



Art, Society, and the Politics of Aesthetic Freedom in M. K. Binodini's *Crimson Rainclouds*

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Received: 02/05/2026	Abstract
Accepted: 15/06/2026	<i>The purpose of this paper is to analyse how, in her drama <i>Crimson Rainclouds</i> (Asangba Nongjabi), M. K. Binodini reinterprets the meaning of artistic freedom within the context of social, cultural, and ideological restrictions. The paper is based on various theories proposed by Theodor W. Adorno, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Rancière, Henri Lefebvre, and Raymond Williams to examine the interplay of aesthetic independence, social hierarchy, and culture in the play. It also argues that Gautam's struggle against material gains and authority represents a critique of the forces influencing artistic performance, while the experiences of Indu and Keinatombi show the connection between gender and the negotiation of expectations in society. By comparing Western aesthetic and cultural theories with a significant work of modern Manipuri drama, this paper sheds light on significant aspects of Binodini's literary vision. It contributes to Manipuri literary studies by presenting the idea of art as a form of resistance against dominant values and an exploration of the possible ways to achieve human freedom.</i>
Keywords: M. K. Binodini; <i>Crimson Rainclouds</i> ; aesthetic autonomy; cultural resistance;	

1. Introduction

Maharaj Kumari Binodini Devi (1922–2011) was one of the prominent literary figures in contemporary Manipur and the Northeast India region. Even though she was born to a royal family in Manipur, her writings demonstrate her great sympathies towards the common people and her understanding of the emotional dilemmas that face them during a time of social and cultural transition (Roy, n.d., p. 59). Her collection of short stories, *Nunggairakta Chandramukhi* (*Chrysanthemum amidst Pebbles*, 1965) is considered the beginning of modern Manipuri literature and the initiation of the “floodgates” for this genre (Singh, 2013, p. 101).

Binodini's writings are characterized by psychologically complex characters, particularly the female characters who question social norms and seek to balance tradition and modernity (Roy, n.d., pp. 57–60). In addition to her literary contributions, Binodini also contributed to Manipuri cinema as a scriptwriter, working with director Aribam Syam Sharma. Her literary works and activism in culture, along with her passion for saving the environment, made her a prominent figure in the literature and culture of Northeast India (Roy, n.d., p. 60).

One of the important works by Binodini is *Crimson Rainclouds*, written as Asangba Nongjabi in Manipuri in 1967 and translated into English by her younger son, L. Somi Roy, in 2012. The play depicts the complications of the connection between artistic freedom, social norms, and a person's necessity to experience reality immediately. The play consists of five acts and was first performed on 20th February 1966 at Rupmahal Theatre by the troupe Roop

Raag, directed by Aribam Syam Sharma and with the music composed by N. Pahari. The most recognized actors were Rabindra Sharma for the role of Gautam, Yengkhom Roma for Indu, and Medhabati playing Keinatombi.

2. Beyond Utility

Having explained Binodini's literary ideology and theory, we now analyze Gautam's disavowal of material success. The opening sections are set up in such a way that the center of conflict is revealed, whereby art does not listen to the call of usefulness and economic transaction. The tension created by this confrontation is precisely what allows us to grasp how Gautam has understood the meaning of artistic independence.

Crimson Rainclouds is an intense drama that allows an artist who is continually tempted by the materialistic aspects of life to reflect on the importance of his artistry in a society where there is an emphasis on functionality over aesthetics. With Gautam, a painter, as the focal point, Binodini (2012) explores the struggle between his desire for aesthetic freedom and the expectations of society for him to have financial security. Gautam's struggle to attain "absolute freedom" (p. 25) serves as a critique of a society that has placed importance on what Pierre Bourdieu (1984) calls "the tastes of necessity" (p. 56). Gautam's artwork exemplifies the two artistic philosophies of Theodor W. Adorno (1997) and Jacques Rancière (2013) while also being a "social antithesis of society" (Adorno, 1997, p. 10) through the challenge of the existing "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière, 2013, p. 4).

In the opening scene of *Crimson Rainclouds*, Gautam is shown in an empty, disordered space, which indicates that he is disconnected from the "bourgeois experience of the world" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 54). The barrenness of his physical surroundings, combined with the many unfinished canvases present in his space, emphasizes Gautam's choice to focus on producing works of art as opposed to amassing wealth. Through the choice of this physical space, Gautam deliberately rejects the social norms associated with achieving financial success. Conflict surrounding artistic independence versus societal expectation arises when Indu suggests that he should attend a job interview at an art school—a job that "won't get in the way of your painting" (Binodini, 2012, p. 22)—but Gautam believes that being employed by an institution will limit his creative freedoms, and he thereby rejects the idea of pursuing an economically secure life, citing examples of other accomplished artists who lived a life of poverty: "Vincent van Gogh" couldn't even buy paint brushes when he died, nor could "Mozart" when he died (p. 22). His reply demonstrates an awareness of the artistic vocation that goes beyond any material aspects. In this way, Gautam's viewpoint agrees with Adorno's idea that the artistic "history of art" (Adorno, 1997, p. 8) is the "mimetically written history of human suffering" (p. iv). He shows this alignment by identifying himself as an artist who has lived a life of poverty and one that is grounded in sacrifice and struggle against the social order of capitalism. Furthermore, Gautam's unwillingness to compromise with regard to professional or commercial pressures is based on the idea that true artistic expression can only be maintained in opposition to the "social function" (p. 1) created by a capitalistic and dehumanising society.

By rejecting the job market, Gautam is rejecting Bourdieu's (1984) conception of the "popular aesthetic" (p. 4) as privileging utility through the subordination of "form to function" (p. 4), and this becomes apparent through the visit of a Middle-Aged Man who visits Gautam's studio to obtain a copy of a photograph of his sister who passed away, and requests to have a "nice beauty spot" (Binodini, 2012, p. 27) included on the photograph, because, even though there is no beauty spot on his sister in the original photo, it will be "trendy" (p. 27). In his opinion, the artwork he is requesting will serve as a tool to remember his sister and provide him with "social importance" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 44); Bourdieu has argued that this is an example of "barbarous taste" (p. 44) because it lacks a "disinterested" (p. 250) perspective. The discomfort that Gautam has with these external interventions demonstrates that he has an allegiance to the "immanent law" of art (Adorno, 1997, p. 9), resisting the demands of external instruments. Adorno (1997) observes, "Art is autonomous and it is not" (p. 8), meaning that

even though art is a “fait social” (p. 8), it is dependent upon “stepping outside of the constraining” charms of empirical reality (p. 7).

Autonomy is also at the political level through Rancière's (2013) theory of the “politics of aesthetics” (p. 65). Rancière describes that political action as a “distribution of the sensible” (p. 67), that defines who is assigned “time” (p. 50) to participate publicly and who is restricted to “the private space-time of his occupation” (p. 50). Using this structure, Gautam can be classified as a “mimetician” (p. 50) and “double being” (p. 50) because he resists the social system by rejecting his assigned role. In addition, Gautam has expanded upon the original meaning of mimetic art by choosing to pursue painting instead of a “socially useful” (p. 13) career, thus disrupting the “police order” (p. 13) that rigidly defines people's productive legitimacy. Furthermore, the assertion of Gautam's “absolute freedom” (Binodini, 2012, p. 25) corresponds to the “ruse of art's own reason” (Adorno, 1997, p. 7), allowing for a symbolic gesture of transcendence, or “soaring” (p. 7), beyond the confines of a society trying to restrain him. In this context, Gautam expresses, “I have no ties to bind” (Binodini, 2012, p. 25).

Indu's uncle, along with Indu herself, is related to the idea of the social forces that seek to regulate artistic and personal autonomy. The uncle's attitude about Gautam relates to Bourdieu's (1993) concept of the “dominant fractions” (p. 102) that maintain and legitimize its “class domination” (p. 44) through the promotion of socially acceptable values and patterns of behavior. While he once supported Gautam's quest for knowledge, he regards Gautam's pursuit of art as a “serious malady” (Binodini, 2012, p. 24), and believes that “real life” (p. 50) has no place for “lovely words of literature” (p. 50) because “man is made of flesh, and he also bleeds” (p. 50). His thinking is based on an economic rationale that favours economic necessity and social status, as opposed to artistic freedom, and reveals the tension between the autonomous fields of art compared to the social world. This type of perspective aligns with what Adorno (1997) refers to as “cynical...realism” (p. 351), a perspective that attempts to provide a full and comprehensive way of mollifying the artist from being an alienated person (p. 261) by helping the artist adjust to living in an “administered world” (p. 296) guided by utilitarian, conformist, and economically rational goals, instead of accepting the potential of art to serve as a form of critique. As a consequence of this mentality, his attempt to “shape life” (Binodini, 2012, p. 51) of Indu through his wish for her to marry through an arranged marriage demonstrates Rancière's (2013) view of the order of “the police” (p. 12), which seeks to bring order to and re-establish the hierarchical structure of society.

Gautam's quest for the “crimson rainclouds” (Binodini, 2012, p. 58) of his youth ultimately reflects his desire for a way to live that is no longer limited by traditional notions of usefulness or material wealth. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno (1997) refers to the significance of this utopian aspect of art, which exists as a “negation of what exist[s]” (p. 68) in the world today. Gautam's desire to live in a way that exceeds the “limits” (p. 58) and “horizons” (p. 58) of average “human beings” (p. 59) indicated a desire to establish a way of living that is not based on instrumental reasoning; his departure with Keinatombi demonstrates what Bourdieu (1993) refers to as a “return to the sources” (p. 82) and a “renunciation” (p. 82) of the “temporal profits” (p. 82) associated with being socially and economically successful.

Gautam's reflection in the last scene on “Yellow waves on fields of mustard greens” (Binodini, 2012, p. 61) and “the azure skies” (p. 61) makes the landscape of the scene an experience lived. This supports Lefebvre (1991), the author of *The Production of Space*, who said that we create space through social and imaginative practices, and that this can serve as a basis for creating an “organizing principle of space” (p. 153). At the same time, it refers to the idea of an “aesthetic state” (Rancière, 2013, p. 32), a moment in which we suspend traditional hierarchies and thus restructure how the moment is perceived. By refusing to “test” (Binodini, 2012, p. 24) the validity of his own art through any institutional measure or standard, Gautam supports what Adorno describes as “the truth content of art” (p. 58), against the “market” (p. 264). Therefore, Binodini suggests that aesthetic freedom is a necessary form of resistance

against all forms of social, economic, or spatial structures that attempt to control the experiences of individuals.

Gautam's dedication to his artwork is a clear demonstration of what Raymond Williams has said about a cultural phenomenon in his book *Culture and Society* (1960), whereby culture serves as a "court of human appeal" (p. xvi), as such he is also helping to challenge an established culture that reduces individuals to being nothing more than "specialized instrument[s] of production" (p. 46). Through his preference for creating works of art that have social relevance or significance over creating works of art that serve an economic purpose, Gautam reflects the Romantic "emphasis on the creative imagination" (p. 46) and provides an "alternative construction of human motive" (p. 46). In addition to that, his nonconformist attitude demonstrates that, as Williams says in his book *Marxism and Literature* (1977), the act of performing aesthetically can also be seen as an act of "protest against the forcing of all experience into instrumentality" (p. 151). Therefore, through Gautam's use of a creative form of expression, which can be considered "emergent" (p. 123) within our society, the cultural practice he creates generates "new meanings and values" (p. 123) and acts as "alternative or oppositional" (p. 122) to the dominant culture created through family, social, economic, and other forms of notions.

3. Artistic Freedom and Social Constraint

However, Gautam's refusal to accept materialistic values cannot be seen in isolation. His determination to have creative autonomy constantly confronts his obligations toward family, work, and society. The drama thus moves from the personal values of the artist to the forces of social nature trying to restrict creativity.

Gautam's existence as an artist in *Crimson Rainclouds* is characterised by what Pierre Bourdieu defines as the "field of cultural production" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 15), an area in which creativity is continuously impeded by economic and social pressures for conformance to both of those areas. Gautam lives in a nearly empty studio consisting only of a mat and unfinished artworks. According to Henri Lefebvre's (1991) description of "spatial practice" (p. 8), Gautam is using the physical environment (his living space) to express his rejection of bourgeois materialism and conformity to social norms. To support this notion, Bourdieu (1984) describes in his book that aesthetic choices are often represented in ways that contradict the "tastes of necessity" (p. 56) created by economic factors. Gautam's poverty, which exists in the "restricted field" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 16) of cultural production, is therefore utilised by Gautam as a source of "symbolic profit" (p. 48), representing his dedication to artistic principles even though he does not earn a good living. Bourdieu also stated that Gautam's admiration for the works of "Van Gogh ... and ... Mozart" (Binodini, 2012, p. 22) illustrates the "ascetic aspect of aesthetics" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 176), in that passion for art is validated through cultural acceptance. As a result of this, Gautam's choosing not to obtain a traditional job in the workforce is in itself a challenge against a culture that, as Raymond Williams noted in his book *Culture and Society* (1960), transforms people's identities into "specialized instrument[s] of production" (p. 46). Thus, Binodini depicts Gautam's artistic work as an act of cultural defiance towards the utilitarian principles of contemporary society, affirming creativity and independence.

The conflict of creative expression and social control is represented through the exchange between Gautam and Indu about a job at the art school. Indu embodies the "police order" (Rancière, 2013, p. 91) and tries to assimilate Gautam into a "distribution of the sensible" (p. 91) where he must find an appropriate, productive place. As per Indu's view, a job is how to be "securely tied" (Binodini, 2012, p. 25) and therefore balanced and "normal" (p. 52). For Gautam, a job is also a method of gaining "de-aestheticization" (Adorno, 1997, p. 23) of his existence, and he interprets the art school's need for him to go through an "interview" (Binodini, 2012, p. 24) as an unnecessary "senseless iteration" (Williams, 1960, p. 37) of market-based values, since, if his ability is already established, testing his ability is as pointless

and useless as hitting a “pure bell metal” (Binodini, 2012, p. 24) to hear its chime. The rejection of the interview reflects the “double character of art” (Adorno, 1997, p. 373), in that it is both a “fait social” (social fact) (p. 395) and can only remain true to its meaning by “stepping outside of the constraining spell” (p. 31) of what is socially useful.

The example of the Middle-Aged Man visiting Gautam's studio illustrates the way social constraints can be demonstrated through the “popular aesthetics” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 85). The man makes a request for a reproduction of a photograph of his deceased sister to be altered with the addition of a “beauty spot” (Binodini, 2012, p. 27) because it is fashionable; therefore, by treating art as “consumer goods under the control of *vested interests*” (Adorno, 1997, p. 23), this request promotes art to a “mechanical reproduction” (p. 21) and “standardization” (p. 330), wherein the “inner logic” of the work (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. xi) is sacrificed for the sake of “external goals” (Adorno, 1997, p. 25). Gautam's suggestion that the beauty spot be placed where “no one can see” (Binodini, 2012, p. 28) constitutes a “polemical” (Adorno, 1997, p. 7) response to the “barbarous taste” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 25) manifested in this request. He is therefore resisting the “culture industry” (p. 16), which aims to reduce the distance between the work and the viewer, while preferring the “aesthetic distancing” (Adorno, 1997, p. 29) that enables the work to remain as a “windowless monad”¹ (p. 7). The concept of the “windowless monad” is a theoretical term Adorno borrows from the rationalist metaphysics of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who envisioned the monad as a fundamental, simple substance that has no windows—“lack[ing] windows” through which anything could enter or leave—to characterize the autonomous and self-contained nature of artworks (pp. 275, 351, 375). In short, for Adorno, the artwork is a monad because its distance from reality is precisely what allows it to critique and represent more deeply than direct imitation.

In addition, Gautam faces many constraints as a result of the “class ethos and habitus” (Lane, 2000, p. 36) within his immediate social environment. Indu's uncle, who was initially in favour of helping Gautam with his education, now considers Gautam's lifestyle to be a source of “malady” (Binodini, 2012, p. 24) and a major “burden” (p. 54). By arranging for Indu to be married, her uncle wants her to have a “normal life” (p. 52) and return her to a “well-defined” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 22) social order, which would be a way of imposing a “collective trajectory” (p. 311) upon her. He suggests that “real life” (Binodini, 2012, p. 50) and “lovely words of literature” (p. 50) cannot be reconciled because “man is made of flesh, and he also bleeds” (p. 50). Such a “cynical...realism” (Adorno, 1997, p. 351) is a type of “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 137) that attempts to “mollify the alienation” (Adorno, 1997, p. 261) of the artist by forcing him to conform to the “status quo” (p. 292).

The way Gautam expresses his “absolute freedom” (Binodini, 2012, p. 25) as a “ruse of art's own reason” (Adorno, 1997, p. 7), or the use of one's “double being” (Rancière, 2013, p. 50) to interrupt the normal flow of time/space in one's job, is presented to Indu as an act of heroic self-determination in abstaining from a “market of symbolic goods” (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 205, 112) through their respective professions. He discusses with Indu his “limits” (Binodini, 2012, p. 58) and “horizons” (p. 58) of what would be considered “normal” (p. 59) for her to pursue, and then he reaches into his past for “crimson rainclouds” (p. 58), an image of his pursuit of the “utopic aspect” of art as well as a way of “reconfiguring the other” from repetition (Adorno, 1997, p. 443). Gautam's departure with Keinatombi is ultimately a “renunciation” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 82) from the “temporal profits” (p. 82) of the city to which he returns. In this sense, Gautam had a choice between the “azure skies” (Binodini, 2012, p. 61) and “waves of yellow” (p. 61) or the restrictions of a “totally administered society” (Bronner and Kellner, 1989, p. 9), and he has taken the former, asserting that art is not a “diversion” (p. 13) but is a “court of human appeal” (Williams, 1960, p. xvi). Gautam's “mimetic comportment (aesthetic comportment)”² (Adorno, 1997, pp. 28, 471) enables Gautam to translate the unresolved “antagonisms of reality” (p. 7) into “problems of form” (p. 7), thus preserving his freedom within an “over-administered world” (p. 74). In Binodini's play, the

artist's freedom is not an "artless spontaneity" (Williams, 1960, p. 49), but rather the "power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination" (p. 49), which conflicts with the "petrified relations" (Adorno, 1989, p. 129) of the society.

4. Art, Culture, and Social Hierarchy

The clash between artistic liberty and societal duty also shows how extensive cultural and class relations are implicated. Binodini indicates that the conflict of the artist is not a question of individual efforts only but also involves the forces of cultural establishment, economic power, and social stratum. The bigger formations give the frame in which the choices made by Gautam gain political significance.

The way the protagonist Gautam lives and works in Binodini's *Crimson Rainclouds* represents an ongoing negotiation of the existing social hierarchy—a "field of forces", or "chiasmatic structure", within M. K. Binodini's play (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 30, 185). His sad, disorganized, and poor-quality living space contains little more than a mat, as well as his unfinished paintings; however, the fact that Gautam makes this poorly organized space work for him is evidence of how he occupied a different kind of "spatial practice", or "taste of liberty", compared to that of people with greater "tastes of necessity" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 8; Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 6, 56). Gautam also chooses to live in this "restricted field of production" space, thereby challenging the larger social dynamic that defines social success through the number of theatrical performances and a "heteronomous principle", or monetary wealth, and substitutes an "autonomous principle" of creative contribution or "specific consecration" and recognition as an artist (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 16, 38). As Williams (1960) states, by living in this independent manner, Gautam provides a "court of human appeal", so to speak, against the contemporary society that seeks to dehumanize or reduce human beings to purely "specialized instruments of production" (pp. xvi, 46).

The play illustrates the social hierarchy through the "distribution of the sensible", described by Jacques Rancière (2013) as a framework that determines the "distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity" (pp. v, 4). Indu and her uncle serve as representatives of a "police order" attempting to allocate Gautam's time by forcing him to attend an interview for a utilitarian job at an art school (pp. 91, 94). Indu believes that obtaining a job provides one with secure binding and a way to live as a "normal human" (Binodini, 2012, pp. 25, 57). However, Gautam sees this as a form of "symbolic violence", as it would require him to force his "mimetic comportment"—an irrational and indifferent pursuit of beauty—into the world of the "administered world", which consists of "socially useful labor" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 358; Adorno, 1997, pp. 28, 42, 340). Thus, by not participating in the interview, Gautam is rejecting being a "double being" that is restricted to remain in an assigned position; this constitutes "political subjectivization"³, which interrupts the pre-existing social sharing of the community (Rancière, 2013, pp. 49, 56). Rancière (2013) further describes that political subjectivization is the process where a political subject extracts itself from dominant categories of identification and classification. It functions by treating a "wrong" and attempting to "implement equality", creating a dispute for those with no part in the established order. This process reconfigures the communal "distribution of the sensible" through intermittent acts of contention. This transformation occurs when a supernumerary subject interrupts the police order, modifying the "aesthetico-political field of possibility". It allows those who are invisible to penetrate social structures by implementing the universal presupposition that all are equal. Through "subjectivization", individuals produce a "dissensus" that challenges the given distribution of roles and territories within society (pp. 48, 56, 57, 102, vii).

The conflict surrounding the freedom of aesthetics is complicated further by the "popular aesthetic" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 4) represented by the Middle-Aged Man. His request to Gautam to copy a photograph and add a "nice beauty spot" (Binodini, 2012, p. 27) because it is "trendy" (p. 27) reduces art to a "commodity" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 376) that will sell to a "large-scale market" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 7). Such "barbarous taste" completely disregards the "aesthetic

distancing” that is necessary for the “pure gaze”, which gives precedence to form over function (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 3, 35, 44). The persistence of the Man on “remembrance” (Adorno, 1997, p. 113) and “social importance” signifies a “habitus” (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 286, 377) dictated by material necessity, i.e., the only value of art is if it performs an objective function. Gautam’s frustration with this request illustrates the “social antithesis of society” (Adorno, 1997, p. 10) established in authentic art; Gautam suggests that the beauty spot should be hidden where “no one can see it” (Binodini, 2012, p. 28) as a polemical defence of art’s “immanent law” against the “constraining spell” of the real world (Adorno, 1997, pp. 7, 9, 10).

Indu’s uncle exemplifies the conflicting demands of the “dominant principle of hierarchization” in his attitude towards Gautam’s training. Initially, Gautam received encouragement from Indu’s uncle, but now that he has adopted a “serious malady” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 16; Binodini, 2012, p. 24), he no longer approves. Furthermore, the uncle represents the “dominant fraction” within the ruling class, which expects that art be dissociative and maintain “a high degree of denial of the social world” (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 176, 281). He goes on to inform Indu that “real life” is not composed of “lovely words of literature”; instead, it consists of “flesh” and “bleeds” (Binodini, 2012, p. 50). This “cynical...realism” (Adorno, 1997, p. 351) serves to rationalize “an ethos” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 185) that justifies one class dominating another by portraying an artist’s “inner development” (Williams, 1977, p. 14) as a lavishness that a working class cannot afford. The result is that culture is no longer a process but is instead a “received state” imposed on those in power (Williams, 1960, pp. 15, 151).

Gautam’s relationship with Keinatombi, a vendor he has become acquainted with, exemplifies an “emergent” cultural prospect that breaks with the conventional “bourgeois experience of the world” (Williams, 1977, p. 122; Bourdieu, 1984, p. 54). While Indu offers Gautam a “life of ease” and “symbolic profit” through her integration into a school, Keinatombi’s role is to facilitate Gautam’s “return to the people” (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 5, 63, 563). She gives Gautam the opportunity to explore the “crimson rainclouds” (Binodini, 2012, p. 61) of artwork, a utopian aspect of art that exists as the “other” in a utilitarian world (Adorno, 1997, p. 443). By observing the “Yellow waves on fields of flowering mustard” (Binodini, 2012, p. 61) and “azure skies” (p. 61), Gautam is not trying to find an item of scenery to consume, but rather to seek a means by which to structure his own experience in relation to the aesthetic state: an “organizing-principle of space” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 153). This aesthetic state alters the disagreement between active forms of “understanding and passive sensitivity” and disrupts “an idea of society based on the opposition between those who think and decide and those who are doomed to material tasks” (Rancière, 2013, p. 34).

In effect, Binodini’s representation of social stratification, as a “distribution of the sensible” (Rancière, 2013, p. 34), implies that the art/artist must validate or undermine this order; Gautam achieves his “absolute freedom” (Binodini, 2012, p. 25) through his creative action under his own rules and laws (Bronner and Kellner, 1989, p. 49). By refusing to be “tied down”, he continues to maintain the “distance of the artwork from the empirical world”, thereby allowing an artwork to remain a “windowless monad”, depicting the social contradictions of its “functionlessness” (Binodini, 2012, p. 25; Adorno, 1997, pp. 31, 107, 374). His departure with Keinatombi represents a “renunciation” of the “temporal profits” of the city and a “subversive alliance” with those who do not belong in the police order’s jurisdiction (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 54, 82; Lane, 2000, p. 216; Rancière, 2013, p. 73). The “crimson rainclouds” (Binodini, 2012, p. 61) transform into the “truth content” of the play, a “mimetically written history of human suffering” that affirms the “superiority” of those who can be satisfied by the “sublimated, refined, [and] disinterested” ease that the marketplace cannot completely consume (Adorno, 1997, pp. 13, 202; Bourdieu, 1984, p. 7). Thus, according to Binodini, the only avenue to true artistic development is for the artist to step out of the social order to “reconfigure the other out of the unvarying” (Adorno, 1997, pp. 193, 443).

5. The Politics of Aesthetic Freedom

After looking at the cultural structures that influence art, the discussion will now explain how *Crimson Rainclouds* gives new meaning to the art of politics. Instead of considering aesthetics as something separate from society, the play sees artistic creation as a means of challenging established values and thinking about new ways of living.

The aesthetic freedom in M. K. Binodini's *Crimson Rainclouds* is derived not from any explicit ideological messages, but rather is found in the protagonist's rejection of the utilitarian logic of "police order" through his radical insistence upon creating a "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière, 2013, pp. 67, 91). Gautam's cluttered studio, its "poverty", lack of finished works, and criteria for defining a "representational space" continue to test the "abstract space" of a society increasingly dominated by the "principle of exchange" (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 103, 116, 140; Adorno, 1997, pp. vi–vii). His refusal to attend the art school job interview is the primary political act in the play. For the community's representatives Indu and her uncle, Gautam's refusal to attend art school is a "serious malady" (Binodini, 2012, p. 24). However, from the perspective of aesthetic theory, his actions represent the defence of art as possessing "absolute freedom" (p. 25), which, as Adorno (1997) has argued, must continue to exist as the "social antithesis" of that society (p. 10) so that it is not consumed by the "constraining spell" (p. 7) of pragmatic reality.

Gautam maintains that all art embodies an "absolute freedom", and that this is an artist's "own reason" for "soaring" beyond an existing social organization, where his or her hours of work need not be assigned (Binodini, 2012, p. 25; Adorno, 1997, p. 7; Rancière, 2013, p. 94). The conflict between the two principles that make up the "field of cultural production" is represented by Gautam's struggle for "autonomous" (artistic) prestige versus "heteronomous" (financial) prestige. This conflict is analogous to the struggle between artistic production and non-artistic production in the creative industry (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 16, 167; 1984, p. 56). Indu's argument that a job "won't get in the way of your painting" shows that she is trying to impose a "distribution of the sensible" where the artist has a "proper" and an "improper" place within the social order (Binodini, 2012, p. 22; Rancière, 2013, pp. 67, 95). Gautam's rejection of this is an act of "political subjectivation"; he asserts that he is not a "specialized instrument of production" but a "double being" who is, in fact, "a court of human appeal" because he is not functional (Adorno, 1997, p. 107; Rancière, 2013, pp. 49, 100; Williams, 1960, pp. xvi, 46).

The introduction of the Middle-Aged Man into Gautam's studio reiterates the "politics" of aesthetic freedom expressed through the "culture industry" (Adorno, 1997, pp. 43, 52) and how Gautam cannot create art without exposing himself to conflict with the "culture industry" (p. 52). When the Man asks to include a "beauty spot" in the painting because it is "trendy", the act of creating art is treated as "consumer goods under the control of vested interests" (Binodini, 2012, p. 27; Adorno, 1997, p. 23) and reflects "barbarous taste", thereby "narrow[ing] the distance" between the work and the viewer, effectively eliminating "aesthetic distancing" and creating a "windowless monad" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 44; Adorno, 1997, pp. 7, 30). Gautam's "polemical" suggestion to position the beauty spot "where no one can see" (Adorno, 1997, p. 7; Binodini, 2012, p. 28) is thus a political defence for art's "immanent law" (Adorno, 1997, p. 9) from "popular aesthetics", which subordinates "form to function" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 4). By not allowing his art to be "cozy and discretionary", Gautam is preserving the "truth content" of his creations, which can only be realised as a "mimetically written history of human suffering" (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 351, 358; Adorno, 1997, p. v).

Indu's uncle symbolizes a ruling class' "dominant fraction" that utilizes "symbolic violence" to assert their class superiority (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 44, 102). His arranging of Indu's marriage in order to provide her with a "normal life" reinforces a "collective trajectory" and attempts to restore the "sensible world" to its "petrified" condition (Binodini, 2012, p. 52; Bourdieu, 1984, p. 595; Rancière, 2013, p. 19; Adorno, 1997, p. 110). He expresses the view that "real life" does not consist of the beautiful "words of literature", because "man is made of flesh; and he bleeds" as well (Binodini, 2012, p. 50). This expression of "cynical realism"

serves as “a rationalization of an ethos” that dismisses the artist’s “inner development” as being lavishness (Adorno, 1997, p. 35; Bourdieu, 1984, p. 185; Williams, 1977, p. 14). The uncle considers Gautam, who lives an “aberration” to have complete “freedom”, and therefore cites “absolute freedom” as being a significant “burden” (Adorno, 1997, p. 31; Binodini, 2012, pp. 25, 54). In the view of Williams (1960), this is a case of “forcing all experience into instrumentality”, where culture is envisioned as a ‘received state’ instead of a continually evolving process of “creative imagination” (pp. 15, 46, 151).

In Gautam’s eyes, his quest for the “crimson rainclouds” of childhood is really a pursuit for a “Utopia” and a “promesse du bonheur”, or a promise of happiness, that exists “beyond that Good and Evil” (Binodini, 2012, p. 61; Adorno, 1997, pp. 16, 44, 237). This exploration embodies the “utopic aspect” of art as an “other” to a utility-based world (Adorno, 1997, p. 443). While Gautam expresses his desire to “immerse myself” in the raincloud, he describes what Rancière (2013) labels the “aesthetic state”, or “pure instances of suspension”, in which the divide between “active understanding and passive sensibility” dissolves. Thus, the “aesthetic state” is inherently political, as it undermines the idea of society based on the opposition between those who think and decide and those who are doomed to material tasks (pp. 32, 51).

Gautam’s leaving with Keinatombi marks a “renunciation” of the city’s “temporal profits” and a “return to the sources” (the people) (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 54, 82; 1984, p. 563). Keinatombi is an “emergent” cultural adjustment and practice, providing Gautam “new meanings and values” that are “alternative or oppositional” to the dominant social notion (Williams, 1977, pp. 122, 123). In this space (the location of her village where the emerald paddies touch the azure sky), a “recomposition of the landscape of the visible” occurs (Binodini, 2012, p. 61; Rancière, 2013, p. 52). Through this final “reconfiguration of the sensible”, Gautam’s “mimetic comportment” allows him to change unanswered “antagonisms of reality” into “problems of form” while retaining his freedom in an “over-administered world” (Rancière, 2013, p. 15; Adorno, 1997, pp. 31, 52, 98).

Finally, Binodini indicates that the politics involved in artistic freedom rest in the ability of an artist to “[act] creatively within [their] own laws” (Williams, 1960, p. 49). Gautam states that art is more than a “diversion”; rather, it is a “court of human appeal” that will never be restrained, nor will he ever experiment with his talent as an artist as if it were “pure bell metal” (Williams, 1960, pp. xvi, 98; Binodini, 2012, pp. 24, 25). Gautam’s movement towards “Yellow waves on fields of flowering mustard” represents a form of disassociation from a society that values humans based on their economic value (Binodini, 2012, p. 61; Rancière, 2013, p. 30). The “crimson rainclouds” represent the “truth content” of a given play, or “an image of the truth” that will endure in a “false world” of commerce and domination (Binodini, 2012, p. 61; Adorno, 1997, pp. 16, 34, 347). Therefore, through her play, Binodini conveys that an artist’s autonomy does not result in an artist’s withdrawal from the world but rather a “revolutionary” protest toward a truth that admits the possibility of a rehabilitated humanity (Adorno, 1997, p. 358).

6. Discussion

The prior discussion illustrates how Gautam’s creative journey ties together concepts of independence, culture, and social hierarchy. The present discourse binds all these theoretical aspects together to explain how Binodini establishes aesthetic freedom as an artistic concept as well as a means of criticism towards society.

The synthesis of findings in M. K. Binodini’s *Crimson Rainclouds* reveals a fundamental struggle between aesthetic autonomy and the utilitarian demands of a society undergoing rapid modernization. The protagonist, Gautam, uses his cluttered, impoverished studio as a “representational space” to resist the “abstract space” (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 2, 42) of a city governed by the “principle of exchange” (Adorno, 1997, p. vii). His refusal to participate in the art school’s job interview is not a sign of failure but a radical act of “political

subjectivization” (Rancière, 2013, p. 49). By rejecting a role within the “police order” (p. vii) that parcels out human time into “socially useful labour” (Adorno, 1997, p. 340), Gautam asserts his right to be a “double being” (Rancière, 2013, p. 50), who exists both within and outside social classifications. His art functions as a “windowless monad”, a self-contained entity that reflects the contradictions of the social world precisely by refusing to communicate with its utilitarian goals (Adorno, 1997, p. 7).

While Gautam’s struggle is central, the play also highlights how social constraints differ for Indu and Keinatombi based on gender. Indu is trapped by a “bourgeois habitus” (Lane, 2000, p. 49) that dictates her path as a “strong and professional woman” who must nevertheless be settled through marriage (Roy, n.d., p. 57). Her uncle views her as a “burden” that must be securely placed, using “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 137) to enforce a “collective trajectory” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 311) of a “normal life” (Binodini, 2012, p. 52). Indu attempts to pull Gautam into this same order, viewing a job as a means of being “securely tied down” (Binodini, 2012, p. 25). In contrast, Keinatombi faces the constraints of class and displacement as an uneducated vendor. She describes herself as “worthless river drift”, snatched from her green homeland and snagged on the dry roots of the “city of distractions” (Binodini, 2012, pp. 24, 25). While Indu is the “Muse” (Williams, 1960, p. 41) who belongs to the city’s institutions, Keinatombi represents an “emergent” cultural practice—a “return to the sources” that offers Gautam a landscape where “the paddies of emerald meet the azure skies” (Williams, 1977, p. 122; Bourdieu, 1993, p. 82; Binodini, 2012, p. 61).

These findings have significant implications for understanding Manipuri literature. Binodini’s work represents a shift from traditional themes to a modern, psychological exploration of the individual’s inner life (Roy, n.d., p. 59). By placing women who question social conventions at the heart of her narrative, she challenges the traditional model of “the division of labour” between the sexes (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 63). Her play documents the “loss and degradation” of a disappearing world, yet it refuses the comfort of “reproductive art” (Roy, n.d., p. 57; Bourdieu, 1993, p. 102). Instead, it adopts an “aesthetic regime” (Rancière, 2013, p. viii) that proclaims a radical equality of experience, where the “crimson rainclouds” of a child’s memory carry more “truth content” (Binodini, 2012, pp. 27, 61) than the economic demands of the art market.

The research also aids in enhancing the knowledge of Manipuri literature. Instead of depicting art as a means of escape from reality, it shows us how art form acts as a response to social changes. Gautam’s journey for the “crimson rainclouds” (Binodini, 2012, p. 61) shows the human longing for beauty, dignity, and freedom amidst material struggles. Thus, Binodini’s work highlights some of the central issues of modern Manipuri literature, such as the conflict between civilization and tradition, the struggle of an individual to discover identity, and the ethical implications of socio-political transformations.

Reflecting on the application of Western critical theory to a non-Western text, we see a process of productive “transculturation”⁴ (Lane, 2000, p. 10). While the concepts of Adorno, Bourdieu, and Rancière emerged from European contexts, they provide a rigorous vocabulary for describing the “symbolic violence” and chiasmic “distribution of capital” that occur in any society facing the pressures of global capitalism (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 137; 1984, p. 172). Using the “windowless monad” (Adorno, 1997, p. 312) to interpret Gautam’s studio, or the aesthetic state to understand his final departure, allows Binodini’s work to be seen as part of a global conversation on human freedom. This approach does not colonize the Manipuri text; rather, it uses theory as a “court of human appeal” to show that the struggle for an unmediated experience of reality is universal (Williams, 1960, p. xvi). By connecting the specific Manipuri landscape of “waves of yellow” flowering mustard to Adorno’s “mimetic comportment”, the analysis demonstrates that true aesthetic freedom is a “revolutionary” protest against any system that reduces the human spirit to a mere “specialized instrument of production” (Binodini, 2012, p. 61; Adorno, 1997, pp. 28, 358; Williams, 1960, p. 46).

When Western literary theories are employed in the analysis of *Crimson Rainclouds*, it becomes apparent that comparative literary criticism has both advantages and limitations. Notions established by Adorno, Bourdieu, Rancière, Lefebvre, and Williams give rise to fruitful avenues for studying questions pertaining to the autonomy of art, culture, space, and politics. However, it is important to note that Binodini's play is deeply embedded in the socio-cultural and historical realities of Manipuri society. Consequently, the aforementioned theories must be regarded as interpretative rather than universal in nature. An analysis of the work that takes into account both its local context and global theoretical perspectives is necessary to achieve a holistic understanding of the play's significance without relying solely on foreign notions.

Ultimately, Binodini's play suggests that aesthetic freedom is found in the "power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination" (Williams, 1960, p. 49). Gautam's move toward the village is not a retreat into the past, but an embrace of the "residual" as a way to "reconfigure the other out of the unvarying" (Williams, 1977, p. 122; Adorno, 1997, p. 443). By refusing to "test" his talent like "pure bell metal", he maintains art as the "organon of truth" that convicts the status quo of its irrationality (Binodini, 2012, p. 24; Adorno, 1997, p. 340). Through this dialogue between Manipuri narrative and critical theory, *Crimson Rainclouds* emerges as a profound meditation on the artist's role in maintaining the "images of a transformed humanity" in an increasingly administered world (Adorno, 1997, p. 358).

This analysis ultimately demonstrates that *Crimson Rainclouds* provides a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between art and society. The artistic resistance of Gautam, the negotiation of Indu with social norms, and the social positioning of Keinatombi show that aesthetic freedom cannot be dissociated from the issues of culture, power, gender, and everyday life. The primary argument presented in the play by Binodini expresses the idea of art as a questioning of dominant values and a promotion of humane alternatives, thus constituting an important contribution to Manipuri literature.

7. Conclusion

This discussion illustrates how Gautam's quest for artistic independence not merely focuses on self-expression, but also raises more general issues of culture, power, and human freedom. The conclusion answers the main question of the paper by putting forth an idea that Binodini implies about the connection between art and society.

M. K. Binodini's *Crimson Rainclouds* does not end with an artist's willingness to distance himself from his bourgeois past, but rather signals the final crossing from a "reproductive art" trapped within the "police order" of an established social hierarchy into an "aesthetic regime" proclaiming the drastic equality of the sensible (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 102; Rancière, 2013, pp. vii, viii). Gautam's denial of Indu as 'immortal Muse' (Williams, 1960, p. 41), who nevertheless is "securely tied down" to a bourgeois habitus, shows that the artist rejects allowing his work to be consumed as a "Sunday institution", which could provide only "solace" for a world that has yet to be reconciled (Binodini, 2012, p. 25; Adorno, 1997, p. 2). By choosing to follow Keinatombi as they cross into a landscape where "the paddies of emerald" run with "the azure skies" (Binodini, 2012, p. 61), Gautam performs a literal and symbolic break with the "abstract space" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 49) associated with the city—an abstract space of "formal and quantitative" exchange—in favour of "representational space" (Rancière, 2013, p. 74), which is immediately experienced before being "conceptualized" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 34).

This move represents a kind of final destination, a point of no return, in an "economic world reversed", in which the "symbolic profit" (or 'value in itself') for an artistic entity is in direct proportion to its lack of a "temporal reward" (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 64, 164; Lane, 2000, p. 216). Gautam's concept of "absolute freedom" (Binodini, 2012, p. 25) is not to be regarded as an instance of "artless spontaneity", but instead should be viewed as a manifestation of creative action in accordance with "its own [laws] of origination" (Williams, 1960, p. 49); Adorno

(1997) asserts that this is the only means by which artistic expression can attain eloquence in its form after the crisis of “metaphysics” (pp. 29, 484). The search for Gautam’s “crimson rainclouds” (Binodini, 2012, p. 61) is the embrace of “dialectical images”, crystallizations of both childhood memory and the effects of particular historic traumatic events, which are resistant to being “filtered through the existing social matrix” of the culture industry (Jay, 1996, pp. 98, 108).

The conclusion to the play reveals that aesthetic autonomy represents an “emergent” practice of culture, which first appears within the “fibres of the self” before reaching into community (Williams, 1977, pp. 126, 212). Gautam’s refusal to submit to testing as “pure bell metal” is a political act of “subjectivization”, which disrupts traditional roles within a social structure, establishing that, through being a “double being”, an artist does not have a permanent location in the hierarchy (Binodini, 2012, p. 24; Rancière, 2013, pp. vii, 29, 32). When Gautam “quickly walks ahead of her; Keinatombi follows him” into the “waves of yellow”, he successfully “disincorporates” himself from his civilization, in which men are seen only as “specialized instruments of production” (Binodini, 2012, pp. 61, 62; Rancière, 2013, p. 61; Lefebvre, 1991, p. 151).

Ultimately, Binodini’s play verifies that the “truth content” of art is found through its “functionlessness” (Adorno, 1997, pp. 47, 102). When Gautam makes his art available without comfort and options, the promise of happiness that is only fulfilled by losing that promise in a continuously made “unfreedom” in his society (Adorno, 1997, pp. 1, 16, 351) is preserved. The “crimson rainclouds” (Binodini, 2012, p. 61) symbolize a “court for human appeal”, determining whether or not humans are able to see the divine in their everyday actions (Williams, 1960, p. xvi; Jay, 1996, p. 46). The actions of Gautam create a “mimetic comportment”, whereby Binodini supports the thesis that the only way to experience true freedom through aesthetics is through a “revolutionary” act of keeping the “images of a transformed humanity”, even if that humanity exists only as a “vanishing point” in the future (Adorno, 1997, pp. 1, 28, 72, 358). Therefore, this play concludes that art is not an escapist approach to reality, but rather the “organon of truth”, which holds the status quo accountable for its illogical and unreasonable actions (Adorno, 1997, p. 340).

End Notes

1. *Windowless monad*: Adorno describes the “windowless monad” as the autonomous, self-contained nature of artworks. Borrowed from Leibniz, the term signifies that works are hermetically closed to empirical reality and direct social communication. Despite “lack[ing] windows”, they function as a “social microcosm”, representing historical processes through their internal tensions and immanent laws of form (Adorno, 1997, pp. 7, viii, 275).
2. *Mimetic comportment* or *aesthetic comportment* is a non-conceptual attitude where the subject assimilates itself to the object rather than dominating it. Adorno describes art as a “refuge” for this behavior within a rationalized, administered world. It is experienced as a “shudder”—the act of being touched by the “other”—allowing art to communicate truth through its own internal logic (Adorno, 1997, pp. 24, 471).
3. *Political subjectivization* is the process where subjects extract themselves from dominant social classifications to verify equality. By identifying a “wrong”, these subjects disrupt the established “distribution of the sensible”, transforming communal coordinates to make the invisible audible. This intermittent act of contention creates a locus of dispute, asserting that those with “no part” are equal (Rancière, 2013, pp. 72–73, 94–95, 102, vii).
4. The emergence of Algerian nationalism might be better understood as a case of ‘transculturation’, a term coined by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1940) to describe phenomena of cultural interchange, which are not reducible to the unidirectional process implicit in the notion of ‘acculturation’ (Lane, 2000, p. 10).

8. References

Art, Society, and the Politics of Aesthetic Freedom in M. K. Binodini's *Crimson Rainclouds*

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