

Echoes of Division: Familial Rupture in Preti Taneja's *We That Are Young* (2017) as a Postcolonial Reimagining King Lear

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Abstract

Preti Taneja's We That Are Young (2017) reimagines Shakespeare's King Lear within the neoliberal corporate milieu of contemporary Mumbai, transforming sovereign division into a struggle over capitalist inheritance. This paper argues that Taneja's novel should be read as a postcolonial family tragedy that relocates Lear's themes of authority, love, and blindness into the affective economies of late capitalism. By situating Devraj Bapuji's corporate empire within postcolonial histories of patriarchy, linguistic mimicry, and neoliberal aspiration, the novel humanizes Shakespeare's archetypal daughters as psychologically complex subjects shaped by gendered exclusion and intergenerational trauma. Drawing upon postcolonial adaptation theory, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, Bharata Muni's rasa aesthetics, and Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economies, the paper demonstrates how familial fracture in We That Are Young is not a moral aberration but a structural consequence of corporate capitalism. The study further examines Hinglish as a linguistic strategy that exposes class hierarchies and cultural negotiation, particularly through the figure of Jivan, whose vernacular wisdom destabilizes elite corporate rationality. Ultimately, the paper contends that Taneja's adaptation reconfigures King Lear for the Global South by foregrounding the family as the primary site where postcolonial power, gender, and emotion intersect.

Keywords: Postcolonial adaptation, familial capitalism, King Lear, Hinglish hybridity, rasa theory, Indian English fiction, neoliberal patriarchy

Introduction: From Elizabethan Sovereignty to Corporate Patriarchy:

Shakespeare's *King Lear* has endured as one of the most frequently adapted tragedies because of its fundamental engagement with power, inheritance, and familial loyalty. At its core, the play stages the catastrophic consequences of conflating political authority with emotional obligation. In *We That Are Young*, Preti Taneja transposes this tragic structure into the world of twenty-first-century Mumbai, where monarchical sovereignty is replaced by corporate capitalism and paternal authority operates through boardroom control rather than royal decree.

Devraj Bapuji, a self-made hotel magnate, embodies the postcolonial patriarch whose legitimacy derives from economic success and entrepreneurial mythology. His demand that his daughters publicly declare their love in order to secure inheritance converts Shakespeare's love test into a neoliberal ritual of valuation (Taneja 42). Love becomes measurable, transactional, and competitive, mirroring the logic of corporate capitalism in which emotional bonds are subordinated to economic worth.

This transformation marks a crucial shift in the tragic paradigm. Whereas Shakespeare's *Lear* dramatizes the collapse of feudal sovereignty, Taneja's novel exposes the erosion of familial intimacy under neoliberal patriarchy. The family, rather than the state, becomes the primary site of tragedy. As a result, *We That Are Young* resists being read merely as a contemporary retelling of *King Lear*; it emerges instead as a postcolonial family tragedy that interrogates the emotional costs of inheritance, ambition, and obedience in late-capitalist India.

Postcolonial Shakespeare studies have extensively documented global adaptations of *King Lear*, particularly in theatrical and cinematic forms. Scholars such as Ania Loomba and Poonam Trivedi have demonstrated how Shakespeare's tragedies acquire renewed political significance when refracted through colonial and postcolonial histories (Loomba; Trivedi). These studies, however, often privilege performance, spectacle, and translation, leaving prose adaptations under-theorized. Moreover, critical discourse surrounding *King Lear* has historically framed Goneril and Regan as embodiments of moral corruption, while Cordelia is elevated as a figure of ethical purity. Such readings obscure the structural forces that shape filial conflict. Taneja's novel intervenes decisively in this tradition by granting interiority to the daughters and reframing their actions as responses to patriarchal neglect, gendered exclusion, and capitalist competition.

This paper addresses two significant gaps in existing scholarship. First, it foregrounds the novel as a literary form capable of sustained psychological and affective exploration, challenging the theatre-centric bias of postcolonial Shakespeare studies. Second, it reconceptualizes familial fracture not as individual moral failure but as a structural outcome of postcolonial capitalism and neoliberal inheritance.

Postcolonial Adaptation as Cultural Rewriting:

Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as a process of reinterpretation shaped by historical context and ideological positioning rather than a derivative act of imitation (Hutcheon). From this perspective, *We That Are Young* functions as a dialogic rewriting of *King Lear*, engaging the Shakespearean text while simultaneously displacing its feudal logic with corporate rationality.

This approach aligns with the postcolonial concept of "writing back" articulated by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, wherein canonical texts are reconfigured to accommodate indigenous histories and contemporary realities. Taneja's novel writes back to Shakespeare by embedding Lear's tragic structure within the lived conditions of postcolonial India, where economic liberalization and global capital have reshaped family, class, and authority.

Hybridity and the Third Space:

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "third space" provides a crucial lens for understanding the cultural negotiations in *We That Are Young*. Bhabha argues that colonial authority is destabilized through mimicry, which produces subjects that are "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 86). Devraj's insistence on English fluency, corporate decorum, and global legitimacy exemplifies this mimetic aspiration.

However, the novel repeatedly exposes the fragility of such mimicry. Linguistic slippages into Hinglish and vernacular speech reveal the instability of elite authority and foreground the persistence of local knowledge systems. The corporate boardroom thus becomes a third space where colonial legacies and indigenous realities intersect.

Affective Economies and Emotional Circulation:

Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economies conceptualizes emotions as forces that circulate between bodies and institutions, accruing value through repetition rather than residing within individuals (Ahmed 11). This framework is particularly useful for analyzing how love, resentment, ambition, and grief circulate within Devraj's family.

In *We That Are Young*, emotions are repeatedly translated into economic terms. Love is demanded as proof, resentment accumulates through neglect, and ambition emerges as a survival mechanism. Ahmed's framework allows the novel's emotional landscape to be read as an economy shaped by patriarchal power and capitalist logic.

Corporate Capitalism and the Reconfiguration of Authority:

Devraj Bapuji's corporate empire replaces Lear's kingdom, yet the logic of authority remains deeply personal. His declaration "Who loves Papa most?" is not merely rhetorical but performative, demanding public affirmation as a condition of inheritance (Taneja 44). This demand exemplifies the fusion of emotional obligation and economic power characteristic of neoliberal patriarchy.

Unlike feudal sovereignty, corporate authority depends on perpetual performance. Devraj's identity as a self-made patriarch is sustained through narratives of sacrifice, discipline, and success. However, this mythology collapses when confronted with daughters who refuse to perform affection on command. The tragedy of *We That Are Young* thus emerges not from political rebellion but from emotional misrecognition. Devraj's blindness is affective rather than literal, rooted in his inability to perceive love outside transactional affirmation.

Gargi: Ambition, Neglect, and Emotional Injury:

Gargi, the eldest daughter, is positioned as the apparent corporate successor to Devraj Bapuji, yet her proximity to power never translates into unquestioned authority. Despite her competence, discipline, and intimate knowledge of the family business, Gargi's legitimacy remains perpetually provisional, contingent upon her willingness to perform obedience and emotional alignment with paternal authority. Unlike Shakespeare's Goneril, who has traditionally been read as innately cruel and power-hungry, Gargi is not marked by moral excess but by emotional restraint a disposition forged through years of paternal neglect and conditional recognition.

Sara Ahmed terms the “accumulation of affective residue,” whereby emotions such as resentment, vigilance, and guardedness are produced through repeated experiences of being overlooked, doubted, or measured against patriarchal norms (Ahmed). Gargi’s emotional reserve, therefore, is not evidence of coldness but a learned strategy of self-protection within a familial and corporate structure that rewards compliance over competence.

Gender plays a decisive role in this dynamic. As a woman occupying a leadership role in a corporate empire built on masculine narratives of risk, dominance, and control, Gargi is subject to heightened scrutiny (169-70). Her assertiveness is frequently read as aggression, while her restraint is interpreted as emotional deficiency. This double bind mirrors feminist critiques of neoliberal workplaces, where women leaders are expected to perform authority without appearing authoritative and ambition without appearing ambitious. Gargi’s failure, then, is not personal but structural: she cannot embody power without violating the gendered codes that define acceptable femininity.

Moreover, Gargi’s relationship with her father is marked by emotional asymmetry. Devraj’s authority operates through extraction rather than reciprocity; affection is demanded as proof of loyalty but rarely offered as care. Gargi learns early that love must be earned through performance, yet her performances are never sufficient. This persistent denial produces what can be understood as emotional injury a wound that manifests not in overt rebellion but in strategic detachment. Her ambition becomes less about domination than about securing recognition within a system that withholds it.

From the perspective of affective economies, Gargi’s pursuit of power is an attempt to stabilize value in an unstable emotional market. If love is unreliable and recognition conditional, authority appears to offer a substitute form of security. However, this substitution is ultimately illusory. The corporate structures that promise empowerment simultaneously reproduce patriarchal hierarchies that undermine her legitimacy. Gargi’s tragedy lies precisely in this contradiction: she internalizes the logic of the system that injures her, believing that authority will compensate for emotional deprivation.

In reframing *Goneril* through Gargi, Taneja dismantles the moral binaries that have long governed readings of *King Lear*. Gargi is neither villain nor victim in any simplistic sense; she is a subject produced by neoliberal patriarchy, whose ambition is inseparable from injury. Her emotional detachment is not the cause of familial fracture but one of its most legible symptoms. By foregrounding Gargi’s interiority, *We That Are Young* transforms filial conflict into a critique of gendered power, revealing how ambition itself becomes a mode of survival in a world where love is conditional and authority is never fully granted.

Radha: Excess, Dissociation, and Affective Breakdown:

Radha, the middle daughter, occupies the most volatile emotional terrain in *We That Are Young*. In traditional Shakespearean criticism, Regan is frequently reduced to a figure of impulsive cruelty whose violence appears unmotivated and morally aberrant. Taneja decisively resists this reductive framing by reimagining Radha not as a sadist but as a subject of affective excess someone whose actions are driven by emotional overload rather than deliberate malice (236). Her volatility is marked by oscillations between indulgence, recklessness, and violence, revealing a psyche unable to regulate or symbolize affect within a familial system structured by neglect, rivalry, and conditional love.

Radha's excess functions as a mode of dissociation rather than transgression. Rather than deriving pleasure from cruelty, she appears overwhelmed by sensations she cannot contain or interpret. This inability to modulate affect suggests a fractured emotional economy in which grief, jealousy, and abandonment circulate without resolution. In contrast to Gargi's disciplined emotional restraint, Radha's responses spill outward, transforming internal chaos into spectacle (233). The novel thus presents the sisters not as moral opposites but as differentiated responses to the same patriarchal injury one through containment, the other through excess.

Trauma theory provides a crucial lens for understanding Radha's behavior. Cathy Caruth emphasizes that trauma is not fully assimilated into consciousness and therefore resists direct narration, returning instead through repetition, reenactment, and emotional dislocation (Caruth). Radha's volatility exemplifies this traumatic logic. Her actions do not move toward resolution or mastery; they repeat compulsively, suggesting that the original wound paternal favoritism, emotional neglect, and perpetual comparison remains unacknowledged and therefore unprocessed. Violence, in this context, is not expressive but symptomatic, marking the failure of language and recognition.

Radha's relationship with Devraj Bapuji further intensifies this dynamic. While she is alternately indulged and dismissed, she is never truly recognized as an autonomous subject. This oscillation between visibility and erasure produces a state of affective instability in which validation is unpredictable and fleeting. Deprived of stable recognition, Radha seeks intensity as a substitute for intimacy. Excess whether emotional, material, or physical becomes a means of feeling something in a relational environment that has otherwise rendered her affectively invisible. Within the framework of Bharata Muni's rasa theory, Radha's trajectory evokes *karuṇa rasa* rather than *raudra* (anger). Although her actions are often violent or destructive, the dominant emotional response elicited in the reader is not outrage but compassion. The narrative positions Radha's suffering as relational and inherited rather than individually chosen, inviting an affective engagement grounded in shared sorrow. Tragedy here does not purify through moral judgment but deepens through empathetic recognition, aligning the novel with an indigenous aesthetic tradition that privileges emotional communion over ethical absolutism. Taneja's reconfiguration of Regan through Radha thus performs a significant postcolonial intervention. By situating excess within the context of patriarchal capitalism, the novel reframes cruelty as the outcome of affective collapse rather than innate monstrosity.

Radha becomes a figure through whom the violence of neoliberal inheritance is made visible—an embodiment of what happens when emotional needs are subordinated to performance, competition, and paternal approval. Her breakdown is not an aberration but an exposure of the system's failure to sustain relational life.

In transforming Regan's cruelty into Radha's mournful excess, *We That Are Young* dismantles the moral economy of Shakespearean tragedy and replaces it with an affective one. Radha's story insists that violence must be read not only as an ethical problem but as a symptom of unresolved trauma embedded within structures of power, gender, and inheritance. Tragedy, in this reimagining, emerges not from evil intent but from the catastrophic consequences of emotional abandonment under patriarchal capitalism.

Sita: Silence, Refusal, and Postcolonial Resistance:

Sita, the youngest daughter in *We That Are Young*, most overtly recalls Shakespeare's Cordelia, yet Taneja radically reconfigures this figure by translating filial refusal into a form of postcolonial political ethics. While Cordelia's silence in *King Lear* has often been read as moral integrity or tragic sincerity, Sita's refusal to perform love operates within a contemporary context shaped by legal rationality, public accountability, and political consciousness (475-76). When Sita declares that she loves her father 'no more and no less than what the law requires,' she rejects not love itself but its commodification and public staging. Her statement dismantles the emotional economy of neoliberal patriarchy by refusing to convert affection into currency.

In this context, silence functions not as emotional lack but as ethical resistance. Sita's refusal interrupts Devraj Bapuji's demand for affective spectacle, exposing the violence inherent in his insistence on performative loyalty. Unlike her sisters, who negotiate or implode under patriarchal pressure, Sita withdraws from the evaluative framework altogether. Her silence marks a refusal to be measured, ranked, or rewarded within an inheritance system that equates obedience with worth. This withdrawal transforms silence into a deliberate political gesture rather than a passive absence. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal question "Can the subaltern speak?" provides a critical lens through which Sita's trajectory can be read. At first glance, Sita's silence appears to reproduce subaltern voicelessness, reinforcing the impression that ethical refusal remains unintelligible within patriarchal authority (Spivak). However, Taneja complicates this reading by refusing to allow silence to remain static. Sita's ethical stance evolves from individual refusal into collective articulation as she moves beyond the family and into the public sphere. In doing so, the novel challenges the assumption that speech must be immediately legible to power in order to be meaningful.

Sita's later involvement in anti-corruption movements and public protest marks a decisive shift from private dissent to political engagement. By aligning her with grassroots activism, Taneja situates Sita within a collective struggle against systemic injustice rather than familial grievance alone. This alignment reorients Cordelia's tragic destiny: instead of dying for paternal love, Sita survives by redirecting her ethical commitment toward the public good. Her disappearance from the family is not a defeat but a strategic refusal of neoliberal inheritance, which she recognizes as inseparable from emotional exploitation and patriarchal control.

This transformation has significant implications for how tragedy itself is reimagined. Shakespeare's Cordelia embodies an ethics of loyalty that culminates in martyrdom, reinforcing the tragic ideal of moral purity achieved through sacrifice. Sita, by contrast, embodies an ethics of survival. Her refusal to reconcile, forgive, or return resists narrative closure, unsettling the expectation that tragedy must end in death or redemption. Instead, Taneja leaves Sita suspended within ongoing political struggle, suggesting that ethical agency in the postcolonial present lies not in filial obedience but in sustained resistance.

From a feminist postcolonial perspective, Sita's trajectory articulates an alternative mode of agency grounded in withdrawal, collectivity, and refusal. Rather than seeking recognition from patriarchal authority, she rejects its terms entirely. This rejection resonates with contemporary feminist theories of refusal, which view disengagement from oppressive structures as a legitimate political act rather than a failure of participation. Sita's silence, therefore, is not an absence of voice but a reorientation of address—from the father to the public, from the family to the polis.

In reimagining Cordelia through Sita, *We That Are Young* performs one of its most radical adaptations. It replaces sacrificial virtue with political consciousness, obedience with refusal, and tragic death with ethical persistence. Sita emerges as a postcolonial Cordelia whose resistance lies not in saying "nothing" but in choosing where, how, and for whom to speak. Her story insists that in a neoliberal world where love is commodified and loyalty demanded, silence can become the most articulate form of dissent.

Jivan and the Politics of Hinglish: The Fool Reimagined:

One of Preti Taneja's most innovative departures from Shakespeare's *King Lear* lies in her reconfiguration of the Fool through the character of Jivan. In Shakespeare, the Fool occupies a paradoxical position: licensed to speak truth precisely because he is marked as marginal, comic, and expendable. Taneja transposes this function into the neoliberal and postcolonial present by situating Jivan not as a professional entertainer but as a domestic worker whose proximity to elite power affords him insight without institutional authority. This shift from court jester to household laborer is significant, as it grounds truth-telling not in wit sanctioned by sovereignty but in lived class experience shaped by precarity.

Jivan's liminal status within Devraj Bapuji's household mirrors the structural invisibility of domestic labor in contemporary India. He moves freely through corporate spaces—boardrooms, penthouses, private family rituals—yet remains excluded from decision-making processes that determine the family's fate. This proximity without power allows Jivan to observe the affective contradictions of neoliberal patriarchy with clarity unavailable to those invested in its performance. Like Shakespeare's Fool, he perceives the absurdity of authority, but unlike his Elizabethan predecessor, his insight emerges from economic vulnerability rather than performative license. Language is central to Jivan's function as a postcolonial Fool. His speech is marked by Hinglish, code-switching between English corporate vocabulary and Hindi vernacular idiom. This linguistic hybridity destabilizes the dominance of corporate English, which in the novel functions as a marker of legitimacy, professionalism, and global belonging.

Devraj's insistence on English fluency reflects what Homi K. Bhabha identifies as colonial mimicry—a desire to approximate metropolitan authority through linguistic performance while never fully escaping its conditionality (Bhabha). Jivan's Hinglish disrupts this performance by exposing the fragility of linguistic hierarchy.

Bhabha's concept of the "third space" is particularly illuminating in this context. The third space emerges where cultures meet, overlap, and negotiate meaning rather than reproduce fixed identities (Bhabha). Jivan's language inhabits this interstitial zone. It neither fully assimilates into elite English nor retreats into linguistic purism. Instead, it operates as a site of negotiation, irony, and resistance. By refusing to speak in a single, "proper" register, Jivan undermines the authority of corporate discourse that relies on linguistic standardization to maintain control.

This linguistic strategy has political implications. Corporate English in *We That Are Young* functions as a tool of abstraction, transforming relationships into contracts and emotions into metrics. Jivan's Hinglish resists this abstraction by reintroducing affect, embodiment, and relationality into speech. His observation that "shares do not hug back" condenses a complex critique of neoliberal inheritance into a vernacular aphorism that exposes the emotional impoverishment underlying capitalist rationality (167). The statement foregrounds the disjunction between economic accumulation and human intimacy, a gap that Devraj's corporate worldview persistently fails to acknowledge.

Through such moments, Taneja restores the Fool's traditional function as truth-teller while reconfiguring the source of that truth. Shakespeare's Fool relies on irony, song, and riddles; Jivan relies on lived experience, vernacular wisdom, and observational clarity. His insights are not couched in theatrical performance but emerge organically from his position within the domestic economy. This grounding in class experience marks a crucial shift in the politics of adaptation, aligning truth-telling with subaltern knowledge rather than sanctioned dissent.

Furthermore, Jivan's presence complicates the affective economy of the novel. While Devraj demands love as performance and his daughters negotiate affection as inheritance, Jivan articulates an alternative value system grounded in care, continuity, and emotional reciprocity. His speech consistently gestures toward forms of relationality that lie outside capitalist exchange, revealing the moral limits of corporate authority. In this sense, Jivan functions as an ethical counterpoint to neoliberal patriarchy, exposing its inability to sustain meaningful human bonds.

Jivan's marginality also allows him to witness the gradual disintegration of the family without the illusion of control. Unlike the daughters, whose actions are constrained by competition and recognition, Jivan observes without investment in inheritance or power. This observational distance enhances his diagnostic role within the narrative. He sees what the powerful cannot: that authority without empathy collapses into isolation, and wealth without relational care produces emotional desolation. In reimagining the Fool through Jivan, *We That Are Young* articulates a distinctly postcolonial critique of power, language, and class. Taneja demonstrates that in a neoliberal context, truth no longer emerges from sanctioned wit but from the margins of economic and linguistic privilege. Jivan's Hinglish becomes a mode of resistance that unsettles corporate authority, disrupts colonial mimicry, and restores affect to a system that seeks to erase it.

Ultimately, Jivan embodies the ethical conscience of the novel not because he stands outside the system, but because he moves through it without being seduced by its promises. His language, his observations, and his marginal position collectively reassert the Fool's enduring relevance while transforming it for the Global South. Through Jivan, Taneja suggests that in postcolonial capitalist societies, the sharpest truths are spoken not from thrones or boardrooms, but from the interstitial spaces where power is seen most clearly because it is never possessed.

Affective Economies and Familial Capitalism:

Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economies provides a crucial framework for understanding how emotions circulate within Devraj's family. Emotions in *We That Are Young* do not remain private; they move between bodies, institutions, and economic structures, accruing meaning through repetition (Ahmed 11). Devraj's demand for love initiates an affective economy in which affection is converted into currency. Resentment accumulates through neglect, ambition hardens into armor, and grief circulates without resolution. The novel demonstrates that under neoliberal patriarchy, emotions are not merely expressed but commodified. This affective circulation explains why reconciliation remains impossible. Emotional damage is structural rather than incidental, embedded within inheritance mechanisms that reward performance and punish refusal. The tragedy, therefore, is not the collapse of authority alone but the impossibility of affective repair within capitalist frameworks.

Nature, Monsoon, and Postcolonial Tragic Space:

Shakespeare's storm scene in *King Lear* externalizes internal chaos through cosmic disorder. Taneja translates this metaphor into the monsoon-drenched landscape of Mumbai, replacing metaphysical tempest with environmental and infrastructural breakdown. Flooded streets, collapsing transport systems, and relentless rain mirror the disintegration of familial bonds. This transformation situates tragedy within material reality rather than cosmic abstraction. The monsoon becomes an equalizing force that disrupts class boundaries and exposes the fragility of corporate power. Eco critically, the novel aligns environmental crisis with moral collapse, suggesting that neoliberal excess produces both social and ecological devastation. Within *rasa* theory, the monsoon intensifies *karuṇa rasa*, allowing sorrow to be experienced collectively rather than individually. The city itself becomes a participant in tragedy, absorbing and reflecting the emotional turbulence of its inhabitants.

Postcolonial Patriarchy and the Failure of Recognition:

Devraj's ultimate failure is not loss of power but loss of recognition. Like Lear, he cannot distinguish between performance and sincerity, obedience and love. However, Taneja situates this blindness within postcolonial patriarchy, where authority is sustained through emotional extraction rather than mutual recognition. Bhabha's notion of mimicry is again relevant here. Devraj's adherence to English corporate norms reflects a colonial inheritance that equates authority with performance. Yet this mimicry collapses when confronted with daughters who refuse affective submission. His tragedy lies in the inability to inhabit relational authority outside capitalist valuation.

Neoliberal Inheritance and the Crisis of Filial Ethics:

One of the most profound shifts enacted by *We That Are Young* lies in its reconceptualization of inheritance. In *King Lear*, inheritance is tied to land, lineage, and political sovereignty. Although emotionally charged, it remains anchored within a feudal moral economy where authority is legitimized by divine right and patriarchal continuity. Taneja, however, situates inheritance within neoliberal capitalism, where value is speculative, competitive, and governed by market logic rather than ethical obligation.

Devraj Bapuji's empire is not inherited by divine sanction or ancestral right but produced through entrepreneurial risk, privatization, and global capital flows. This shift fundamentally alters the ethical structure of filial relations. In a neoliberal framework, inheritance becomes conditional, contractual, and revocable. The daughters' access to power is mediated through performance metrics loyalty, obedience, affective display—rather than kinship alone. This transformation exposes what Wendy Brown describes as the economization of all spheres of life under neoliberal rationality, where human relations are recoded in terms of investment, return, and competition. Within this framework, filial love is no longer unconditional but evaluated according to its utility. Devraj's insistence on public declarations of love exemplifies this logic: affection must be visible, quantifiable, and competitive to possess value.

Consequently, the ethical rupture within the family cannot be resolved through reconciliation or repentance. The tragedy emerges not because the daughters fail their father morally, but because neoliberal inheritance erodes the very conditions under which ethical recognition is possible. Love, once commodified, loses its reparative capacity.

Gender, Patriarchy, and the Corporate Glass Ceiling:

While *King Lear* dramatizes patriarchal authority, *We That Are Young* exposes its specifically gendered operation under neoliberal capitalism. Devraj's daughters inherit not only wealth but also systemic exclusion embedded within corporate patriarchy. Despite their proximity to power, Gargi and Radha remain subject to constant surveillance, doubt, and emotional manipulation. Gargi's struggle to assert authority within the corporate hierarchy mirrors what feminist theorists describe as the "double bind" faced by women leaders: assertiveness is read as aggression, while emotional restraint is interpreted as coldness. Taneja's narrative repeatedly foregrounds this bind, illustrating how Gargi's ambition is framed as moral deficiency rather than professional competence.

Radha, by contrast, internalizes patriarchal violence through self-destructive excess. Her sexuality, consumption, and volatility become sites where gendered expectations collapse into spectacle. Rather than reading Radha as morally excessive, the novel positions her as a casualty of patriarchal affective deprivation a subject denied recognition except through transgression. Sita's withdrawal from corporate inheritance represents a third response to gendered patriarchy: refusal. Her rejection of both corporate authority and filial obligation articulates a feminist ethics of disengagement. Rather than competing within patriarchal structures, she exits them entirely, aligning herself with public activism and collective resistance.

Together, the sisters embody differentiated responses to gendered exclusion under neoliberal patriarchy: negotiation (Gargi), implosion (Radha), and refusal (Sita). This triadic structure transforms Shakespeare's moral hierarchy into a feminist critique of systemic inequality.

Trauma, Memory, and Intergenerational Transmission:

The novel's tragic force is intensified through its attention to intergenerational trauma. Devraj's authoritarianism is not portrayed as innate cruelty but as a legacy shaped by postcolonial insecurity, economic precarity, and masculine survivalism. His emotional withholding reflects a learned mode of patriarchal endurance, transmitted across generations. Trauma theorists emphasize that unacknowledged trauma is often passed down relationally rather than narratively. In *We That Are Young*, this transmission occurs through silence, favouritism, and emotional absence. The daughters inherit not only wealth but also unresolved psychic wounds that structure their responses to power and love.

Radha's compulsive repetition, Gargi's emotional armor, and Sita's withdrawal all reflect different modes of traumatic inheritance. None of these responses resolve the trauma; instead, they reproduce it in altered forms. The family thus becomes a site of recursive injury rather than healing. This framework reframes Lear's "madness" as intergenerational breakdown rather than individual collapse. Devraj's eventual isolation mirrors the affective void he has cultivated, suggesting that trauma, when denied recognition, culminates in relational extinction rather than redemption.

Mumbai as a Postcolonial Tragic Metropolis:

Taneja's Mumbai is not merely a backdrop but an active participant in the novel's tragic economy. Unlike Shakespeare's abstracted Britain, Mumbai is rendered as a hyper-capitalist, postcolonial metropolis marked by stark inequality, infrastructural fragility, and relentless aspiration. The city's spatial division's luxury hotels, slums, corporate towers, flooded streets—mirror the novel's emotional and ethical fractures. Corporate spaces prioritize visibility, surveillance, and performance, while informal spaces allow for relational intimacy and vernacular wisdom. Jivan's mobility across these spaces enables him to perceive truths inaccessible to elite characters confined within corporate enclaves.

The monsoon intensifies this spatial critique by collapsing boundaries between privilege and precarity. Flooded roads disrupt corporate schedules, undermine logistical control, and expose the limits of capital's mastery over nature. Tragedy thus unfolds not in isolation but within a collective urban experience shaped by environmental vulnerability. From a postcolonial perspective, Mumbai emerges as a city haunted by colonial infrastructures repurposed for neoliberal accumulation. The novel suggests that corporate modernity does not transcend colonial history but reconfigures it, producing new forms of exclusion and affective violence.

Ethical Failure without Moral Villains:

One of the novel's most radical achievements is its refusal to assign moral villainy. Unlike Shakespeare's play, which invites condemnation of Goneril and Regan, *We That Are Young* withholds moral absolutism. Each character is implicated within systems that exceed individual agency.

Devraj's authoritarianism is inseparable from neoliberal masculinity; Gargi's ambition emerges from exclusion; Radha's violence reflects affective collapse; Sita's withdrawal exposes ethical exhaustion. Tragedy arises not from evil intent but from structural misalignment between emotional needs and economic systems. This ethical ambiguity aligns with contemporary postcolonial criticism that resists moral binaries in favour of systemic analysis. By foregrounding causality over culpability, Taneja redefines tragedy as a condition produced by history, capital, and affect rather than personal failure.

Conclusion:

We That Are Young should be read not merely as a contemporary adaptation of *King Lear* but as a postcolonial family tragedy that exposes the emotional costs of neoliberal capitalism. By relocating sovereign division into corporate inheritance, Taneja demonstrates how postcolonial power operates most violently within the intimate space of the family. Through the interiorization of Shakespeare's daughters, the novel dismantles moral binaries and foregrounds structural causality. Gargi's ambition, Radha's excess, and Sita's refusal emerge not as ethical failures but as responses to patriarchal neglect and capitalist valuation. Jivan's vernacular wisdom further destabilizes elite authority, revealing the affective impoverishment of corporate rationality.

Ultimately, Taneja's novel reimagines tragedy as an affective economy shaped by history, gender, and class. Familial fracture becomes the site where colonial legacies and neoliberal futures collide, producing a tragedy that is deeply personal, structurally political, and distinctly postcolonial. Future scholar may extend this analysis through comparative studies of South Asian *Lear* adaptations, Dalit and queer rewritings, or digital narratives of corporate power. Such work would further establish *We That Are Young* as a paradigmatic text for understanding the transformation of Shakespearean tragedy within global capitalism.

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