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## **Echoes of Resistance: *Kesari Chapter 2* as a Counter-Orientalist Act of Reclamation in a Post-Truth Landscape**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper analyses the film *Kesari Chapter 2* (2025) directed by Karan Singh Thyagi, a historical courtroom drama inspired from the life of Sir Chettur Shankaran Nair and the aftermath of Jallianwala Bagh massacre through the lens of counter-orientalism and post-truth narrative. By applying Edward Said's criticism of Orientalism as a starting point, the research looks at how the movie challenges colonial historiography by giving more weight to indigenous points of view and changing how we remember history. Following a chronological logic, the film analysis moves from the historical event of colonial violence, to its cinematic retelling through fictionalisation and post-truth elements, and finally to its larger ideological significance as a counter-orientalist act of resistance. While the film deviates significantly from historical records, it reclaims narrative sovereignty by presenting an alternative account that confronts imperial narratives and asserts Indian resistance. In an era increasingly influenced by selective but emotionally charged reconstructions of history, the paper examines the ethical and historiographical conflicts between artistic freedom and factual distortion. The analysis ultimately reveals that *Kesari Chapter 2* is a cinematic act of reclamation, complicating the relationship between history, fiction, and national identity.

**Keywords:** Post-Truth Narrative, Counter-Orientalism, Historical Fiction, Cultural Memory, Historical Revisionism, Emotional Truth vs Factual Accuracy

### **Introduction**

“This disproportionate severity of punishment inflicted upon the unfortunate people and method of carrying it out is without parallel in the history of civilized govt.” (*“Jallianwala Bagh”*) wrote Rabindra Nath Tagore the noble laureate while returning knighthood after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, one of the most horrifying and politically consequential events of British colonial rule in India. The event, in which more than a thousand unarmed civilians were slain after General Dyer ordered army troops to fire on a crowd of civilians who were trapped in a garden, has been inscribed into the Indian national psyche as a symbol of colonial cruelty and resistance. The colonial records suppress the crime indulged in by Dyer's act and document it as an inevitable military operation to take

down an insurrection. Some narratives talk about the brutality and the moral outrage it caused. Artistic portrayals, especially in Indian cinema, have also had a big impact on how people remember the events. Recent films such as *Kesari Chapter 2* (2025), directed by Karan Singh Tyagi, reinterpret the aftermath of the slaughter by incorporating dramatised court proceedings and fictionalised accounts of resistance, although being based on actual events. This film adaptation focuses on Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair, a prominent Indian attorney and nationalist. The cinematic adaptation portrays a legal dispute with British officials that, although largely inspired by the 1924 defamation trial between Nair and Michael O'Dwyer, drastically deviates from historical accuracy. It is in this way the film integrates authentic historical elements with fictional courtroom drama, provoking intricate enquiries over cinematic veracity, nationalism, and postcolonial justice.

This paper explores *Kesari Chapter 2* through the lens of counter-orientalism, a theoretical mode that resists the colonial gaze and reclaims narrative sovereignty. Taking advantage of Edward Said's critique of the West's fabricated representation of the Orient, the paper analyses how the film seeks to undermine imperialist historiography by amplifying indigenous perspectives, although through fictitious liberties. The study also examines the ramifications of post-truth narrative, questioning whether artistic liberty can legitimise historical misrepresentation in the quest for nationalistic emotion.

### **Theoretical Framework**

With the 1978 publication of the book *Orientalism*, Edward Said proposed the concept of Orientalism, which critiques the way in which the Western narratives saw the East as acquiescent, submissive and inferior. The study involves how the Orient is viewed, stereotyped and thereby dominated by the Occident or the West. This systematic portrayal justified colonial domination, where the knowledge creation was intricately linked to power. As the excerpt "Knowledge of the Orient... was part of an overall campaign of control and accumulation" (Said 273), says the consciousness about the orient was used as a tool for control and to accumulate power. This information influenced the Western perception and engagement with these regions, frequently strengthening existing power relations. In response to the concept of Orientalism, Counter-Orientalism emerges as a strategy for contesting and overturning colonial depictions by emphasising indigenous perspectives and opposing Western narrative dominance. In the world of postcolonial cinema, this kind of thinking is quite useful for looking at how films change or challenge historical and cultural representations that were forced on people by colonial authorities.

*Kesari Chapter 2* portrays through Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair the Indian agency and resistance, which goes against common ideas about colonialism and Western views of India to illustrate Indian points of view and independence. Even though the movie makes up events, its story goal is the same as those of counter-orientalists: to take back control of the historical record and reject imperialist history. However, the film also operates within what some critics call a post-truth cultural moment, which is not simply a claim that truth is dead; it is the assertion that emotional resonance matters more than factual accuracy. Alternative realities, based on emotions and perception rather than facts/data, are amplified by modern

tools. These tools block access to fact-checking sources while boosting lies to spread rapidly and persist online. This creates a paradox where things seem both possible and impossible. The issue brings up important moral questions about the conflict between reclaiming representation and changing historical facts to fit nationalistic stories.

### ***Kesari Chapter 2: A Critical Analysis***

*Kesari Chapter 2* looks back at the mostly untold story of Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair, the Indian nationalist and legal luminary who took on the British Empire in a landmark defamation trial on the 106th anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Directed by Karan Singh Tyagi and starring Akshay Kumar, the movie brings to life the courtroom battle that questioned colonial impunity and sought justice for imperial atrocities. The film, based on the book *The Case That Shook the Empire: One Man's Fight for the Truth about the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (2019)* by Raghu Palat and Pushpa Palat-Nair's great-grandson and great-granddaughter-in-law, respectively-reimagines a neglected chapter of India's freedom struggle, providing a strong mix of historical inspiration and nationalistic storytelling. Through the prism of counter-orientalism, the following analysis looks at how the movie deals with history, representation, and ideology.

#### **1. Representation of colonial violence**

The film *Kesari Chapter 2* opens with an evocative dramatisation of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Despite having higher emotional stakes, this incident highlights colonial brutality and portrays British imperialism as unrepentantly violent. The decision to use vivid imagery to portray the massacre—such as stranded civilians leaping into the ground's well to avoid gunfire and indiscriminate shooting akin to hunting a pack of animals—aligns with a counter-orientalist goal: it challenges the sanitised explanations provided by colonial historiography, which frequently defend the massacre as an act of necessary military suppression. The scene's minimalistic visuals and sound design heighten its emotional impact. Muffled cries, a child's wail, and gunfire echo dimly lit shots of bodies piled in narrow alleys. These components demonstrate what critic Laura Mulvey refers to as the "cinematic unconscious," which is a technique for accessing collective trauma through sound and visuals. *Kesari Chapter 2* is an act of cinematic reclamation because it chooses to ground the moral urgency of the film in the memory of colonial violence. It seeks to restore the dignity of those who have been silenced in official records in addition to portraying injustice. This collective trauma serves as the moral and emotional catalyst for Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair's resistance throughout the remainder of the movie. The film thus offers a nationalistic perspective that focuses on Indian suffering and moral outrage by making this cruelty viscerally visible.

#### **2. Fictionalisation and the Post-Truth Narrative**

Although *Kesari Chapter 2* is based on the actual defamation trial between Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair and Michael O'Dwyer in 1924, the movie deviates significantly from historical accuracy, crafting a cinematic experience that thrives on emotional catharsis and nationalist sentiment. The post-truth narrative, which emphasises emotional appeal over historical accuracy in forming public perception, can be used to understand this purposeful fictionalisation. As philosopher Lee McIntyre notes, "Post-truth is not simply about saying things that aren't true. It's about a cultural condition where appeals to emotion and personal

belief are more influential than objective facts” (McIntyre 13). This is clear in *Kesari Chapter 2*, where British characters are frequently presented as caricatured villains, court scenes are exaggerated for dramatic effect, and Nair's legal strategies are simplified. For instance, in one climactic scene, Nair declares in court: "Yeh Jaanwaron Ka Jhund Ab Desh Banne Jaa Raha Hei. Aur Yeh Jaanwar ab cheekhega nahi, Khuryega." (This herd of animals is going to become a country. And these animals will no longer scream. They will roar.) This statement serves as a culminating addition to Nair's earlier declaration that the British view Indians as a herd of animals who will only scream. This line, while fictitious, is emblematic of the film's strategy to fuse personal resistance with collective nationalist emotion.

According to historical accounts, Nair's actual trial featured a rigorous legal procedure and a more complex defence against the defamation allegation. The movie, on the other hand, depicts courtroom drama with booming monologues and straightforward moral disputes that were uncommon in colonial courtrooms. The way post-truth film creates 'emotional truths', narratives that may not be factually correct but seem true in the collective memory are best illustrated by such embellishments. But this is more than just entertainment distortion. According to Hayden White, all historical narratives are necessarily constructed, emplotted, and interpreted through language and perspective (White). According to this interpretation, the film's deviations are more about regaining representational authority than they are about lying. *Kesari Chapter 2* dramatises a historical injustice by fictionalising some aspects of it. This awakens modern moral outrage, which is a technique frequently employed in postcolonial storytelling to evoke emotion as a means of cultural resistance. The filmy portrayal of history in *Kesari Chapter 2* raises moral issues because it might put spectacle over reality, which could change the way people see the real events. Such an approach can possibly create a selectively curated historical memory, where people who are not aware of the accuracy behind the events believe that the dramatisation is true. The movie also uses fiction to support patriotic goals by altering history to fit in those goals and putting emotional impact ahead of the historical accuracy. Such behaviour eventually aids counter-orientalism's objective, but it makes it hard to tell the difference between historical revisionism and empowerment. This raises questions about the ethics of making films about history.

### **3. Counter-Orientalist Reclamation and Nationalist Framing**

The movie *Kesari Chapter 2* uses a counter-orientalist approach by putting Indian agency and resistance front and centre, especially through the character of Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair. The movie takes back control of the story by showing Nair not just as a subject of colonial rule, but as a strong legal mind who isn't afraid to take on the empire in its own courtroom. This resistance fits with Edward Said's criticism of Orientalism, where taking back your voice and power becomes a political act. The courtroom becomes a symbolic space of confrontation, with fictional dialogues like "Ab aap mujhe disbar kijiye, phansi pe chadaiye, ya goli maar dijiye... par ek baat meri dhyaan se sun lijiyega.. Get the [expletive] out of my country!" (Now you can disbar me, hang me to death, or shoot me with a bullet... but listen to one thing of mine very carefully. Get out of my country) dramatizing the moral rot of the colonial regime and the subsequent frustration from the Indian People. The movie has a lot of constructed conversations like this one, but they are part of the movie's

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larger goal of narrative sovereignty, which is to convey an indigenous perspective on imperial history.

Additionally, the film also turns the colonial spectacle on its head by changing the way people look at it. Instead of showing British people as civilising heroes, it shows them in the context of the moral decline of the empire. The colonial judiciary, General Dyer, and O'Dwyer are all shown to be part of a system that makes violence seem reasonable and refuses to take responsibility. This change isn't just a way to get people to feel something; it's a movie version of the archive. The story doesn't come from British sources; it comes from Indian memory and moral perspective. But this reclamation is closely linked to a nationalist agenda, which can be seen in the way it sounds and is delivered. Akshay Kumar plays Nair in a stylised way that emphasises stoic righteousness and cinematic grandeur, which adds to the image of the nationalist hero. The courtroom becomes a symbolic battlefield where Nair fights not only for justice but also for the soul of the country. These kinds of scenes fit into the larger goal of postcolonial cinema, which is to give a voice to resistance that colonial historiography has tried to erase.

### **Conclusion**

*Kesari Chapter 2* is not merely a cinematic portrayal of a legal battle between two sides, but it's a reclamation of the narrative space that colonial historiography has long held. The movie interlinks both real history with the fabricated incidents to present how Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair raised his voice against the British Empire. The film does its job by reimagining his resistance and showing how indigenous people can be powerful. By emphasising more Indian voices and lived experiences, the film aims to undermine Western narrative authority by analysing them from the angle of counter-orientalism. However, this narrative reclamation also carefully navigates the post-truth cultural environment, where sentimentality often outweighs accuracy. The dramatised dialogue and reconstructed trials, along with the naturally constructed sections of the movie, raise moral and historical questions, but they also serve the larger nationalistic objective of acknowledging forgotten heroes and changing the way we approach colonial history. The movie isn't historically accurate, but the emotional truths it evokes fit in completely with the postcolonial need to assert identity, agency, and justice. This is how *Kesari Chapter 2* shows how popular films can be both a political act and a cultural archive that can't be erased, remembers the past, and keeps up the fight against imposed silences in colonial discourse.

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