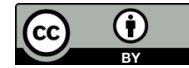


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Beckett in Bengal: Boring Futures and Non-arrival in Ashish Avikunthak's *Kalkimanthankatha*

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Abstract: This paper looks at *Kalkimanthankatha*, an adaptation of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, as an aesthetic object where the absurdist postwar 'tragicomic' play becomes an avant-garde film where two protagonists search for the mysterious messianic figure of Kalki, whose arrival, in Hindu mythology, marks the end of one temporal cycle [*yuga*]. God as absence and the boredom of waiting and non-arrival turns from direct translations of dialogue from the play; discussions on esoteric philosophical dilemmas like the value of inaction; acceptance of the unknowable; and ceaseless search as affirmative to faith; to conspiratorial speak on impending war marked by passages read from Mao's *Little Red Book* (published 1964) evoking the history of the Naxalite movement. This paper will look at how the *a priori* acknowledgment of the cyclical rather than linear structure of time ratifies the motif of uncertain and infinite repetition that marks the absurd quality of Beckett's work and ask: does the cyclical promise of the future as regeneration condemn its prospects to an absolute boredom? Does linear eschatology maintain certain circuitous elements—the coming/return of the messiah (in/as the/a future)—that enclose waiting and boredom as a way of life? Are boredom and waiting fundamental threads interlacing eschatological thoughts? Through this film, the paper will ask what happens to 'future/s' when this seemingly unanticipated encounter of contrarian positions and bodies of knowledge take place as sacred/profane, modernity/tradition, aesthetics/politics, linearity/circularity and to see how boredom plays a pivotal factor in shaping such thought, discourse, and understanding.

Keywords: future, time, boredom, aesthetics, politics, eschatology, postcolonialism.

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The end is in the beginning and yet you go on.
Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*

1. Introduction: Cinematic Transposition and Theological Recontextualization

This paper undertakes an examination of the cinematic transposition inherent in Ashish Avikunthak's *Kalkimanthankatha* (*The Churning of Kalki*, 2015), a filmic endeavor that engages in an intriguing and idiosyncratic adaptation of Samuel Beckett's formative theatrical work, *Waiting for Godot* (published 1952). The intention of this paper is to elucidate how Avikunthak's film not only endeavors to encapsulate the quintessence of Beckett's absurdist universe but also functions as a prismatic lens through which the multifaceted entanglements of temporality, faith, and the dialectic between tradition and modernity are interrogated. This paper attempts to show that this cinematic intervention metamorphoses into an aesthetic inquiry into the paradigm of divine absence—God as a conspicuous void—and the profound boredom that suffuses the act of interminable waiting, a boredom inextricably entwined with the anticipation of a not-yet-materialized but ostensibly inexorable future that simultaneously implicates the subsumption of the present.

In the realm of intercultural dialogue and artistic recontextualization, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* manifests a unique potential for transgeographical, translinguistic, and transcultural resonance. The play's sparse *mise-en-scène*—an old country road and an almost barren tree—its fundamental premise of two men navigating an apparent desolation in perpetual expectation of the elusive Godot, and its distinct yet amorphous dialogue, all contribute to its universal pertinence. The seventy-nine-minute film attempts a compelling metamorphosis of Beckett's postwar 'tragicomic' '*theatre of the absurd*'¹ into a postcolonial meditation on the inexorable arrival of future events, the phenomenology of waiting, and the inherent tedium that saturates this condition. Avikunthak, a filmmaker with a background in archaeology and social anthropology, accomplishes this transformation by interweaving ancient Indian philosophical and theological treatises—such as *akarma* (inaction), *anitya* (impermanence), *anirvachaniyata* (indeterminability), and *sunyata* (emptiness)—with Beckett's textual fabric and his broader philosophical, political, and often neglected theological oeuvre. The theological transfer, from Beckett to Avikunthak, as this paper opines, occurs through the prism of boredom with waiting as the main character of the play, the primary object and very principle dictating the tramps' lives.

Avikunthak's avant-garde cinematic approach offers an expansive scope to comprehend the two 'tramp'-protagonists, who embark upon a search for the elusive messianic figure Kalki—the tenth and ultimate avatar of Vishnu, a figure whose advent heralds the dissolution of one temporal epoch [*yuga*] and the resurgence of the next. This exploration necessitates grappling with the *a priori* recognition of cyclical temporality—an intellectual acknowledgment that venerates the motif of interminable, cyclical recurrence, emblematic of Beckett's absurdist ethos,

¹ The 'theatre of the absurd,' a term introduced by Martin Esslin in his 1960 book, refers to a dramatic movement from the 1940s to the 1960s that challenged traditional theatrical conventions. These plays, often called 'anti-plays,' emerged in response to the disillusionment following the World Wars, reflecting a world perceived as irrational and devoid of inherent meaning. Central themes include the breakdown of communication, the absurdity of existence, and the isolation of the individual. By emphasizing the inadequacies of language and often juxtaposing characters' actions with contradictory dialogue, the movement questioned the reliability of language as a tool for expressing the human experience.

which decisively interrogates the question of linear teleology of (certain) eschatological progression. The comparative study of religions, born in the crucible of colonial hegemony and Christian missionary undertakings (Chidester, 2003, 2013, 2019; Klostermaier, 1989; Webster, 1997) has been instrumental in unveiling the diverse modalities through which different cultures conceptualize history and temporality. Mircea Eliade's (1959) examination of the spiritual convictions and practices of 'archaic man' elucidates the profound divergence between ancient and contemporary worldviews, demonstrating how the degree of adherence to either linear or cyclical temporal frameworks shapes a community's eschatology; humanity's relationship to time and history; and (an) understanding of the end of the world based on the differentiations between the conceptualisations of sacred and profane. Generally, this entails either a radical cessation of the world or a rebirth that continues the cosmic narrative. Constant 'de-contextualization' is identifiably a persuasive quality of Beckett's play (Taylor-Batty and Taylor-Batty, 2013). The elusive and persistent presence of the divine, as well, presents an intriguing aspect, noticeable rather explicitly in the clever phonetic resemblance between 'Godot' and 'God,' blending elements from both French and English to create the word. D. Z. Phillips (1986) points out that the Beckettian text embodies a suspended Christian narrative where the struggle to recount the story of redemption in an era denuded of its apposite language ascertains that there's a clinching to the debris and refuge at hand as an infractible deportment against the prevalent authority of Gnostic modernity that leads to both the securing and undermining of its theological significance. Beckett's work often emplaces God conceptually within the masked theological processes of existentialism and poststructuralism. It can be said that the vacuum portrayed in Beckett's play—God as absence—is not a novel notion but one that is deeply rooted in theological traditions (Eagleton, 2012). In this context, the paper will also attempt to navigate the intricate dynamics of a cyclical promise of a regenerative future, considering its inevitable tethering to an interminable realm of boredom. The paper also contemplates and considers whether the linear eschatological framework, interwoven with cyclical motifs such as the 'return' of the messiah, creates an inescapable, labyrinthine structure where waiting and boredom become irrevocably intertwined. The analysis also attempts to unravel the foundational threads of waiting and boredom as essential components of eschatological thought transcending the boundaries of Eastern and Western ontological paradigms oscillating between cyclical and linear conceptions of time.

2. Adapting Beckett: Narrating by Way of Non-narration

Beckett's texts, particularly *Waiting for Godot* had from its earliest day struck a chord within Bengali as well as with the larger Indian cultural scene (Chakraborty, 2021; Chatterjee, 2017), capturing the attention of numerous playwrights and actors like Badal Sircar, Mohit Chattopadhyay, Girish Karnad, Dipak Majumdar, and Naseeruddin Shah to name a few. The ambiguity of the Beckettian text facilitates experimental re-imaginings without forcing the audience with specific contexts. The question of what/who is supposed to or going to come, for which the waiting is taking place, is deliberately left unresolved in the text/language, refusing to exchange the impossibly absurd moments portrayed in place of the comforts of deducible narrative while also questioning the very act of meaning-making. The absence of meaning here

is particularly not meaninglessness but the absurd, it's a deferral towards an interminable future that any endeavor to illustrate it frequently reveals the meaning proffered by the audience, critic, or adapter. The axial issue remains in the realm of understanding itself where the crisis of meaning emerges as a quandary regarding the facade, instead of a representation of a particular condition. Eric Levy (2001, 2003), in his analysis of Beckett's larger aesthetic oeuvre, articulates that it is pain that transcends the excess of meaning while seeking self-origination, specifically 'asiety,' a virtue fundamentally associated with God, which was also ascribed by Kant to the individual. The deliberate ambiguity of the text thus becomes the transformative formal scope of the Beckettian aesthetic text.

The mechanisms that shape aesthetic hierarchies, especially the global influences that affect the reception and adaptation of Beckett's texts in specific temporal and geographic contexts underscore the profound adaptability of his works. In Avikunthak's cinematic intervention, this resonance is magnified, revealing a broad spectrum of formalistic possibilities. *Kalkimanthankatha* does not merely offer a direct transliteration of Beckett's dialogic lexicon; instead, it embarks upon a cerebral expedition, stitched with esoteric dialogues of sprawling profundities that traverse the labyrinthine corridors of complex philosophical quandaries. The director not only transposes Beckett's narrative into a distinct cultural milieu but also infuses it with layers of meaning drawn from within the postcolonial experience and its historical antecedents. In the age of skepticism, it is especially observable that a correspondence between the tenuity and a range of works of fiction to the reclusion and apprehension towards ends and origins do take place (Kermode, 2020). The Beckettian stage doesn't forbid anything because its fundamental ideal is to disintegrate the boundaries of discourse and therefore, the tramps navigate a spectrum of emotions, realisations, concerns, and wonderings while parleying through spiteful jibes to expressions of care, (almost) conjugal intimacy and eccentric farces as they play out the 'theater of absurd' while a constant meaning deficit takes on its deliberate nature, going as far as recommending suicide as a way to pass/kill time. Hemmed within an existence bereft of profundity and meaningfulness and lodged within the sphere of only existence instead of an enclosing world, there is an underlining of abject futility which effectively depicts their lives, such lives, and the lives of those who wait (and search).

The perpetual anticipation of an awaited messiah or savior that has permeated collective imaginations across various religions and cultures throughout the breadth of history (App, 2011) can be located as Godot in Beckett or as Kalki in the film and the larger Hindu theological context. Kalki, the tenth and final incarnation of Vishnu, is believed to herald the end of the current yuga cycle, Kali Yuga² and initiate the resurgence of the next, Satya Yuga,³ marking the conclusion of one time cycle and the beginning of the next. Avikunthak combines the cyclical

² Kali Yuga, in Hinduism, is the fourth and final age in the Yuga Cycle, characterized by conflict, moral decay, and darkness. It is believed to be the current age, beginning with the death of Krishna, which marked the end of Dvapara Yuga. Often described as 'the age of vice and misery,' Kali Yuga is expected to culminate in a cataclysmic event, followed by the restoration of *dharma* by Kalki. References to Kali Yuga appear in texts such as the *Mahabharata*, *Manusmriti*, *Puranas*, and is also used for astronomical calculations in *Aryabhatiya* and *Surya Siddhanta*.

³ Satya Yuga, also known as Krita Yuga, is the first and most pristine of the four yugas in Hinduism's Yuga Cycle. It follows the Kali Yuga of the previous cycle and precedes Treta Yuga. Often called the 'Golden Age' or the 'age of truth,' Satya Yuga is marked by divine governance and a world where goodness and truth prevail. References to this era are found in Hindu texts such as the *Mahabharata*, *Manusmriti*, *Surya Siddhanta*, *Vishnu Smriti*, and various *Puranas*.

expectation associated with Kalki's eventuality and the fortitude of awaiting Godot. The profundity of Beckett's 'epistemological inquiries' (Hoffman, 1964), wherein the future is repetitious, eventual, and fundamentally not final is resurfaced in this adaptation and is contextualised against questions about violence, sexuality, caste, race, sexual violence, perversion, rape, communal violence, revolution, morality, ethics, thought, nationhood, prophecy, and love.

The film starts initially through direct translations of the text only to veer off course, constructing an idiosyncratic cinematic world by locating it within the mist-filled mythical off-stage of the Maha Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, a vast premodern spiritual confluence. By going to a specific location there is a definite presentation of a geographical backdrop which deviates from Beckett's deliberately vague setting but the different locations enframed in the film deliberately wear a mythical non-place like hue overlaid on it. As *Kalkimanthankatha* politicizes the wait and search for Kalki by lining it with a Maoist-Naxalite thesis, it wittingly or unwittingly engages with the many political readings of Godot as a play that reacts against the World Wars (Brereton, 1968). Following the prodigious outpouring of creative energy in the post-War period, which Beckett had referred to as the "siege in the room," (quoted in Gontarski, 2010, p. 135) his work underwent a conspicuous move "towards the apocalyptic and the eschatological" (quoted in Gontarski, 2010, p. 136). As Gontarski (2010) points out, throughout his body of work Beckett's sensibilities developed a trajectory which was shadowed by a fundamentally classical disposition that permeated the realm of High Modernism during the earlier half of the twentieth century and the prevailing spirit of post-war doom that marked the century since as well as his subsequent oeuvre. Transcendence and linear progression were eschewed, giving way instead to residual remnants, inherent limitations, and the essential incoherence and fragmentation that Beckett felt compelled to navigate in the post-War era. This finds resonance in *Avikunthak* as a fertile point to base his artistic reflection on and respond to the contemporary, through the medium of cinema and through adaptation as method where, in the opinion of this paper, the presence, role, and fact of boredom and waiting become irreducible though not necessarily apparent in their profundity.

Waiting lingers like a constant shadow in our lives, whether it's for the monsoons to break, a bus to appear, a salary to clear, a place in line at the bank, an appointment to commence, a lover to return, or even the end of days and the promise of the future. The act and experience of waiting is the condemned fate that is defined by endless labor, and a persistent bid to 'kill time' wherein actions are rendered lacking any purpose, resembling, almost in toto, Nietzsche's 'last man': a manifestation of the acme of existentialist traces that have allegedly absorbed Western eschatological thought (Valentine, 2009). It wouldn't be amiss to opine that with respect to the formulation of the characters' being(s)-as-waiting there is next to no opportunity for any authentic individuality and is instead marked by a complete indolence, embroiled in a barren life that still bears boredom as a Tolstoyesque 'desire for a desire.' There is thus a life-negating kind of brutality, reminiscent of that often found in Western eschatology and is also central to the larger Beckettian aesthetic text. This does indeed breed a kind of universalism. Regardless of the recursively benumbed and vacuous essence of their lives, the characters nevertheless retain a logic of purpose, despite how elusory or abstract it may be i.e. a search. There is a transpiration

within their existence only through the certitude that there is something that is being waited for—an incarnation; a promise; a war; a calamity; a future; an arrival; a destruction; another recreation. This underlines the fact that there is a resoluteness with respect to the questions of meaning and meaningfulness as fundamental, even within the scope of apparently meaningless circumstances. And it is within the creation of such an implicit feeling, experience, and understanding of boredom in waiting, as is the opinion of this paper, which echoes across this specific adaptation, in terms of both content and form.

The film's aesthetic choices—particularly its use of 16mm film for daylight sequences and digital media for nocturnal shots—serve as a formal manifestation of its thematic concerns with the dialectic of presence and absence, being and non-being. This hybrid visual language amplifies the film's exploration of the liminality inherent in the characters' quest for meaning. Avikunthak's anxiety over the sufficiency of digital as a cinematic medium, finds expression in the grainy texture that pervades the film, a deliberate choice that underscores the inherent tension between the materiality of film and the ephemerality of digital imagery. The film's score, a fusion of Western classical instrumentation and *ragas* from Hindustani classical music, further exemplifies the film's synthesis of diverse cultural forms, while the narrative itself unfolds through a process of spontaneous improvisation and painstaking, iterative editing over a span of two years. The film's visual language is crafted with distinctive signatures, leitmotifs, intertextual references, and artistic allusions. It transits from monochromatic depictions of desolate landscapes to vibrant bursts of color that allude to political undertones. The visual representations of revolution evolve into an almost hallucinatory reverie experienced solely by the tramps, who, as instruments of the text, are trapped within a crystallized temporal unit—be it the play, the film, the ages, or the *yuga*. They remain fundamentally isolated from an indifferent world, a condition both caused by and reflective of their own indifference. These interconnections receive a contemplative academic and artistic treatment as Avikunthak tries to employ “the sacred to arrive at the secular by profaning the religious mythology embedded in its subject” (Chatterjee, 2017).

Recurrent visual metaphors dislodged within *Kalkimanthankatha* behave as sites of convergence for the film's exploration of contemporary political Hinduism and the existential dilemmas of Beckettian absurdity—barren landscapes, unpopulated places, and water behave as spectral presences lodged within a continuum of ambiguity and disconsolateness (Figure 1). This, at once, simplifies and complicates the very expectations around the logics of grand narratives of political and spiritual search as culminatory. Such duality encapsulates broader tension between the tangible and the transcendental, the imminent and the elusive, that defines the film's engagement with the mythos of Kalki and the perpetual deferral of eschatological fulfillment. Boredom, in the way that it can be located in this adaptation may stem as much from that which is interesting, assuming, stimulating, or felicitous, to that which is distracting, disrupting, or amusing. The wait for the future, the end, the redemption, and the resurgence, intensifies the emptiness of boredom. Even the spiritual, political wait that the text alludes to does not relieve boredom but instead it populates the present as a device. This is manifest acutely in the formal realm of the text of the play and the adaptation in question. The boring design of the film demands a demonstrative and contemplative attentiveness to the visual regime that is being unraveled to the audience—the pacing, the set up, the framing design and technique, the music, all create an

atmosphere that is also parallelly derived from aesthetic moments and movements. A certain kind of boringness is demanded as a meditative, restorative, and contemplative anchor. Where Beckett interspersed the central banality with uproariously absurd humor, Avikunthak chooses to pierce it through deliberate techniques—linguistic and cinematic. Linguistically, Avikunthak's tramps grapple with the ineffable nature of their search through the deployment of a highly stylized and poetic register of Bangla which deliberately distances itself from colloquial speech that could command active cognitive engagement from the audience, which inordinately corresponds to Beckett's preoccupation with the limitations of language as stated above. On the level of cinematic technique this ranges from a deliberate nod to Ritwik Ghatak in the framing of the sprawling tree at the center of the frame in the beginning of the film or a quote from the Bengali poet Nabarun Bhattacharya's famous political poem *এই মৃত্যু উপত্যকা আমার দেশ না* (*This Valley of Death Is Not My Land*) to the stilled long shots of expansive landscapes or the empty excesses of an abandoned fairground or the shifting soundscapes which accompany the expansive landscapes or the jolt-like appearance of the tramps into the open landscapes as if teleported from somewhere else or the dead space and dead time which mark each frame.

Figure 1: The two *tramps* at the fairground of Kumbh at night



Source: film *Kalkimanthankatha*.

Avikunthak manages to tranquil the space and the time within his frames, even during the Kumbh Mela—one of the largest known gatherings of devotees that takes place every 12 years. This demand for meditative intervention is visually iterated through the particular scene of a haunting musical rendition of a *raga* that is inserted into the film as a deliberate aesthetic technique to arrest time, to confine it with awe (Figure 2). A gradual yet sudden shift in the screen occurs, from the grainy pockmarked gray of the screen into a vivid blue, with the singing body of a *saree*-clad woman seated under the lush giant tree with a tamboura in her hand as the tramps and the audience watch on. This tactic to make time captive to ephemeral beauty by way of

invoking the sound of singing and a tamboura proceeds into an intensification within the realm of spiritual/political boredom which inundates everything leaving nothing outside of it. The song stays on screen for a whole five minutes in stilled frame and then it jolts back to its gray and grainy texture as one tramp walks slowly from the distant, arid hillocks while the other stares into the distance as the song quietens and is replaced by unintelligible announcements floating in from the distant background (Figure 3). This moment of stuplimity (Ngai, 2000) illustrates how all acts and attempts to resolve boredom are at their core, fundamentally, boring, which also protracts and amplifies the feeling. The fatal lassitude of boredom encloses actuality in a deep gloom, an encounter with an emptiness that colonizes everything, every space, and every time.

Figure 2: The *tramps* standing across the landscape of the heartland



Source: film *Kalkimanthankatha*.

3. The Dynamics of Waiting: Boredom and Search in *Kalkimanthankatha*

To Jack Barbalet (1999), boredom encompasses more than the mere passage of time but involves a complete loss of meaning that individuals experience, which can profoundly affect their sense of self; a deprivation of meaning which has been observed to lead to disengagement (Kanevsky and Keighley, 2003). Jacques Ellul's work, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (2012 [1969]), sees boredom as "gloomy, dull, and joyless" while simultaneously being adjudged as one of the defining perversions of life (p. 121). This view is proximate to that of Karl Barth, who similarly described the distinctive characteristic of contemporary humanity as neither serenity nor rebellion, but simply an "utter weariness and boredom" (1960, p. 117). Not only is man "bored with himself" and burdened by everything but boredom can lead one to assume "that all life is thus empty" (Jameson, 1988, p. 187). Drawing on Heidegger's ideas (1995 [1938]), Elpidorou and Freeman (2015) propose that boredom can be understood as a fundamental mode

of existence, referred to as ‘mood,’ which plays a constitutive and revelatory role in one’s attunement to the world. This ‘fundamental’ human attunement encapsulates a profoundly metaphysical and deeply religious implication (Raposa, 1985). And attunements such as this are not just subjectively tinted experiences or otherwise epiphenomenal expression of internal life but also elemental ways of being, configuring the ways the world gets perceived, lived in and made sense of. Boredom can be deemed a seemingly trivial yet gnawingly pervasive phenomenon that constitutes the everyday and everydayness of life. In Agamben’s (2000) discussion on Martin Heidegger’s 1929–1930 lecture course, he traces ‘this’ inherent incapability of humankind by emphasizing that individuals cannot be defined solely by any particular function i.e. human nature cannot be fully captured by any specific identity or task, to which he further added the notion of humanity’s creative ‘semi-indifference’ towards assigned roles or responsibilities. This prompts us to question whether this assertion holds true when applied to the act of waiting and, consequently, the unique identity of the two tramps who are defined by their state and act of waiting. So, if boredom reveals the essence of a “purely living being” (Agamben, 2004, p. 70) then waiting becomes the ideal plane of such a possibility as is true for our protagonists, whose wait is depicted as search but the imagination of searching as agencied disposition is rendered false as search ends in non-arrival which implicates the act of searching to the fact of waiting.

Figure 3: The *raga* performance as the *tramps* watch on



Source: film *Kalkimanthankatha*.

In his *Phenomenological Analysis of Waiting* (1972), Imad Shouery explores how the experience of waiting spans both individual and collective realms of consciousness. He illustrates that, at the individual level, waiting is experienced subjectively, while at the collective level, it becomes a projected state that manifests across social, political, theological, and historical dimensions. Shouery argues that, on a collective scale, individual consciousness is objectified and integrates with the broader collective experience, resulting in a shared encounter with waiting. This collective waiting often lacks a sense of presence, as consciousness is driven

forward, fixating on the potentialities of the future rather than the immediacy of the present. This state of anticipation fosters a sense of self-estrangement, characterized by a detachment from one's temporal possibilities. The all-encompassing act of waiting takes place within the realm of what is known-yet-unknown or what is known-as-unknown, where anticipation and uncertainty encounter each other across the gray long shots of the bare landscapes of the Indian heartland and the blurry carnivalesque of the gathering in the background reverberating in the cacophony of the distant loud noises of the crowd. Waiting implies the act of holding space for something's arrival, Kalki! as the tramps of Avikunthak's rendition keep evoking; or Godot! as Vladimir and Estragon often call out. Waiting is steered by the diktats of expectation where the impossible must conditionally remain forever elusive to anticipation, because waiting can only occur when it is moored to the realm of possibility, and probability. Their wait, this way, takes place at the cusp where anticipation, belief, and the act of searching interlace meticulously within the being while it also casts its shadow constantly on existence (Figure 4). Waiting must indeed be studied as behavior or affective propensity, but there's a space to enquire about its tangled interconnections between intention and attention; compulsion and freedom; experience and an inevitability that haunts the entire being. Waiting is a device, a posturing, an approach where one finds themselves stationed voluntarily or ambivalently, yet always bearing with it the effect that it has on one's embroilment to (the) future/s. It is a preoccupation with the future in perpetual generation, a boring repetition of inevitabilities which can potentially devour essence. While distractions often try to supplant one away from stoical meditation or pernoctation, the fact that diversions abound, waiting's presence testifies as well to the capability to wait which endures many if not constant resistances. The deportment, intended for the future i.e. that which will happen later, stitches together a montage of apprehensions restive within the being, a persistent disquietude. Therefore, 'waiting' always bears the risk of becoming 'boredom,' a torpefying detachment to the now. Waiting can collapse into boredom and 'the boring.' Waiting, indeed, can happen exclusively in the scope of the future, the 'after' where the authentic is suffused with contingent relevance. And within the realm of eschatology, Paul Fiddes (2000) through an instantiation of a parable of Luke's Gospel, where faithful servants earnestly await the return of Christ (their savior), brings out the Christian concept of parousia, that, for the true believers, presages a jubilant climax of this world not a boring or melancholic or a repetitive and blithe one. While in Hinduism, the conclusion of the Kali Yuga leads to the Satya Yuga with a fore-guaranteed triumph of good over evil and the culmination therefore is not a culmination at all rather a cusp where the dissolution of the present age and not the present itself meets the resurgence of the age of truth. In this case, time transcends endurance and promises redemption only in its regeneration, its resumption into the cycle again and again and then all over again. Waiting necessitates non-arrival and that which happens in *Waiting for Godot*, twice (Mercier, 1956), happens in *Kalkimanthakatha* as well, i.e. nothing. This wait, constricted and indefatigable, makes the present unintelligible and this is where boredom festers; a deeply contemplative, spiritual and tragic boredom as well as a trivial, lingering, and comical boredom.

Figure 4: The *tramps* in conversation and contemplation

Source: film *Kalkimanthakatha*.

4. Boring Futures: Irresolvable Resolutions

To Jean-Luc Marion, there exists a type of supernatural boredom that repels the spiritual, leading to a disconnection not only from one's essence of existence but also leads to the negation of "the very name of being" (1991, p. 135). Across various cultures and theological frameworks, the notion that God could evoke any sense of boredom seems not only sacrilegious but sinful. However, Jean Lacoste (2005) argues that both theology and philosophy should approach boredom in a manner akin to how other emotions and experiences such as sorrow and joy are considered. This perspective also harkens back to Karl Barth's formulation on theological anthropology and the philosophy of religion, who, in the aftermath of World War I, observed that man was consumed in a profound weariness and boredom, disinterested in himself and the world, lacking the will to find fascination within while failing to succumb to stimuli, distractions, or the disillusionments of seeking transcendence. While to aver that human life and transcendence are related, Barth (1960) would insist, there has to be a discernment that man must indeed be interested in himself. The postcolonial condition speaks to this feeling wherein there is an interest in the self that is haunted by an acute experience of waiting—for resolutions and reparations; formations and formulations; resolve and revolutions; reconciliations and reckonings; future(s) and savior(s). The spiritual aspect of waiting also implicates, in the case of the film, the ceaseless struggle against the many aftershocks of colonialism which constantly and cumulatively plague everything, all the time, all at once. The degradations and dilemmas that the tramps deliberate and debate in the film carry on under colonialism's shadow, implicated in being on the outside (of the Empire). Their repetitive musings on nothing, their expressions of inactivity and inaction speak to boredom as "an experience of meaningless agency" (Kustermans and Ringmar, 2011, p. 1778) wherein the future is not salvageable but just where salvation promises to be.

John P. Manoussakis, in his book *Phenomenology and Eschatology: Not Yet in the Now* (2016), makes a remarkable point about how there has always been this implicit risk of conflating

the *eschaton* with the *telos* which occurs when the *eschaton* is erroneously linked to the end of the world or the culmination of history. Eschatology and teleology are distinct concepts. Eschatology activates “a relation with being *beyond the totality* or beyond history” (Levinas, 1969, p. 22). Hence, attempting to determine the precise arrival of the future, the next Yuga, or the resurgence of another Yuga, becomes an impossibility not due to lack of knowledge, but due to the inherent unknowability of its imminence. The question of ‘when’ holds no meaning because the arrival of the future must transcend time and history rather than coinciding with ‘a’ collapse or culmination of history. By avoiding a definitive placement of the culmination of waiting for Godot or ‘searching’ for Kalki within, before, or after history, there emerges a resistance to being identified solely with history. This is similar to the ontotheological eschatologies present in the grand projects of Hegel and Marx, which, Manoussakis points out, allows history to unfold autonomously, not predetermined courses leading back to predetermined outcomes for that “would condemn God to boredom and humanity to a fatalistic passivity” (2016, p. 73). It is the envisioning of such a condition where both God and humanity are consigned to impassivity that thrusts eschatological idea into a horrifying scenario, where there is a droning threat of “theocratic or secular totalitarianism” (Manoussakis, 2016, p. 73) which comes to the fore when the tramps recite names of the avatars of Vishnu and in the same chant they add Gaip, Bukharin, Trotsky, Kamenev, and Ceaușescu, which along with the quoted and debated portions of Mao’s *Red Book* in the film comically and tragically enough, become a nothingness when recited to the vacant landscape bereft of any masses to mobilize. And if incarnations have any akinness to the *eschaton*, it would be conceivable to anticipate a time when a direct and immediate apprehension of the future (as promise, inevitability, and promised inevitability) becomes possible, feasible and of course acutely and inexplicably desirable for and by virtue of its abject abstractness. However, engaging in prognostication for this future event initiates a process of reactivation when it is put through disclosure within the present. Therefore, an *eschaton*, which succeeds an incarnation, also has a latent potential to facilitate an ineffable pretext to bypass events (of the now) as non-events into an anticipatory formulation of awaiting the authentic future, which must be located at the end of History or at the cusp of end and regeneration. In this respect, the future is condemned to boredom.

5. Conclusions

Kalkimanthakatha foregrounds the dissonance between premodern spiritual revivalism and postmodern urbanity, particularly within the spatial and temporal context of the Kumbh Mela grounds in Allahabad. This disjunction serves as a critical lens through which the film interrogates the inevitability of metaphysical failure in efforts to reconcile disparate temporalities highlighting the contradictions and complexities inherent to contemporary Indian political discourse. Through the film’s layered design, Avikunthak displays the volatile interplay between revolutionary and traditional narratives, mapping the fraught terrain of modern Indian identity and its ongoing negotiations with history and future. The director navigates towards a revelation that ultimately emerges as hollow and devoid of meaning—a non-arrival or, conversely, an interminable ‘arriving.’ This represents the fundamentally cruel joke of both waiting and searching. The concept of non-arrival here is final in the sense that a text is final: films must end,

plays conclude, and books come to a close. Yet, the continuum of non-arrival that both the play and the film inhabit is a network of intersecting ideas—dialogues between notions of God and worldliness, sacred and profane, and aesthetic, political, and philosophical concerns. Avikunthak refrains from outrightly undermining religious foundations or blindly celebrating revolution. Instead, he engages in an examination of doctrinal notions of salvation and the idolization of a grand divine savior, juxtaposed with the materialistic politics advocated by Mao, the realities of the Naxalite revolution in Bengal, and the potential future transformation of India into a Hindu Rashtra. In doing so, he reflects on the haunting presence of promise sustained only by its absence—a non-fulfillment that engenders an absolute boredom.

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