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Abstract

Power Dynamics in manu: A New Historical Perspective

¹ Keshav Raj Chalise ²Sabindra Raj Bhandari,

This study aims to examine how Manu legitimizes authority and social order and analyze how his stories shape cultural values and beliefs over time, functioning in literary texts and historical documents. Manu is a mythical figure in Hindu tradition. He has been studied as a lawgiver among Hindu believers. His laws are part of cultural practices and also there are some questions about his stories and doctrines. Based on the concepts set on mythical and cultural aspects of Manu tradition, this study examines the novel, Manu and Manu culture using the new historical perspective of power dynamics. This research further tries to see and reinterpret these narratives as cultural poetics, where myths shape societal norms and behaviors, rooted in historical circumstances. It implies the ideas of Manu culture and the novel Manu to examine how Manu codifies social norms and human cultural landscapes. However, interpretations vary with debates on their historical context and relevance regarding cultural hegemony and power dynamics. Implying the New Historicism, this research article concludes that Manu, in both myth and the novel, Manu, embodies a dynamic interplay of culture, power, and history, with its influence as a vehicle for societal norms and values. Amid the diverse arrays of cultural interpretations of Manu, this research is meaningful in reexamining Manu tradition and analysis of the novel Manu from the New Historical perspective.

Keywords

Cultural poetics
Manava Dharma
Manu law
mythical narratives
power dynamics

MANU, AN ANCIENT Indian mythological figure, has a mythical tradition in the chain of Hindu mythology. Manu, known as the progenitor of humanity, matches the myth of Adam in the Abrahamic religions in the case of producing the

¹ Lecturer, Nepal Sanskrit University,
Email: chalisekeshavraj73@gmail.com.

². Lecturer, Patan Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal
Email: bhandarisabindra@gmail.com

Corresponding Author's Email: chalisekeshavraj73@gmail.com

heritage of rules and regulations of humanity and human knowledge of social welfare among Hindu believers. Stories about the activities of Manu are found in Hindu scriptures, that show Manu not as a single person, but as a tradition, and therefore there was not a Manu, but there were several Manu/s.

Rich in legendary connections between ancient stories and present lifestyle, Hindu mythology provides the stories of deities and human beings among which Manu (the whole chain of Manu tradition as a single Manu) is believed to have been the first man created by the gods or the Supreme Being with exceptional ability to link Gods and Humans through the knowledge of humanity as a wise king and lawgiver who received the divine laws, known as dharma, directly from the gods. The Sanskrit term, 'Manava' (मानव) means 'of Manu' or 'children of Manu'. His role extends beyond being merely the first man; he is also the ancestor of all humans and the father of the human race. The myth of Manu serves as a foundation for Hindu cosmology.

Writing a novel entitled Manu based on the life and activities of Hindu mythical character/s, Manu, Devi Prasad Subedi has started a different discourse on the tradition of Manu as the initiator of education and social civilization on earth. The reference of Manu, Subedi has mentioned, comes from the Rigveda, "In the Rigveda there were references to Father Manu, implying that he was either a creator or a progenitor of the human race" (Williams, 2003, p. 210). The stories of Manu have come along later in Hindu scriptures and the Puranic stories, "Manu was known as the first human, father of the race, first to kindle the sacrificial fire, and creator of the social order" (p. 210). The story of Manu has historical value, "its application in modern times requires critical scrutiny, especially in relation to caste and gender issues" (Doniger & Smith p. 202). However, Manu's ideas have many criticisms on "the legal implications and restrictive stance on women's autonomy, particularly in sections where it prescribes patriarchal guardianship" (Olivelle, 2005, p. 124). Still, Manu principles are meaningful in shaping the moral fabric of ancient society.

This study examines how the novel, Manu has presented the events in the life of Manu; how this reference, not as a myth but as a mode of history is connected with present-day context and how the author has developed the events of Manu-history in the structure of the novel. The study uses the New Historicism as the theory of rereading Manu tradition in the novel to see how the power has determined not only the reality but also the mythical history. This article does not focus on 'reading myth', but it focuses on 'new-historical reading' of the text.

Review of Literature

Rooted in the Vedic tradition, Manu convention embodies a worldview that merges religious principles with practical governance. It has created a system where social roles, duties, and rights are defined. Doniger and Smith (2000) write, "Manu tradition tries to form a social order. Its historical context reveals a society striving for stability through a hierarchy that reinforced order but often entrenched systemic inequalities" (p. 45). Manu tradition begins the concept of dharma, a term that encompasses duty, law, and moral order. It emphasizes the importance of adhering to one's prescribed varna (caste) duties as a means to uphold

societal harmony through the Manusmriti, however, there is debate on whether Manusmriti is the real book authored by any one of the Manus in its long tradition. Patrick Olivelle (2005) highlights how the tradition of Manu combines metaphysical and practical dimensions, presenting “dharma as both an eternal truth and a context-dependent set of rules” (p. 22). The trend of Manu, as guided by Manusmriti, has, however, been criticized for its “rigid interpretation of caste and gender roles, which often served to legitimize Brahminical hegemony and patriarchal dominance” (Chakravarti, 1993, p. 104). Often it is identified as power hegemony. It has created positive and negative arguments.

Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith (2000) argue that Manu tradition reveals the tensions and contradictions within its hierarchical framework, where power is centralized but bound by ethical constraints (p.78). Manu’s instructions for governance in Manusmriti reflect the philosophy of power. Kingship is described as divinely ordained. The monarch is someone who has to protect and enforce dharma. Yet, the king’s authority is not absolute. It is circumscribed by the laws and ethical principles laid down in the text.

B. R. Ambedkar (1936) argues against Manu tradition and law. In his opinion, it is a tool of oppression that institutionalized systemic injustices (p. 25). It is necessary to debate its relevance, exploring how its philosophy has been selectively interpreted and adapted across different historical periods to serve varying political and social agendas (Smith 78). Therefore, it requires seeing Manu from diverse perspectives to authenticate its essence.

These studies on Manu and Manusmriti have shown Manu as an initiator of patriarchy, contradictions, hierarchy and injustice. Despite these extensive studies on the Manusmriti and its role in shaping ancient Indian society, there remains a significant gap in exploring the Manu tradition through a new historical perspective. Existing studies often focus on its prescriptive norms and hierarchical structures, yet they seldom contextualize how these principles were adapted, contested, or reinterpreted in different historical and regional contexts. Furthermore, the dynamic interplay between Manu’s legal philosophy and the socio-political transformations across centuries has not been sufficiently examined. This research aims to address these gaps by analyzing the Manu tradition and the novel, Manu authored by Devi Prasad Subedi.

Objective and Significance of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine the Manu tradition and the Novel, Manu from the perspective of power dynamics. This study is meaningful in setting a connection between Manu tradition and the novel, Manu. It helps to reexamine the culture of Manu in modern principles of power dynamics.

Research Questions

1. Who is Manu- a man, a divine or just a myth?
2. How is Manu a vehicle of power in the Manu myth?
3. How does the author present the narratives of Manu to reflect upon the mode of power dynamics in the novel, Manu?

Methodology

This study is of a qualitative and archival nature. It implies the method of textual analysis based on secondary sources from the existing archives. It uses the theory of new historicism, especially the principles of power dynamics to interpret and analyze the Manu tradition and the novel, Manu.

Manu in Myth and Culture

Manu has a myth, and also has a religion and culture, as Devi Prasad Subedi (2022) has mentioned, “the story in the novel has combined the mythical character. The relational rope of the mythical and historical characters is more complicated than of the Puranas” (p. xii). Manu has a myth. He has a history too. Myth on him and religion link intricately with the common purpose of generating and maintaining cultural value. This culture has a history to tell. Manu history has stories to convey cultural beliefs, values, and moral codes. The history of Manu serves as a foundational narrative within religious traditions. This history explains the origin of the universe, the creation of humanity, and the workings of divine beings, however, “the law of Manu encompasses contradictions that may be ultimately insoluble” (Doniger, 1992, p. 25). Manu employs symbols and allegories to convey deeper spiritual truths and insights into long humanity, “the purpose of Manu was to establish humanity and human religion through the sages” (Subedi, 2022, p. 210). This purpose is often interpreted within religious contexts to provide guidance, inspire devotion, and foster a sense of community. It has deep-rooted impacts on the cultural pattern because the stories of Manu play a crucial role in transmitting cultural and religious beliefs across generations.

Manu tradition serves as a means of preserving and perpetuating religious teachings and practices. This tradition has come over the centuries through oral tradition, written texts, rituals, and ceremonies, “Manu gives a great deal of importance to customs which he considered essential for the maintenance of social life. These customs were based on the religious principles” (Sinha, 2017, p. 54). These customs and religious traditions incorporate mythological narratives into their understanding of sacred history as the interactions in the development of the faith “by making Takchyashila as the center of study, practice and documentation of human social rules and regulations” (Subedi, 2022, p. 206). Likewise, the story of Manu helps shape individual and collective identities within Hindu religious communities.

Revisiting and reinterpreting Manu related stories, symbols, and narratives unfolds new insights because “Manu changed the divine voices into human language and in the written form” (p. 262). This activity enhances the understanding of different perspectives and explores various layers of meaning within Manu myths. In Arthur Schopenhauer’s views, “myths function as a vehicle that transports an esoteric system of values from the intellectually superior to the inferior” (Borchetia, 2023, p. 11). Stories of Manu, created once long back, have come down to human cultural practices and they undergo certain changes.

As powerful tools in shaping human lifestyles, myths often reflect the values, beliefs, and cultural practices of a society, “the work of myth is to explain, to reconcile, to guide action or to legitimate” (Cupitt, 1982, p. 29) the actions at present however they reflect the values of past of a particular geography, “in a myth we have definite locality” (Roheim, 1969,

p. 25). Rereading the Myth of Manu through literature helps individuals connect with the cultural heritage of the past and understand the historical context in which such myths originated and how they have affected life at present. Manu appears as the hero of civilization and culture and his laws have come in the form of stories and instructions. For example, “Vānaprasthī has to go to the forest taking his wife along or leaving his wife with the son, according to Swayambhuva Manu” (Subedi, 2022, p. 325). These instructions or stories contain elements of plot, character development, and narrative structure “in a myth the actors are mostly divine and sometimes human” (Roheim, 1969, p. 25), which makes it possible to reread them not just as the myths but as the forms of history and literature and this activity makes sense for further creation.

Manu embodies myth and culture. His myth and culture transfer to the public for many generations, “Manu will establish and advocate humanity through education making Takshashila as the central place. Āyurveda, Astrology and many other subjects will be taught there. Takshashila will be the place to expand humanity” (Subedi, 2022, p. 64). Through this mode, Manu continues to be relevant in contemporary society, however differently as the events and laws of Manu are not accepted as they are instructed. This transformation of humanity from ancient times as part of culture is a mode of history. This Manu history is the history of power and rereading it helps individuals draw parallels between the themes and motifs of the history/ stories to know better about current events and societal dynamics.

Manu: A Vehicle of Power

Mythical stories legitimize the authority of rulers, leaders, or institutions in the society through culture, “Myths could be used to validate otherwise inconsistent ritual practices or even conflicting political and property claims with the authority of law through divine sanction” (Dietrich, 1977, p. 66). Stories of Manu provide rules to strengthen the legitimacy of those in power. Manu tradition is the tradition of legitimization passing from one Manu to another. The myth of Manu is also a way to legitimize the authority in the mode of establishing social rules.

The laws of Manu refer to a significant Hindu mythological narrative centered around the legendary figure known as Manu “Primitive religion is the primitive counterpart to science because both are explanations of the physical world. The religious explanation is personalistic, the scientific one impersonal” (Segal, 2021, p. 11). Manu is understood as the progenitor of humanity in Hindu tradition and is associated with the concept of law and social order. There are different versions of the Manu myth found in various Hindu scriptures, with the Manusmṛiti (Laws of Manu) being a prominent text that outlines guidelines for righteous living.

Manu is not just a hero in Hindu practice; rather he is a power or the source of power. When the stories of the activities of Manu (Manu tradition) and the laws of Manu appear in the form of narrative, it carries the function of both the literary text and the history. Purāṇas narrate the stories of multiple Manus, a Manu, or first man, for each Manvantara. Manvantaras are approximately three hundred million years each, and the present one is the seventh Manvantara. The current Manu is Manu Vāivasvata. The six previous Manus were

Svayambhuva, Svarocisa, Auttami, Tamasa, Raivata, and Cakshusa. There will be seven more—Savarni, Daksasa- varni, Brahmasavarni, Dharmasavarni, Rudrasavarni, Raucya or Devasavarni, and Bhautya or Indrasavarni. (Williams, 2003, p. 210)

Manu has generated a level of cultural value among the Hindus in their lifestyle. Moreover, his actions and rules have been transformed as a source of literary creation in the later generations up to present. Many texts such as Devi Prasad Subedi's Manu have been written on the basis of the same myth and then the myth becomes literature. With its form of literature, as Brannigan says, "literary texts are vehicles of power" (Brannigan, 1998, p. 6), the myth of Manu has become a vehicle of power. Power in the creation and transformation of this myth has a complex and multifaceted aspect linking it with various historical and cultural contexts through texts, which in new historical perspective includes the history- text in history and history in text.

Texts, the way the Laws of Manu does, are the tools to both practice of power and resistance of power, "literary texts become an important focus for contemporary attempts to resist power" (p. 6). No literature, in New Historicism, can be completely isolated from the power, "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1981, p. 93). Myth "can be a part of this process of renegotiating power relations and is in that respect somewhat similar to a political movement" (Brannigan, 1998, p. 196). The myth of Manu has the picture of Vedic society on how power exercise was the central concern in both heaven and earth. The myth of Manu as a mythical narrative provides an opportunity to read the ancient society in the form of a text further encouraging multiple interpretations, "It is always possible to read a literary or cultural text for its mythic interest" (Coupe, 2009, p. 13). It provides the history of the Arya civilization beginning from Kshir Sagar (Kshir Ocean) to Devalok (heaven) and to Bharatbarsha (Earth) along with the history of the tradition of Manu, fourteen Manus beginning from Swayambhuva.

The power of Manu is not the power of a ruler or a king, "Vivaswan was not a person at the level of the ruler, nor was he a singer poet of the Arya civilization" (Subedi, 2022, p. 2) but "he had an objective to improve the society through education" (p. 2). Manu, (a chain of Manu tradition in fourteen Manus) is an image of an educational power to enhance a civilization of knowledge with different schools of thought, "his Gurukul (school) was centered to produce human resource who could work for social reformation and generate moral and spiritual consciousness" (p. 2). He has given the rules for human beings, but he respects individual freedom "The freedom of the Manu-smriti from all sectarian influence is perfect. It nowhere teaches the performance of other rites than those prescribed in the Vedic writings, and it nowhere inculcates the exclusive worship of one of the deities of the Pauranik sects as we find it recommended" (Mullar, 1886, p. lv). Manu's strategy lies in his excellent handling of his issue as a powerful way of focusing on the social civilization and culture without properly emphasizing praying to any particular god/goddess. The power lies on his primary focus on virtuous conduct, self-improvement and happiness after death.

Manu's tradition existed among the ancient Aryas starting from Swayambhuva Manu and passing the tradition from one Manu to another as "the repetition of power through different epistemés" (Hamilton, 1996, p. 162). His laws have remained as Smritis for a long

time. Sage Markandeya and his disciples incorporated those sutras into pictographs in the school of Acharya Vivaswan of Devloka and those Dharmasutras became famous as Manudharmasutra. Later Vaivaswat Manu led the work of summarizing and transcribing those Dharmasutras from pictorial script into Brahmi script for Aryavarta. The reference of Manu's best contribution to mankind is also connected with human civilization as a social civilization in the way a history does.

It is the history of Humanity to establish nonviolence and respect to human and nonhuman beings, “the main purpose of Manu was to establish humanitarianism (Manav dharma) on earth through his sons and heaven’s sages” (Subedi, 2022, p. 210) which takes a form of history. This history talks about the linear pattern of Manus. This history itself is a text, a text of civilization. Manu, in the myth, is not a king but has a power not less than a king in Heaven and Earth, “The power to represent, and hence to dominate, is what is at issue” (Brannigan, 1998, p. 149) in all practices of Manu civilization. Manu has the power to preserve and sustain the power of King Indra in heaven and Manu has the power to establish kingdoms on earth, especially in the Bharatbarsha. And, therefore, Manu is the symbol of power “we are more readily equipped to recognize the interests and stakes of power when reading culture” (p. 8) and the myth of Manu whose power is “omnipresent and omnipotent force, the new god” (p. 50). The description of Manu in the myth shows him with the qualities of a man but in a border sense he is the symbol of knowledge and power. His power, as Foucault says, appears as the productive network:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs throughout the whole social body. (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, 1980, p. 119)

Among fourteen Manus, each Manu has the power for an epoch known as Manwantar and “each period has its own specific and pervasive mode of power” (Brannigan, 1998, p. 63) and each of them tries to establish Manav Dharma on earth, “this must have been the old Manava Dharma-sutra” (Mullar, 1986, p. xxxvii) and transfer the knowledge of heaven to earth because “the ancient Manava Dharma-sutra was considered as the special property of the Manavas,” (p. xl) as a power. Manu’s purpose and nature of power remain the same but the form that it takes does not. Their attempts “are being reconstrued as historically determined and determining modes of cultural work” (Montrose, 1989, p. 15) however their works are all surrounded to establish and circulate power from one to another in chain.

Lessons of Manu focus on ending discrimination and establishing equality through behavior, “one becomes a god or a man or a monster not by any caste or cast but by the behavior” (Subedi, 2022, p. 192) as Greenblatt says it ‘improvisation’, which “is primarily the mode of behavior through which power adapts to the structures and roles of its other in order to accommodate and appropriate opposition” (Brannigan, 1998, p. 62). Improvisation is always the instrument of power, but it may not always be in the hands of repression or destruction. Lessons of Manu myth always talk about the constructive part of life, “the sacrifice (hawan) in Yagya is not the sacrifice (hawan) of any material things, animals and others,

but it must be the sacrifice of desire, jealousy, greed and anger” (Subedi, 2022, p. 192), and therefore “we should stop the tradition of sacrificing animals in Yagya and this will be the best way to maintain equality” (p.195). Manu, in the myth, is no when in the throne of the king in the heaven and earth, but as “power works through the medium of cultural forms (Brannigan, 1998, p. 69), Manu becomes a culture and he always deserves a power to settle every problem and conflicts with his holy desire to bring change through knowledge, “I would request to all sages to make the Vedic knowledge knowable and understandable to every common human being” (Subedi, 2022, p. 220), and then “all the sages of the Heaven agreed to transfer Vedic knowledge into simple form” (p. 220). Manu, in this regard is not a ruler, not a destructive or subversive symbol, but he is a creative symbol and the myth of depicting Manu as a creative symbol is itself a result of power because myth and power both appear virtually synonymous.

Manu, similar to a mythical hero, has a power to settle conflicts of social hierarchies and inequalities, who has contributed the discrimination of Devas and slaves in heaven, “Now the discrimination and slavery in heaven has been ended and my aim is to bring this message to earth and set social order without discrimination on earth” (p. 221). Myths can do nothing but produce and reproduce power as ‘Invisible Bullet’ in Greenblatt’s terms and the myth of Manu, likewise, generates the image of Manu as an invisible bullet that functions secretly to establish power for many generations as lessons of Manu (Manusmriti) are studied even today however critics find contradictions in them. Manu exists both in literature and culture “endlessly reduplicative: endlessly re-presenting” (Ryan, 1998, p. 124) as the reduplication of power.

Manu’s circular existence justifies “the restoration of cosmic order, exercising colossal martial prowess in doing so. These exploits are embedded in an intriguing frame narrative” (Balkaran, 2029, p. 01) when he developed the principles of Brahmasutra into the written form in Takshashila school (Subedi, 2022, p. iii). His stories “defined as a “traditional story” – that is, one that has been handed down for as long as anyone can remember” (Ellwood, 2008, p. 3) have highlighted the academic power Manu with somehow divinely endowed figure, “all humans are divinely endowed, whereas only very special beings can claim divinity. The same categories apply to Christianity” (Bassuk, 1987, p. 7). He steps on earth as “the first expression of a spiritual process of liberation which is effected in the progress from the magical-mythical world view to the truly religious view” (Bidney, 19069, p. 6), but he has never proposed religion as the prayer to any gods/goddesses, but the religion as the true humanity. Therefore, Manu is not a divine figure, but a figure of the far past history. His presence can’t just be ignored as a factious mythical character. He is a symbol of power and the product of power.

Therefore, Manu stories have long-rooted practices where power and culture most visibly merge. Manu is an agent in constructing power and culture in real from generation to generation as an invisible bullet. His stories survive and power also survives as the belief, as the logic in literature and as culture. The myth of Manu therefore is the vehicle of power.

Manu and Cultural Poetics

Myths are powerful tools for social control, helping to shape norms, values, and behaviors within a society in the mode of cultural poetics. Myth creates poetics in culture, the narrative structure of society. Cultural poetics is defined as the “study of the collective making of distinct cultural practices and inquiry into the relations among these practices” (Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, 1998, p. 5). Based on this theory of cultural poetics, Manu narratives are the embodiment of Manu cultural poetics with wider understanding of humanity, “Manu is the founder of rules, regulations and social system on earth” (Subedi, 2022, p. iii). Being the founder of all these systems, he stands as a power in the cultural poetics for many generations. One who is in power may use culture as a means to reinforce a particular social order, promoting unity and conformity among the population that process in another term is cultural poetics. In this sense, Manu stories have promoted Manu culture as a history and this cultural practice as a whole can be seen as a cultural poetics in New Historical perspective.

A poetics of culture looks at how or what causes culture to manifest in specific ways, “The cultural practice which the book identifies is the appropriation of symbolic power” (Brannigan, 1998, p. 87). Because poetics explores how culture materializes in particular forms. Manu narratives depict the historical events scrutinized as the ongoing exchange of meanings that influence cultural development and the mode of power, as Vaivashwat Manu opines, “Our purpose is to establish human dharma in the Bharatvarsha and ascertain civilized and cultured Arya societies through education at Takshashila” (Subedi, 2022, p. 260). Manu migrates from heaven to Bharatvarsha (earth) purposefully with a design of starting a new culture, “now the love marriage will be accepted both in the heaven and earth” (p. 260). His all decisions and activities are the result of cultural practice, “everything we do is interrelated to and within a network of practices embedded in our culture” (Bressler, 2003, p. 188), a historical demand and a predetermined cultural poetics.

Manu tradition comes along many generations in the form of a work of art, Manusmriti. The novel, Manu is a novel based on the same tradition in narration. Works of art always have something to say. They explore how that creation fits into the interconnected web of exchanges that shapes a society. Manu’s activities, his laws and the narratives on Manu have interrelatedness of all human activities, not solely the activity of any one moment of past, but they have generated a discourse, “their doctrines go back to the first progenitor of men” (Mullar, 1986, p. xxxiv). The laws imparted by Manu are the same, but their cultural interpretations do not remain the same. They go on changing because understanding and interpretation of cultures and texts differs subjectively, “all history is subjective, written by people whose personal biases affect their interpretation of the past” (Bressler, 2003, p. 181). Those in power, in any mode of history or repeatedly, use myths to propagate specific ideologies, whether religious, political, or cultural. Laws of Manu are crafted purposefully or adapted to align with the ruling ideology and reinforce its principles, “they are the stories of the first human being credited with the responsibility of preserving and protecting life” (Subedi, 2022, pp. 336-337) during the difficulties as the great flood.

Manusmriti provides the lessons attributed to Manu as the formal properties of a

cultural system. It outlines principles for righteous living, social duties, and the caste system as a culture to Hindus, “culture as a self-contained sign system and which consider any notion of reality or history as an effect of this sign system and determined entirely by representations” (Brannigan, 1998, p. 93). The rules, as the “most important record of old Hindu Society” (Dowson, 2000, p. 209) set a change in human civilization as the earliest and most influential works on Hindu law and ethics. They emphasize the importance of dharma, “the racial difference has been ended and our second purpose is to start the action of establishing and developing human-religion” (Subedi, 2022, p. 236). This activity addresses various aspects of human conduct, including family life, social interactions, and religious practices. And, therefore, the myth of Manu is the poetics of cultural value that needs a “close reading to a self-contained cultural system relies upon the change in title and nothing more” (Brannigan, 1998, p. 93). Interpretations of the Manu myth and the rules of Manu vary, and discussions around these texts often involve debates about their historical context, cultural significance, and relevance. It continues to be a source of discussion and exploration within the broader context of Hindu mythology and philosophy.

The tradition of Manu has a rich history within Hinduism, primarily associated with the legendary figure, Manu, “the history of man, as described in the Vedic texts, began with Manu” (Subedi, 2022, p. iii). His “divine descent has occurred not once but many times” (Bassuk, 1987, p. 1). And, therefore, Manu is not only a person; he is a tradition; he is a power in cultural poetics. According to the theory of cultural poetics, “History can never provide us with the truth or give us a totally accurate picture of past events nor the worldview of a group of people” (Bressler, 2003, p. 181). History is one of many discourses, or ways of seeing and thinking about the world. This can contribute to cultural hegemony, where the beliefs and values of the powerful group become widely accepted as the norm. The history of Manu has followed the same path, Subedi admits, “the main subject of the novel is how Manu ended the discrimination between Aryas and Aryetar and hoe he established humanity on earth” (p. iv). His principles have codified the varna system, outlining the duties and responsibilities of different social classes. His codes have contributed to the creation of identity at its surface level, but they have established power and has helped to exercise power.

Therefore, the history of Manu is circular and serves as part of cultural poetics among his believers. His laws used to be understood as divine lessons in the past, but they are reinterpreted as the changing doctrines as per the geo-political context.

Conclusion

The mythical figure of Manu serves as a potent vehicle of authority and the establishment of social order within Hindu tradition. Devi Prasad Subedi has depicted a similar history of Manu in his novel, and he has humanized Manu. His image of Manu is not a divine. He is a human being and he has established a social life through the education in Takshashila. His stories provide a framework for the reinforcement of power structures, however he, in the novel, is not a king or a source of a direct power. He is the source of passing down education and social systems from one generation to the next. He is not in power seemingly, but he has exercised power excessively. He has the power to appoint the kings. His significance extends beyond mere mythological tales; he embodies the concept of law and social order in Hindu

tradition. The same appears in the novel, but in a slightly different mode. Manu is a hero figure both in the myth and in the novel. He represents power and authority. He appears at the perfect position of power dynamics. He uses power- the power of knowledge, education, civilization and civic norms both in the Manu tradition and the novel, Manu. Narratives of Manu function as both literary texts and historical documents.

The novel keeps Manu at the center to examine the intricate relationship between myth, culture, and power dynamics, which reflects the concept of cultural poetics. Myths, as powerful tools for social control, shape norms, values, and behaviors within society, and embodies the narrative structure of cultural expression. In a similar way, the life stories of Manu both in the heaven and the earth depict historical events and cultural practices. They illustrate the ongoing exchange of meanings that influence cultural development and power dynamics. Manu's migration from heaven to earth, as seen in the novel, signifies the intentional establishment of a new culture, with his actions and laws reflecting predetermined cultural poetics.

Hence, Manu's character and actions as pictured in the novel, Manu, show power dynamics rooted in divine authority and social order. As the first man and a lawgiver in Hindu tradition, Manu is seen as chosen by the gods to preserve life and guide humanity. His laws, especially documented by Manu in the school of Takshashila, create a strict social order, with men holding the most power. While Manu is respected for maintaining cosmic order, his legacy is also debated for reinforcing inequality in society.

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