
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Betrayal under Colonial Oppression: Human Nature and Psychological Conflict through Xunzi and Freud in Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror*

Rakhi Das Gupta

Lecturer, Department of English, Bangladesh Army University of Science and Technology (BAUST), Saidpur, Bangladesh

Corresponding Author: Rakhi Das Gupta, **E-mail:** rakhidasgupta7000@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

In the light of Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror*, this article explores human behaviour under colonial oppression, exclusively focusing on betrayal within the oppressed community. It holds an interdisciplinary approach combining Xunzi's philosophy of human nature as inherently evil with Freudian psychoanalysis. This combination examines how self-interested human tendencies are expressed through desire, moral conflict, fear, guilt, and self-preservation. Both these perspectives together are used to examine the actions of the native characters, the Amin, the Dewan, Podi Moyrani, and the native newspaper editors. Xunzi's philosophy explains the characters' pursuit of profit, status, and personal advantage as manifestations of humanity's natural tendencies, while Freud's psychoanalysis shows the psychological conflicts through which these tendencies are expressed, rationalized, suppressed, or repeated. The article argues that *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror* does not merely critique the exploitative colonial system but also reveals the psychological and moral conflicts that arise when personal desires for profit, security, and advancement come into conflict with ethical and communal responsibilities. Ultimately, the study shows how colonial oppression strengthens existing human tendencies and exploits individual psychological weaknesses, turning the members of the oppressed community into active participants in their own community's oppression.

| KEYWORDS

Xunzi, Freud, human nature, betrayal, evil, Dinabandhu Mitra

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: August 11, 2026 **PUBLISHED:** September 07, 2026 **DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.61424/ijah.v4i3.1014>

1. Introduction

Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror* pictures the story of a Bengali family in West Bengal of India who are oppressed by colonial English planters, who force them to plant indigo in their rice fields. Some of the characters who belong to the native oppressed group, betray their own community by assisting the planters in exchange for self-serving motives and safety. The play specifically presents the story of Goluk Basu's family, who are oppressed by the English planters J.J. Wood and P.P. Rogue. But more than the colonial Planters, the focus of this study will be on the characters who betray their own community and they are the Amin (the land measurer), the Dewan (the Planters' agent), and Podi Moyrani (A sweetmeat maker and a paramour of the planter P.P. Rogue) and local newspaper editors. Through these characters, the play presents different forms of self-interest, betrayal, fear, guilt, and psychological conflict within the oppressed community.

Human nature has been a perplexing subject for philosophers and literary scholars to resolve. It is because despite affiliating all positivity to human nature, many instances testify that it cannot be all good and “neutral” because of some natural and “native dispositions” vulnerable to causing harm to others (Perrett, 2002, p. 309). Upholding moral standards consistently requires qualities such as honesty, integrity, compromise, and even sacrificing one’s own interests. Hence, prioritization of welfare of others is not a stand-alone action, rather it must follow ethical and moral sensibility. But it is in human nature, according to the Chinese philosopher Xunzi (310-238 BCE), that they are “born with a fondness for profit” (de Bary and Bloom 1999, p. 179). For Xunzi, the problem is not simply that human beings consciously choose evil, but that their natural desires, particularly the desire for profit and advantage, can lead to contention, disorder, and moral failure when they are not restrained and cultivated. As a result, conflicts and problems frequently arise when individuals are faced with the need to compromise that they tend to resist.

Therefore, the humanist belief that human nature is inherently good, unchanging, and universally consistent is revealed to be an ‘ideological’ construct, used for legitimising and upholding the existing social order which fosters humanity’s darker side (Althusser 1995/2014, p. 262). Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), an Austrian psychologist has given his own theory of the complex interplay between different faculties of human mind which governs the balance between good and evil in human conscience. While Xunzi provides a philosophical account of the natural tendencies that may lead individuals toward self-interest and disorder, Freud provides a psychological account of how desires, moral constraints, and external pressures interact within the individual.

From the very early stages of life, individuals are shaped by societal influences and power dynamics that Freud hints at that raises the tension between instinctual drives (id) and the moral constraints (superego) often mediated through the rational part of the psyche (ego) (Freud 1923/1927, p. 28). These socio-political structures are closely tied to power relations and are broadly studied as a pervasive chain of influence (Foucault 1976/1978, p. 92). Such structures can shape the circumstances in which individual desires are expressed that can also determine which forms of behaviour are rewarded or punished. This is what prevents human beings from consistently choosing what is ‘fair’. Under conditions of colonial oppression, this tendency toward self-interest becomes particularly significant because personal advancement, security, and material gain may depend upon cooperation with the dominant authority. As a result, we can find in the play *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror* that not only the dominant ones but also some members belonging to the dominated group choose the unfair traits of their character and contradict the real demands of situation. To fulfill the demands of positioning themselves in the higher step of the ladder and securing their desires coming from natural drives, the characters the Dewan, the Amin and Podi Moyrani naturally gravitate towards adoption of the ‘unfair’ and follow their unconscious. Their behaviour can therefore be understood as the intersection between the Xunzian tendency toward self-interest and the Freudian conflict between desire, moral restraint, and external reality. The Chinese philosopher Xunzi argued that if someone needs to seek something from outside, it means he “lacks” that in himself. Similarly, humans show concerns for doing good means that they lack it, as their “nature is evil” (de Bary and Bloom 1999, p. 182). Thus, they tend to be unfair is because of their inherent evil nature. In this sense, “evil” in Xunzi’s philosophy refers to the natural tendencies toward profit, desire, rivalry, and disorder that require deliberate moral cultivation. The characters’ actions demonstrate what can happen when these tendencies are intensified by an oppressive social environment and expressed through psychological conflict.

Therefore, this study does not treat the betrayal of these characters simply as evidence of individual moral failure. Rather, it examines how their self-interested tendencies become psychologically expressed under colonial oppression. The Amin’s pursuit of advancement, the Dewan’s ambition and rivalry, Podi Moyrani’s struggle between self-preservation and moral responsibility, and the newspaper editors’ pursuit of financial gain demonstrate different forms of the same conflict between personal interest and communal welfare. Xunzi’s philosophy helps explain the attraction toward profit, status, and personal advantage, whereas Freud’s psychoanalysis helps explain the psychological processes through which these desires confront moral responsibility, fear, guilt, and external reality. Therefore, concentrating on aforementioned specific characters, Dinabandhu Mitra’s play *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror* can be read as a manuscript that will help in understanding the creed of human natural instincts and tendencies as well as the fact that human behaviour is not always linear, universal, logical, or fair, but

can become inclined toward self-interest and destructive conduct when natural desires interact with psychological conflict and oppressive social conditions.

2. Literature Review

There are several significant studies on *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror* that provide critical insight into the play's historical context. However, only the relevant ones are mentioned here. Some of these studies have also assisted in the development of this article. These studies focus on various aspects of the play, including its connection to colonialism, social conditions, and its reception among different groups.

Naizul Islam (2021) in his study of *Nil Durpan*, explores the social and economic conditions that led to the Indigo Revolt, focusing on colonial policies and the peasants' struggles. Ranajit Guha (1974) finds in his detailed study of this text that the play's popularity is mostly linked to the intense reactions of European planters, rather than its dramatic qualities. It also highlights the role of various social groups, including women, in the rebellion. Another study by Sukanya Banerjee (2018) explores the relationship between drama and ecology, highlighting how indigo serves as a central force in the play tying the land, its people, and colonial oppression together. Again, in an article by Abhijit Gupta (2018), the print culture surrounding the indigo conflicts is explored. It mainly focuses on the English translation of *Nil Durpan* and the debates it sparked through newspapers, plays, and other media. Gaurav Banerjee (2021) questions the play's radicalism, examining whether it genuinely aligns with the nationalist spirit and reflects the real struggles of the indigo revolution.

Existing works focus primarily on its historical, socio-political, ecological, and cultural aspects, leaving a critical gap in understanding the psychological and philosophical dimensions of the behaviour of the characters. Thus, this article addresses this gap by exploring the acts of betrayals and moral conflicts in the play using Freudian psychoanalysis and Xunzi's philosophy. By dissecting human nature within this interdisciplinary framework, it offers a different and new perspective on the underlying tensions in the narrative of *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror*.

3. Methodology

This article uses a qualitative interdisciplinary approach to analyze the behaviour of the selected characters in Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror*. It combines Xunzi's philosophy of human nature being inclined toward personal advantage and disorder, with Freud's psychoanalytic theory focusing on the dynamics of the id, ego, and superego, as well as the death instinct. The study examines the significant events and particular characters in the text using primary evidence from *Nil Durpan or The Indigo Planting Mirror* (translated by Michael Madhusudan Dutt and edited by Sri Sudhi Pradhan and Sailesh Sen Gupta). It also uses other relevant secondary philosophical and literary sources for supporting the argument. This approach aims to unveil how betrayal within the oppressed community reflects deeper psychological and moral conflicts under colonial rule. It also shows how the colonial conditions intensify and exploit these human and psychological tendencies, revealing the complex dimensions of human behaviour.

3.1 Theoretical Framework : Intersecting the Perspectives of Xunzi and Freud Regarding the Dynamics of Human Nature

Reading the characters of *Nil Durpan* who betray their own community through the combined lens of Xunzi's philosophy and Freud's psychoanalytic theory reveals a deep psychological and philosophical tension between natural self-interested tendencies, psychological conflict, and the cultivation of morality. These characters can be understood as individuals caught in a struggle between self-preservation, societal pressures, and moral considerations. While Xunzi provides a philosophical account of the natural tendencies that incline individuals toward self-interest, Freud provides a psychological account of the unconscious drives and internal conflicts through which these types of tendencies are expressed. Their perspectives therefore complement each other without being treated as identical theoretical systems. This intersection helps explain how these tendencies surface through psychological conflict and become destructive under colonial conditions.

3.2 Xunzi's Perspective: The Natural Tendency Toward Evil

Xunzi, a very prominent Confucian Chinese philosopher, is well known for his comprehensive advocacy that human nature is evil. His philosophical narrative was a direct reaction against another Chinese philosopher Mencius (372 - 289 BC), who believed that human beings are born good (Yang 2023, p. 276). But Xunzi believes that human nature is inherently evil, and what human beings do as goodness is in fact their deliberate activity they do against their "nature" (de Bary and Bloom 1999, p. 181).

Xunzi's philosophical perspective presents that human nature has a natural inclination toward self-interest, profit, and desire when these tendencies remain insufficiently cultivated or restrained. And when left unchecked, these tendencies can manifest as actions that produce conflict, disorder, and harm to others. Xunzi's central argument lies in addressing this very flaw of human nature that he associates with desires such as profit, envy, and the pursuit of personal advantage. Without wilful cultivation through education and societal discipline and norms, people are likely to act in ways that harm others for their own benefit (de Bary and Bloom 1999, p. 179). Xunzi therefore, does not suggest that every individual will inevitably act immorally, rather he emphasizes the necessity of deliberate moral cultivation to transform natural tendencies into socially and ethically desirable conduct. The characters in *Nil Durpan* who are found befriending the oppressors are examples of individuals who allow their self-interested tendencies to prevail rather than acting in ways that would benefit the collective interest of their own community. In this context, their betrayal can be read through Xunzi as a consequence of unrestrained natural tendencies, which become particularly destructive when moral and social frameworks fail to restrain them. These types of human actions reflect the importance of moral and social cultivation, and Xunzi believes that such cultivation is necessary for suppressing destructive tendencies and producing social order (de Bary and Bloom 1999, p. 183).

3.3 Freud's Perspective: The Id, Ego, and Superego in Conflict

Freudian psychoanalysis suggests that humans possess inherent sexual and aggressive urges, which societal structures often prevent from being openly expressed. This implies that all individuals have the potential for aggression or destructive behavior that is governed and controlled by the dynamics of the id, ego, and superego (Bickett 2023, p. 4). Among these three psychological factors, the id is the most primitive and unconscious part of the psyche that is driven by instinctual desires. The ego works as a mediator between the demands of the id, the constraints of external reality as well as the moral demands associated with the superego. And finally, the superego represents all the internalized moral and societal values (Freud 1923/1927, p. 28). Freud further argues that the ego, operates on the reality principle, which prioritizes delaying pleasure to meet the demands of the real world. Thus ego actively works to substitute the "Reality Principle" for "Pleasure Principle" by regulating the id's demands (Freud 1923/1927, p. 29). Instead of acting impulsively, the ego devises strategies to achieve satisfaction in a more rational, delayed, or socially acceptable way. The reality principle refers to the ego's ability to balance the desires of the id, which operates according to the pleasure principle and seeks immediate satisfaction while matching the demands of the external world and the moral and social norms represented by the superego. In other words, the ego regulates the id's desires by considering what is possible and acceptable in reality, rather than seeking immediate gratification (Freud 1923/1927, p. 73). Thus, in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the ego operates according to the reality principle. However, the pleasure principle may still overcome the reality principle under certain circumstances that allows instinctual desires to influence behavior (Freud, 1920/1961, p. 3).

Freud's psychoanalytic framework offers a psychological dimension that shows that human actions are often shaped by unconscious impulses, instinctive drives, and irrational forces (Lafmejani 2020, p. 85). The pleasure principle governs the id, compelling it to pursue pleasure and avoid pain relentlessly, striving for the immediate fulfillment of its desires and needs. These desires for personal gain, safety, or social advancement reflect the pressure of instinctual desires and self-preserved needs within the broader psychological conflict (Freud 1923/1927, p. 32).

However, the superego represents the internalized moral and societal values that regulate human behaviour and evaluate the demands of the id and actions taken by the ego. It creates an internal conflict when instinctual desires get confronted by internalised moral standards. And so, the unconscious may also become conscious under certain

circumstances (Freud, 1920, p. 241). This type of conflict can create a moral dissonance, which might be rationalized or suppressed to avoid confronting the guilt related to their actions.

Freudian psychoanalysis says that this guilt is the result of conflicts between the id, ego, and super ego, specifically when the superego, the moral and ethical component of the psyche, judges the actions and desires of the id (even if modified by ego) as morally wrong (Freud 1923/1927, p. 73). Out of the awareness of guilt, human psyche unconsciously employs certain coping strategies, referred to by Freud as defense mechanisms, to protect itself from psychological distress and resolve internal conflicts. The defense mechanisms included repression, denial, reaction formation, projection, regression, rationalization, displacement, and sublimation. Repression is the most commonly used mechanism, characterized by the substitution of conscious memories with the unconscious ones (Zhang 2020, p. 229). Conversely, guilt causes ego to resort to repression, pushing the unacceptable thoughts into the unconscious mind. As a result, the repressed thoughts can profoundly influence human behaviour despite being in an unconscious state, intensifying the feelings of guilt (Freud 1923/1927, p. 74).

3.4 Xunzi's Self-Destructive Chaos and Freudian Death-Instinct

In Xunzi's own words:

The nature of human beings is evil—that they incline toward evil and are not upright, that they are disposed toward chaos and are not orderly (de Bary and Bloom 1999, p. 180).

According to Xunzian philosophy, 'Human nature' is what comes directly from "Heaven", and it is something that humans possess by birth. Consequently, humans are naturally inclined to follow their desires and passions, which, when left unregulated, can lead them away from rightness and fairness (de Bary and Bloom 1999, p. 180). Therefore, following passion without moral cultivation leads to malevolence and chaos, resulting in societal disorder and individual degeneration.

Freud's concept of the death drive provides a different but complementary psychological perspective on the destructive consequences of such behaviour. It provides another layer of insight into the psychological dispositions of the characters of the play. Thanatos indicates the unconscious drive toward destruction, death, and returning to an inorganic state. It is a psychological state that Freud associates with the tendency to repeat, destroy, and ultimately return to an earlier inorganic condition (Freud 1923/1927, p. 55).

The contradictory actions of an individual that appear self-serving are also acts of destruction, affecting the community, social bonds, and ultimately the individual's own moral and social position. In this sense, the action of betrayal and its consequences in the play *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror* can be read alongside Freud's death drive. But the two concepts are not treated as identical. Rather, Xunzi helps explain the natural tendency toward disorder, while Freud helps illuminate the destructive psychological dimension through which such tendencies may be enacted. This echoes Freud's view that humans possess destructive and aggressive tendencies, which he connects with the death instinct and its manifestations into aggression and self-destruction (Freud 1923/1927, p. 55).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Betrayal of Community: Vulnerable Characters Swayed by Colonial Planters' Oppression

In the play *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror*, the oppressive condition and the struggle for power among the different groups of people begins as a result of colonial ill-practice of the British rulers. That also leads to the internal or psychological conflicts regarding leadership, decision making and the fair distribution of resources among the indigo farming community or the 'oppressed' group. The primary barrier to uniting the oppressed group arises from an unhealthy and immoral competition among some members of the exploited community (Marx and Engels 2010, p. 35). Their pursuit of personal gain and influence in the face of colonial oppression creates prolonged tension and rivalries among farmers and others within the same group. This ultimately leads to undermining their

collective resistance and welfare by choosing what is 'unfair'. The hierarchical system resulting from the colonial practice provides that ground of clashes and betrayals within the oppressed group and exposes how natural tendencies toward self-interest can become destructive when they are not restrained by moral and social discipline. In this context, Xunzi's philosophy helps explain the tendency toward profit, desire, rivalry, and disorder, while Freud's psychoanalysis helps explain how these tendencies operate through desire, moral conflict, fear, guilt, and self-preservation. Consequently, certain individuals align themselves with the dominant colonial authorities, driven by fear, desperation, or the hope of personal gain. In stressful or threatening circumstances, the most "primitive parts" of their brain become active (Greene 2018, p. 34), negatively affecting the power of reasoning and revealing the hidden flaws of human nature. Thus, the dark isn't solely tied to the immorality or evil humans possess in them, but also reflects human experience encompassing the difficult and "dark places" humans encounter as individuals (Breyer, 2019, p. 5).

4.2 Characters of the Amin and the Dewan

Some of the characters in the play *Nil Durpan* are found to be in such compromising positions with the English planters as a direct influence of dominance and power dynamics. And these situations of oppression can drive individuals to adopt destructive paths in search of purpose of navigating their circumstances (Bickett 2023, p. 3). In the first act, the Amin or the land measurer assigned by the planters (P. P. Rouge and J. J. Wood) had given his own sister in the hands of the planters for getting a "peshkar's (overseer's) post" (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 8). This morally questionable incident reveals that certain individuals align themselves with the wishes and directives of the plantation owners for gaining a privileged position in the elevated realm of human hierarchy. In addition, by offering his sister to the planters for a mere overseer's post, the Amin reveals a selfish and morally corrupt nature. His willingness to sacrifice familial bonds for personal gain underscores Xunzi's claim that humans, without moral discipline, will pursue base desires at the expense of virtue. His conduct particularly reflects Xunzi's argument that the natural desire for profit and advancement can lead to conflict and moral disorder when it is not restrained by cultivated virtue. Their desire for this elevated status compels them to pursue the most wicked, corrupt, and unjust methods, even adopting offensive and criminal actions. That is why, the Amin is referred to as "tiger" and "villain" by Ray Churn (Goluk Basu's neighbour) who comes to "devour" him on the planters' behalf (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 6).

From a Freudian perspective, the Amin's action can further be understood through the conflict between instinctual desire stemming from the id, and the moral restraint. His pursuit of personal advancement reflects the pleasure-seeking tendency of the id, which does not itself consider moral or societal constraints. His pleasure principle dominates, resulting in selfish and destructive behavior. The psychological significance of his action therefore lies not simply in labelling him as evil, but in showing how the desire for immediate personal advancement can overshadow moral, social and familial obligations. Their animalistic behaviour showcases the fact that the drives coming from the unconscious mind can contribute to "a particular kind of degeneration." (Freud 1920, p. 240). The collaboration of natives like the Amin facilitates the expansion of the planters' malevolent influence. This is evident in Torapa's (a native Muslim peasant) speech in the first scene of the second act in Mitra's play-

This is merely the scheming of the wicked Amin. Does the Saheb possess complete knowledge of the land? This fool acts like a vengeful dog; when he comes across valuable land, he immediately informs the Saheb. (1861/1958, p. 30)

This statement encapsulates Amin's ungrateful and heinous conduct driven solely by his self-interest. Torapa knows that the English planters cannot know every single detail about what goes on regarding the lands, it is some natives themselves who willingly submit to their dominant part for the greed of gaining something. Thus, the Amin becomes an example of how the Xunzian tendency toward profit is psychologically expressed through the pursuit of personal advancement, while the colonial system provides the circumstances in which that tendency can be rewarded and transformed into betrayal.

Gopi Churn Das, also known as the Dewan in the play, is another character who aligns himself with the opposing group. He has played a destructive role by discouraging rice cultivation and promoting indigo growth on land that

has been in the family of Goluk Chunder Basu for seven generations (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 10). Discouraging rice cultivation and promoting indigo farming to benefit the colonial agenda, the Dewan is also found prioritizing personal advancement over communal welfare. His rivalry with the Amin further demonstrates unrestrained envy and ambition in pursuit of personal advancement, which Xunzi sees as the root of societal chaos (Breyer 2019, p. 10). His character therefore demonstrates more clearly how the desire for personal advancement can develop into rivalry and competition within the oppressed community itself.

There are others constantly competing for the planters' favour, such as the Apprentice in the first scene of the fifth act. He attempts to flatter Mr. Wood, to which Gopi remarks that it is futile as there are currently no job openings available (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 85). Even the servants of the planters themselves envy each other in their quest for more attention. In the first scene of the third act, the Dewan speaks ill of Amin to one of the planters in the hope of securing a more favorable position, both the posts of Dewanny and Amin's responsibilities. He plots against Amin by exploiting planter that the Amin is a failure as a servant. (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 48). These incidents show that the colonial hierarchy creates an environment in which personal advancement becomes dependent upon competing for the favour of the dominant authority. Xunzi's philosophy explains this competition through the natural tendency toward profit and advantage, while Freud's theory helps illuminate the psychological desire for recognition, security, and gratification that sustains such competition.

The words are spoken by Gopi Churn or the Dewan with the Native jailer when talking about his contributions in sending goluk basu inside prison.

"A person is considered very expert by the Saheb, if he can bring about the ruin of many. One becomes a good physician by the death of one hundred patients." (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 45).

This is said by Dewan who is working against his own community that is oppressed by the English colonizers. He means that by bringing ruin to many of his own community, he gets appreciation from saheb or the colonizers. But the ruin is not limited to others ruin only. By acting against his own people, Dewan unconsciously moves toward his own ruin, as his betrayal alienates him from both his community and possibly the colonizers once his utility is exhausted. His behaviour therefore reveals a conflict between the immediate satisfaction gained from colonial recognition and the destructive consequences of that satisfaction. This stems from his unconscious death drive or the Thanatos. As it is seen in the third act first scene how he condemns the Planters for showing him *Shamchand* (a leather strap to beat) or even kicking him when he says or does anything inconvenient to the Planters (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 45). Thus, it is a hint that they are putting their existence at risk by themselves.

Thanatos is particularly relevant here because Freud associates the death drive with destructive tendencies that may be directed outward toward others as well as inward toward the self. Dewan's actions, which contribute to the ruin of his community, signify a deep-seated destructive drive aimed at dismantling collective progress. Hence, the death-drive perpetuates cycles of harm by ultimately serving the pleasure principle (Mills 2006, p. 379). Dewan's betrayal reinforces colonial dominance, which in turn ensures the continued subjugation and suffering of his community, a destructive loop. At the same time, his own humiliation at the hands of the planters reveals the self-destructive consequence of his pursuit of their favour. Thus, his alignment with the planters and manipulations against the Amin reflect the id's pursuit of power and recognition along with Freud's concept of the death drive that manifests in his self-destructive path, betraying his community and remaining dependent upon the very colonial authority that humiliates him.

After getting disrespect and physical abuse Dewan questions his condition as a result of his own choice -

"A person becomes the Dewan of an indigo planter after being born a vulture seven hundred times. Else how are numberless kicks dealt by legs wearing stockings digested?" (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 88).

This statement represents his state of guilt that shows his entire unconscious is not repressed. But in the play, he is never found to be explicitly seeking forgiveness to those whom he harmed, which shows that unconscious does not always coincide with what is repressed that keeps affecting the external behaviour (Freud 1923/1927, p. 17). His reflection instead reveals an awareness of the contradiction between his desire for advancement and the humiliating consequences of his decision. As a result, the Dewan's reflection on his condition signals guilt deriving from the superego's judgment. However, this guilt remains repressed or unresolved, manifesting as a conflict between his moral awareness and his continued participation in the oppressive system. Thus they illustrate the fact that humans are easily driven by their impulses tending to exhibit unsocialized and irrational behavior (Abdul Razak and Ismail 2013, p. 124). The Dewan therefore demonstrates how a natural tendency toward personal advantage, identified by Xunzi, can become psychologically complicated by guilt and moral awareness, as explained by Freud.

4.3 Character of Podi Moyrani

Podi Moyrani is another character who betrays her own community for financial security from the English planters. Her character presents the psychological conflict more explicitly because she is more conscious of the moral consequences of her actions than the others, while simultaneously being threatened by the colonial power. So, it becomes more disgraceful when she does it knowingly with her all senses-

Podi: Can the mother, with a firm heart, give such a golden deer into the grasp of the tiger? ... How detestable is this, that for the sake of money I have given up my caste and my religion; and also am obliged to touch the bed of a Buno (rude tribe) (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 37).

She is also the one who directed four club-men to kidnap Khetromony (the daughter of the neighbor of Goluk Basu's family) (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 53). Despite being a woman herself, she did not hesitate to offer another woman's honour to the Planter in exchange for money, knowing well that he would commit a physical violation without her consent.

These tendencies of betrayal deepen internal conflicts and undermine the solidarity of the oppressed group. As a result, the formerly or currently oppressed individuals seem to have adopted the ways of their oppressors. They acquire the knowledge of how to undermine their own communities and act as tyrants (Kincaid 1988. P. 34), perceiving this as a simpler means to preserve their status and assert control over others within their group.

However, she tries to confront by rationalizing her action as the only way to survive, as she states-

Is it through my own choice that I am leveling the axe at my feet by giving the young women to Saheb? (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 37).

She repeats such self-justification several times-

Religion or caste I have none. What can I do, my daughter? It is very hard to extricate oneself from a Saheb's clutches (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 57).

Her words, from Xunzi's philosophical perspective, somehow posits her in contrast to the Amin and the Dewan, that reflects a struggle to maintain moral integrity under extreme circumstances. While her character may face temptations to align with the oppressors, her resistance underscores the potential for cultivating virtue to overcome base instincts. Her self-questioning demonstrates that the natural tendency toward self-interest does not eliminate moral awareness. Rather it creates a conflict between personal survival and moral responsibility. From human nature's external demand of rightness, even the follower of a chaotic school can turn his mind sincere and try to "better his condition " (de Bary and Bloom 1999, p. 177). Thus, her resilience stems from a disciplined effort to align her actions with moral and societal good rather than personal gain (de Bary and Bloom 1999, p. 181)

From Freudian perspective, her self-questioning shows that the unconscious is quite capable of becoming conscious activating the defense mechanism that leads to temporary awareness of repressed guilt (Freud 1923/1927, p. 11). Her self-questioning can therefore be understood as the emergence of moral conflict into conscious awareness. As a result, she tries to find a rational explanation for her very irrational and unrighteous action. From her guilt she pleads to the planter to leave Khetromony for that day. But this is for the time being and she leaves khetromony to the planter as soon as she is threatened by him (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 57), which means she is back to her unconsciously desired state. When she abandons Khetromony once she is threatened, her immediate need for safety appears to override her moral objections. This reveals the conflict between her desire for self-preservation, her moral awareness, and the demands of external reality. Additionally, when she abandons Khetromony once she is threatened, the id's survival instincts overpower the ego's reality principle and the superego's moral imperatives. Freud's theory suggests that in moments of extreme danger, the pleasure principle rooted in self-preservation can dominate, prioritizing immediate safety over ethical considerations. Thus, rationalizing or justifying a wrongdoing does not necessarily lead to a rightful action (Freud 1920, p. 250). Her rationalization therefore shows the psychological mechanism through which an individual attempts to reconcile an ethically troubling action with the need for survival. They do it just to defend their immoral activities. So in the end, actively repressing the guilt instead of acknowledging it means that she is putting her unethical disposition back to the unconscious, perpetuating the evil nature. It brings nothing but harm to the society.

Her repeated involvement in destructive actions can also be associated with Freud's concept of the death drive, particularly because destructive behaviour is repeated despite its harmful consequences. The significance of Thanatos here does not lie in claiming that Podi consciously desires destruction, but in showing how unresolved psychological conflict can contribute to the repetition of harmful behaviour. This cycle of harm affects not only herself but also her community, showing how the death drive can push individuals to act against societal values and moral principles, leading to devastating outcomes.

Again, following Xunzi's philosophy, another contributing factor to why individuals from the exploited group might adopt negative traits could be the absence of a morally upright leader, mentor, or guide capable of nurturing the goodness and positive aspects of human nature. In the play, the characters who follow the English planters thus cannot hold onto the goodness because they follow some evils and their immoral actions. For Xunzi, however, moral goodness requires deliberate cultivation through education, guidance, and social institutions. In such circumstances, in the absence of role models of rightness, individuals are more likely to exhibit bias and a narrow perspective rather than uprightness (de Bary and Bloom 1999, p. 180). The colonial environment therefore becomes particularly significant because it weakens the possibility of such moral cultivation while simultaneously rewarding self-interest and submission to authority.

As a result, these characters discussed before become the "scimitars" while the Sahebs or the Planters are the "blacksmiths", a very well appropriate metaphor used by the Cowherd to Gopi in the first scene of the fifth act (Mitra 1861/1958, p. 83). This metaphor highlights how the colonists wielded authority and shaped the course of events and the personalities of these certain characters like blacksmiths holding the tools and to control and shape the situation, it becomes easy for them because of the compromising tendency of these characters for ascendancy. The metaphor is particularly significant because it connects the natural tendencies identified by Xunzi with the psychological vulnerabilities described by Freud. The "scimitars" possess tendencies that can be directed toward harmful ends, while the "blacksmiths" represent the colonial power capable of shaping and exploiting those tendencies. Thus, the planters do not create every selfish desire found within the oppressed characters, rather they exploit existing desires for profit, security, recognition, and advancement and direct them against the community.

4.4 Favouritism and Concealment of Injustices by Native Newspaper Editors

Another important issue is the native newspapers that contribute to the power dynamics and injustice by adopting the way of discrepancy. Though not a direct and broader part of the fictional story, the editors of the newspapers

are addressed in the preface of the play rather than presented as characters within its dramatic action of *Nil Durpan*. The author Dinabandhu Mitra himself condemns the editors for being immensely biased-

The editors of two daily newspapers are filling their columns with your praises; ... What surprising power of attraction silver has! ... what wonder then, if the proprietors of two newspapers, becoming enslaved by the hope of gaining one thousand rupees, throw the poor helpless of this land into the terrible grasp of your mouth. (1861/1958, p. xvi)

He mourns that the surprising power of 'silver' is driving the native newspaper editors to write their columns with praises for satisfying the Colonists. If newspapers unquestioningly serve the interests of dominants or powerful entities, it can have detrimental effects on human emancipation and society as a whole. Journalism is meant to play a crucial role in informing the public about the real occurrences, promoting transparency, holding power accountable, and contributing to a well-functioning democracy. When newspapers become enslaved to certain interests, they may compromise their independence, objectivity, and the ability to provide unbiased information. This situation can limit the diversity of viewpoints, stifle dissent, and perpetuate narratives that serve the dominant powers.

From Freudian perspective of psychoanalysis, the actions of the editors, motivated by the "surprising power of silver," reflect the dominance of the id over the superego, constantly denying the morality and societal norms. Their actions can be understood as the prioritization of immediate material need over the ethical responsibility associated with representing their own community. Mitra further elaborates this by expressing sorrow over the fact that even those regarded as morally upright individuals could not resist the temptation of monetary gain. They exhibited disloyalty and treason towards their own preceptor. For which he exemplifies how Judas, a disciple of Jesus Christ betrayed his own master Christ for the "sake of thirty rupees" (Mitra 1861/1958, p. xvi). Thus the id, driven by primal urges and self-interest, represents the evil disposition of the newspaper editors prioritizing monetary gain over their ethical duty of transparent social representation.

This view again, parallels Xunzi's argument that human actions are often motivated by external things or material gain rather than moral considerations (Breyer 2019, p. 8). In the play *Nil Durpan*, Gopi Churn tells the planters that those newspapers that write against the injustice of the English colonizers are brought under the influence of the colonial planters with "great expense" (Mitra 1861/1958, 48). Therefore, Newspaper also contribute to the social destruction of the society it represents. The newspaper editors therefore provide an institutional example of the same tendency demonstrated by the individual characters in the play. The newspaper media of a particular society should align itself with the collective interests of humanity instead of engaging in betrayal. Even if not through visible external forces, the evil intentions of someone or any institution are also defined as the Evil (Perret 2002, p. 305).

This portrayal emphasizes the capacity for individuals to act against their own communities or mentors driven by selfish desires, reflecting a troubling facet of human nature. This perspective recognizes that personal interests should not be prioritized at the expense of the greater good or the well-being of others. But when individuals prioritize personal interests over collective well-being and resistance against dominant power structures, it can contribute to the perpetuation of systemic issues and the deepening of the crisis in humanity. Here, Xunzi and Freud again present two different dimensions of the same behaviour.

This shows in fact how loose morals human beings have and how they are more likely to be corrupted with certain situations and own interests. The examples therefore suggest that human beings possess tendencies toward self-interest that can become morally destructive when activated by particular circumstances. It worsens when all human actions, even those that appear selfless, are found to be driven by self-interest at their core (Carlson et al. 2020, p. 9). It is the way how the moral sense of human beings comes under question and becomes a subject to criticism.

5. Conclusion

This interdisciplinary analysis of *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror* through the lenses of Freudian psychoanalysis and Xunzi's philosophical insights has revealed the complex dynamics of self-interest, psychological conflict, self-preservation, and societal betrayal within the colonial framework of the oppressed community. The study of the betraying characters presented in the play demonstrates how the natural tendencies of human beings toward profit, personal advantage, and self-interest can become destructive when they remain unrestrained by moral cultivation. At the same time, Freud's psychoanalytic framework exposes the unconscious drives, internal conflicts, and defense mechanisms through which these tendencies are expressed, negotiated, rationalized, or suppressed. Xunzi's philosophy therefore provides a philosophical explanation of the characters' inclination toward self-interest, and Freud's psychoanalysis helps picturise the psychological processes through which such tendencies operate within individuals.

The characters betraying their own community embody this intersection of natural tendencies and psychological conflict. The discussion throughout the paper has shown that their actions are not only the result of external colonial pressures or manifestations of their natural evil tendencies. Instead, their behaviour results from the interaction between their self-interested tendencies, psychological drives, moral conflicts, and the oppressive conditions in which they exist. The Amin, the Dewan, Podi Moyrani, and the newspaper editors demonstrate different manifestations of this conflict such as the pursuit of status and profit, the struggle for self-preservation, the suppression and rationalization of guilt, and the prioritization of material gain over communal responsibility. Colonial oppression works as a catalyst that intensifies these tendencies by designing a particular circumstance in which personal security and advancement can be gained through cooperation with the dominant power. Thus, this interdisciplinary application of Xunzi and Freud demonstrates that the betrayals represented in *Nil Durpan or the Indigo Planting Mirror* result from the interaction between human tendencies and psychological processes within a coercive social structure. Xunzi's concept of the naturally self-interested human disposition and Freud's account of unconscious drives and psychic conflict together reveal how individuals can become participants in the oppression of their own community while at the same time experiencing internal moral and psychological conflict. Therefore, by incorporating psychological and philosophical perspectives, this study exposes the existing tensions between human desires, moral responsibility, and the need for ethical cultivation, specifically when oppressive social conditions intensify humanity's inclination toward self-interest and disorder.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ORCID iD: 0009-0001-1421-4451

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure: The authors declare that no artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

References

- [1] Abdul Razak, M. A., & Ismail, N. A. H. (2013). A critical appraisal of Freud's ideas on man and personality. *Journal of Islam in Asia*, 10(1), 122–150. <https://doi.org/10.31436/jia.v10i1.385>
- [2] Althusser, L. (2014). *On the reproduction of capitalism: ideology and ideological state apparatuses* (G. M. Goshgarian, Trans.). Verso. (Original work published 1995)
- [3] Banerjee, G. (2021). Dissecting a "radical" literature: A critical study of the play "Neel Durpan." *Lapis Lazuli: An International Literary Journal*, 11(1), 1–13.
- [4] Banerjee, S. (2016). Who, or what, is Victorian? Ecology, indigo, and the transimperial. *Victorian Studies*, 58(2), 223–233. <https://doi.org/10.2979/victorianstudies.58.2.03>
- [5] Bickett, T. A. (2023). The psychology of the nature of evil: Evaluating the evil within us all. *International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities*, 15(1), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.7710/2168-0620.0359>
- [6] Breyer, D. (2019). *Understanding the dark side of human nature*. The Great Courses.

- [7] Carlson, R. W., Adkins, C., Crockett, M. J., & Clark, M. S. (2020). *Psychological selfishness*. OSF Preprints. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/jp27m>
- [8] de Bary, W. T., & Bloom, I. (Eds.). (1999). *Sources of Chinese tradition: From earliest times to 1600* (2nd ed., Vol. 1). Columbia University Press.
- [9] Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: An introduction* (R. Hurley, Trans., Vol. 1). Pantheon Books. (Original work published 1976)
- [10] Freud, S. (1920). *A general introduction to psychoanalysis* (G. Stanley Hall, Trans.). Boni and Liveright.
- [11] Freud, S. (1927). *The ego and the id* (J. Riviere, Trans.). Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1923)
- [12] Freud, S. (1961). *Beyond the pleasure principle* (J. Strachey, Trans.). W. W. Norton. (Original work published 1920)
- [13] Greene, R. (2018). *The laws of human nature*. Viking.
- [14] Guha, R. (1974). Neel-Darpan: The image of a peasant revolt in a liberal mirror. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2(1), 1–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066157408437914>
- [15] Gupta, A. (2018). Indigo and print: The case of the "Indigo-Planting Mirror." In S. Chaudhuri et al. (Eds.), *Commodities and culture in the colonial world* (pp. 163–174). Routledge.
- [16] Islam, N. (2021). *The Blue monkey in Golden Bengal: Understanding the colonial policy and social conditions of the Indigo Rebellion's peasant* [Master's thesis, Linnaeus University].
- [17] Kincaid, Jmamaica. (1988). *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, Strauss.
- [18] Lafmejani, A. Q. (2020). The human in the perspective of Freud and its comparison with the Shiite Islam perspective. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 4, 84–93. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v4i1.65>
- [19] Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2010). *Manifesto of the Communist Party and its genesis* (A. Blunden, Ed.). Marxists Internet Archive.
- [20] Mills, J. (2006). Reflections on the death drive. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 23(2), 373–382. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0736-9735.23.2.373>
- [21] Mitra, D. (1958). *Nil Durpan; or, the Indigo Planting Mirror: A drama* (M. M. Dutt, Trans.; S. Pradhan & S. Sen Gupta, Eds.). Eastern Trading Company. (Original work published 1861)
- [22] Perrett, R. W. (2002). Evil and human nature. *The Monist*, 85(2), 304–319. <https://doi.org/10.5840/monist200285220>
- [23] Yang, H. (2023). Contrasting and exploring the "evil human nature" in Chinese and Western thought: A comparative analysis of Xunzi and Augustine. *Communications in Humanities Research*, 11, 276–281. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/11/20231464>
- [24] Zhang, S. (2020). Psychoanalysis: The influence of Freud's theory in personality psychology. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Mental Health and Humanities Education (ICMHHE 2020)* (Vol. 433, pp. 229–232). Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200425.051>