, for the Suttee Gate with its pathetic frieze of red hand-prints had always filled her with horror, and she could not bear to pass that tragic reminder of the scores of women who had made those marks — the wives and concubines who had been burned alive with the bodies of dead Rajahs of Gulkote, and who had dipped their palms in red dye and pressed them against the stone as they passed out through the Suttee Gate on their last short journey to the funeral pyre. Such slender, delicate little hands, some of them no bigger than her own. (Kaye 82)

The passage illustrates the emotional intensity of this practice which evokes horror in Kairi. She is aware of the tragic history of the Suttee Gate, with its red hand-prints, a symbol of tragedy and a distressing reminder of the gruesome fate of women who were forced into suttee and sacrificed their lives in this way to follow the custom.

The cultural and historical clashes are overflowed with the colonial influence and indigenous customs. Although the suttee

ritual was officially banned in the early 19th century by British authorities who deemed suttee barbaric, it persisted in remote and independent states.

The British had forbidden the barbaric custom of suttee, but every- one knew that in remote and independent states, where white men were seldom seen, it was still practised; and half the population of Gulkote could remember seeing Kairi's grandmother, the old Rani, immolating herself in the flames that consumed the body of her husband, together with three lesser wives and seventeen women of the Zenana. (Kaye 82-3)

The tension between tradition and modernity with the British intervention, disrupting old practices, is skilfully explored by Kaye, but remnants of these customs lingered. In her "Notes for the Curious," Kaye admits: "The tale of the suttee is also fiction based on fact, as it is known that at least one Englishman rescued a widow from her husband's pyre, and subsequently married her" (957). In a nutshell, this practice exemplifies polyphony and evokes the Rashomon effect through varying and differing emotional responses to the Suttee Gate. It invites readers to consider the complexities of personal choices, or internal and external voices, within a historical and cultural context. The Suttee Gate symbolizes the inner dialogue through

the characters' distinct perspectives: Anjuli's potential fate and choices, Ash's cynicism and Kairi's fear, intersecting in their shared context. Although Ash's pragmatic view contrasts with Kairi's horror, each voice contributes to the overall contradictory accounts about the suttee phenomenon, adding depth to the narrative.

### **3.3. Contrasting Worlds of Love:**

Love and romance transcending boundaries is another central theme in *The Far Pavilions*, explored through the intricate relationships between the characters and the author's life. The novel's dialogical nature allows for these different voices to interact, conflict, and blend, mirroring the complex social and cultural aspects of the British Raj era, and discussing themes of tradition, gender roles, and the clash between cultures. The novel then is a dyad that refers to a pair of themes or characters that are in contrast or complement each other, contributing to the polyphonic (multi-voiced) narrative of the story. "Ash is my husband," says Kaye. She married Godfrey Hamilton, also known as Goff, in 1942, describing him as her hero and their meeting as "love at first sight." They spent five years in India, leaving in tears in 1947 with Independence. She moved 22 times as the wife of an army officer and Major General. (Michael).

The relationships among the diverse range of characters, each with their own story or dyad, contribute to the larger

narrative and deepen the reader's understanding of the era's complexities and the human experiences within it. Kaye created her protagonist Ash, the most romantic character in her book, grappled with his affection for two remarkable women, embodying the duality of colonial India and the contrasting worlds that have influenced him. His affection goes for the Indian Princess Anjuli who captures his heart with her spirited nature. Anjuli, a princess of mixed heritage, represents the intersection of different cultures and social expectations. Their relationship shows the clashing of different voices and perspectives. "The discomforts (and there were many) counted for nothing compared to the delight of being together and free to talk and laugh and make love without fear" (Kaye 698). Yet, his love for the British woman Juli Hoffman, is just one facet of his complex life which evokes conflicting interpretations of cultural resistance and colonial exploitation. While their romance challenges social norms and colonial hierarchies, it also raises questions about the power dynamics inherent in their relationships.

Central to *The Far Pavilions* is the story of the wedding of the two princesses Anjuli and Shushila to the Rana of Bhithor, based on a real incident. "I went to a wedding where the bridegroom was twelve and the bride ten," she recalls. The government of India prohibits child marriages, but the ceremony is allowed until the bride is old enough to bear children, sixteen or

seventeen. (Michael). A common practice in India that evokes fun is the bridegroom wearing a veil, and there is a row about the bride price. The author later shared this story with another army wife in Ulster, who gave her great uncle's/Ash's diary, which included the wedding ceremony in the story.

### **3.4. Colonialism and Hierarchy: Contrasting Realities and Conflicting Interpretations**

It is evident that the narratives' polyphonic structure allows for the juxtaposition of diverse voices and perspectives, showcasing the Rashomon effect. The same situation, British colonial rule, is interpreted differently by the colonizers and the colonized, revealing hidden emotions and contrasting perspectives of social hierarchy. Kaye's complex and multifaceted narrative explores the cultural superiority of the aristocratic British people over Indians. Edith Pemberthy, a woman who has spent most of her life with her husband in India, describes Indians "as uncivilized heathens who by the exercise of patience and strictness might be trained to become admirable servants" (Kaye12). While Edith and her husband see no value in engaging with the local culture, the narrative juxtaposes her derogatory view, with Isobel's curiosity and eagerness to see the open country and the native bazaars. His view stands in stark contrast to Mrs. Pemberthys' racial prejudice. For her, India is unworthy of exploration and

tribesmen are bloodthirsty and unreliable: “There is nothing to see,” “and the tribesmen are murderous savages—entirely untrustworthy” (Kaye 12). However, Isobel's agreement reinforces this view, creating a shared but narrow and biased perception. This interaction creates a dialogic tension within the narrative, with Isobel feeling that eight months under their roof resemble eight years.

The British colonizers' worldview is shaped by colonial ideology, which views Indian culture as inferior and unworthy of engagement. “[T]hey rarely invited Indians into their homes, or exerted themselves to make friends among them; and few showed any interest in the history and culture of the land which the majority looked upon as heathen and barbaric” (Kaye 133). This aristocratic British construct is one of dominance, cultural superiority, and disregard for Indian people, culture and history. India is seen as a land to be controlled rather than understood or respected. The lower-Caste Indian interpretation of British rule is one of dehumanization, where their lives are rendered meaningless by the indifferent and dismissive attitudes of the colonizers. From the lower-caste Indians’ perspective, British rule is experienced as an erasure of their existence, value and contributions. The reality they experience is one of being treated as mere shadows, where their Indian life is overlooked and



unacknowledged by the British rulers, reinforcing a sense of marginalization and insignificance.

Deeply ingrained prejudices and the reality of cultural diversity are also portrayed in *The Far Pavillions* when Ash's conservative British relatives experience cultural shock when confronted with Ash. They are “horrified by the habits and appearance of this young ‘heathen’ from the East. Rigidly conservative and possessing all the in-bred insularity of their race, they flinched from the prospect of displaying Hilary's son to the critical gaze of their friends and neighbours” (Kaye 113). They feel discomfort and disdain as they view Ash as a source of embarrassment. Their fears of social judgment reveal their own cultural prejudices and rigid insularity, while Ash embodies the intersection of East and West. This exchange exemplifies Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony by granting equal narrative significance to diverse social strata, thereby allowing each voice to articulate its unique experience and perspective.

### **Conclusion:**

Challenging the notion of objective reality, *The Far Pavillions* has delved into the nature of truth, presenting it as a fluid and malleable concept shaped by cultural, social, and personal constructs. This concept aligns with the Rashomon effect, exploring the multiplicity of truths and perceptions that emerge from different perspectives. The Rashomon effect and

Bakhtin's polyphony are not merely narrative strategies in *The Far Pavilions*; they are essential to its thematic core. They enable a deeper engagement with the narrative structure and its historical context, inviting readers to engage critically with questions of identity and truth understanding. The novel's use of these strategies enhances its literary depth and historical authenticity, making it a compelling literary work that transcends simplistic binaries, challenging readers to discern the underlying truths amidst conflicting accounts. As readers delve into the polyphonic narrative, they gain a deeper understanding of the novel's timeless themes and complex interplay of identity, love, loyalty, and belonging in colonial India, that shape our understanding of the human experience. *The Far Pavilions* exemplifies the Rashomon effect and the polyphonic novel, where multiple voices and perspectives converge to create a rich tapestry of storytelling, offering a complex view of historical events and social dynamics. The narrative strategy of Rashomon effect encourages dialogue about reality, morality, and human consciousness by unveiling ambiguity and presenting conflicting viewpoints on events, characters, and themes. Kaye explores her characters' inner turmoil and the repercussions of their actions to embody conflicting cultural identities and perspectives. This makes them realistic and relatable, highlighting the dynamic interplay of conflicting interpretations,

and adding layers of complexity and subjectivity to the narrative.

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