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EDITORIAL

The Digital World and Humanities

The present age can be characterized as the age of technology, all pervasive technology – Robotics, Artificial intelligence, genetic science, synthetic organisms and bio-mechanics, Information Communication Technology (ICT), Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), digital and virtual existence – that has greatly impacted life on this planet in all manners, physiologically, psychologically and theologically. There are both positive and negative fallouts of this development. But we have reached a point where going backward or standing aloof from this current is no option at least for a society or a nation. Besides physiological changes which are too obvious, technology has brought out changes in our behaviour, attitude and perspective to life. The fast speed of technology world has induced a sense of urgency and impatience in us, and made our life machine-like. The corporate/ market sector that is spearheading technology has led to the corporatization of all facets of life including even religion, ethics, aesthetics, art, agriculture, pastoral life which were innocent of it. We tend to be more pragmatic in our outlook. Consequently we do not write for posterity or *swantah-sukhaya* (soul's satisfaction) but for result in the present.

Market ethics has taken over religious ethics and our priorities in all walks of life have shifted. For example, art has become a market product; knowledge based education has given way to skills oriented professional education; personal communication is being replaced by hypertext/ machine communication; in the domain of sex which is no longer a taboo, cybersex has made its entry; relationship is not made in heaven but in Facebook, not for seven births but for convenience.

Practice of live-in-relationship, contractual marriage and discourse on LGBT are on the rise. The newspapers nowadays are propagating ethics of dating and advocating the abrogation of laws against adultery. It's not that only fair sex is being objectified as a commodity. In fact everything is a commodity in this market world and its existence depends on its relevance to this emerging society. So we have a dynamic value system rather than a universal code of conduct. The postcolonial challenges of 'otherness' and 'difference' are more effectively countered by technology of today subverting any 'universal or normative postulation of rational unanimity' (Leela Gandhi: *Postcolonial Theory*, 27). Everyone has his own take and is being heard by the target group as well as vehemently opposed by the opponents. Multiple voices in literature/ art/ cinema/ media have come to be recognised. Even the concept of a uniform standard language has changed and we come to accept many Englishes within the English language – British English, American English, Hinglish, Tamil English, etc. The centre has broken into multiple centres 'where centre cannot hold' (Yeats: "Second Coming"). As we are passing through a phase of transition we are in for a world of perpetual conflict and contradiction; and each dissenting voice has a place in the public domain. Each talent has a platform to prove. It offers a world where knowledge is free for all and accessible from all places, thanks to social media – Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, web portals, e-library, Wikipedia and the like. Technology is all positive and uncomplaining to the users. You are driving a car and you take a wrong route. Your GPS does not complain of not following its direction, rather adjusts itself and suggests the right way from there. Above all, technology is non-discriminatory, and aloof from human follies. It does not differentiate on the basis of caste, class, religion, race, gender, region, nation or relation.

It can prove to be a game changer for the deprived ones. It offers a platform for all business, art, literature, film and media to all and at all places without discrimination. E-learning, M-learning, virtual class with the help of ICT and CMC are transforming teaching-learning process, making education/ courses damn cheap, more effective, interesting and open to all. Interestingly this intercourse between the humans and the Digital is leading to Digital Humanities, a promising project on which several Universities in the West are consistently working. It gives hope of several new things like open access born digital materials, Collaborative Department of Humanities involving faculty, IT professionals, researchers, creative writers and students. The authorship of a work would be shared by the group. A curious influence of this intercourse can be seen in dance form and acting in which robotic gestures and movements are being imitated. While Robots are designed after humans.

Nonetheless, everything has its own pitfalls. Technological development has indented the human capacity and has posed a threat to human autonomy and authority and led to a jobless growth with the growing craze for automation and now artificial intelligence in the corporate world. It has adversely affected interpersonal relationship, communication and conventional social fabric. A child can be seen glued to his smart phone even while sitting before the family members or guests. Communication between man and machine is a new dimension in communication theory. So we are losing personal touch in our interpersonal relationship. Email cannot generate the same feeling that a handwritten letter used to do. Similarly virtual class or video conference cannot be a substitute for personal meeting and real class. A serious sociological concern is our over dependence on technology for

addressing social and psychological issues like fundamentalism, communalism, intolerance, social and economic divides, terrorism and poverty. For example, the state invests far more on surveillance, electronic means of communication, infrastructure and on weaponry than on socio-psychological measures like education, counselling, communication with people, recognition of their dissenting identity and investing in the human capital. It is a matter of concern that human values and cultural mores and seriousness of art are being diluted in this cyber age.

However, our hope lies in what is being threatened – our dynamic culture. It is the strength and beauty of Indian culture that it does not give up its core strength even while assimilating new things. It has been proved time and again in history be it the long history of foreign invasions or the global recession in the recent time. Jawaharlal Nehru said about Indian culture that ‘it is ever flowing, ever changing, yet ever the same.’ We are passing through a transition phase and we can hope that a time will come when technology will forge harmony with sociology for a better world for all its stakeholders to live in; and that a more technocultured trained human resource navigates through differences, dissents, conflicts and contradictions with a smile on the face.

The year 2017 has virtually remained economic gestation for India and gestational dilemma for world peace. Living in peaceful restlessness as a new way of life let us welcome 2018 as a new generation’s child most dear to blind parents. However, I heartily wish my readers a year of benign bliss.

— C. L. Khatri



The Pangs of Being Dalit : A Study of Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*

— Dr. P.K. Singh

Abstract

Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, an autobiographical account of his birth and upbringing as an untouchable, or Dalit, in the newly independent India of the 1950s, is one of the first portrayals of Dalit life in north India from an insider's perspective. 'Joothan' literally means leftover on a plate, destined for the garbage or for the family pet in a middle-class urban home. It is related to the word *jootha* which means polluted and such remains are characterized as *joothan* when someone else eats them. India's untouchables have been forced to accept and eat *joothan* for their subsistence for centuries. According to my observation, it is impossible to abolish this social stigma from the society unless a strong willed political leadership comes into power at the centre. The other important thing in the term of this Dalit isolation, if we want to maintain the integrity and unity of this great nation, is imperative to establish a society in which every individual must have equal right and opportunity. In the proposed article the pangs of being Dalit has been portrayed with special reference to *Joothan*.

Keywords : Dalit, caste hierarchy, humiliation, equality

The word *joothan* denotes the pain, humiliation, and poverty of this community, which has lived at the bottom of India's social pyramid for millennia. Although untouchability was legally abolished in the constitution of the newly independent India in 1949, Dalits continue to face discrimination, economic deprivation, violence,

and ridicule. In past they did not have any right so they were forced to be exploited by the upper class people. But after the independence our national leaders realized that these anti social activities should be eradicated from their roots. As a result, in the Constitution they have been listed as SC (Scheduled Caste).

Before coming into the hands of the public *Joothan* was an autobiography but when it came to the readers it became the biography of the whole community. As a narrative, it starts with the marriage party, when the guests and the baratis, were eating their meals, the Chuhras (the caste that the author belongs to) would sit outside the door with huge baskets in their hands. After the baratis had eaten, the dirty leaf-plates (disposable dishes) were put in the Chuhra's baskets, which they took home, as garbage food. The small pieces of pooris, lumps of sweetmeats, and a little bit of vegetable were enough to make them happy. The *joothan* was eaten with a lot of relish. The bridegroom's guests who didn't leave enough scraps on their pattals were denounced as gluttons. But poor things, they had never enjoyed a wedding feast. So they licked it all up. This incident shows the poverty and helplessness in the society. As an autobiography, Valmiki gives a detailed description of preserving and eating the *joothan* after reprocessing it, during the 'hard days of the rainy season.' The memories of his childhood associated with *joothan*, often come back to haunt him and cause him new pain and humiliation. It indicates that the poor people were suffering a lot. There was no end of humiliation and insult in their life. The pitiable thing that a reader notices in this description is the utter poverty and destitution that the Chuhars were bound to tolerate. However, on a closer reading, another aspect of this deprivation comes to the fore. The passage

highlights the association of the Dalits with the notion of pollution. In this connection I would like to quote an example from Limbale's book *Akkarmashi*:

The teacher asked the high-caste boys and girls to collect the leftovers on a piece of paper and give it to us. I and Parshya carried the bundle of the leftover food on the way back. The high caste boys and girls were laughing and joking, but our whole attention was on the bundle. Mallya carried a bundle of bhakri on his head and we, the Mahar (the author's caste) boys, followed him excitedly like hungry vultures. At last we gathered in Girmalya's farm and opened the bundle. It contained crumbs of different kinds of food and their spicy smell filled the air. We squatted in a circle and stuffed ourselves greedily. We had never tasted food like that before. We were all really gluttonous. Our stomachs were greedy as a beggar's sack. When I got home I told my mother all about this. Like the victim of a famine she said, 'why didn't you get at least a small portion of it for me? Leftover food is nectar.'¹

These two descriptions of the situation of the Dalits are identical to each other and have close relationship. But the most striking thing here is the 'naturalness' of the teacher's asking the 'high-caste' students to collect the leftover food and give them to the Mahar students. Once again, along with suggesting poverty and hunger, the passage signifies the Mahars as deemed polluted. Although class-based issues come up in both the narratives, especially *Akkarmashi*, where pain is experienced as hunger, both the authors explain accepting leftover food in the context of their caste identity. As mentioned earlier, *joothan* carries the connotation of ritual pollution, when used in relation to anyone other than the original eater. It is this

association with ritual pollution, and the stigma and discrimination resulting thereof, that sets apart the Dalits from the other deprived groups or 'have-nots' in the Indian society.

The other facet of this association with pollution is the Dalit's engagement with the so-called 'unclean' occupations. Certain occupations – mostly associated with death and human body waste – are regarded as unclean and degraded and therefore assigned to those considered to be outside the pale of humanity. In fact, the link between the Dalit embodying pollution and the polluting occupations follows a circular logic: Why are the jobs polluting, because they are performed by Dalits. Why are the Dalits pollutant? Because, they perform polluting jobs. This incident is contradictory in itself because the person who cleans the toilet or the upper class people is declared polluted by the white collar men. Here the idea of pollution does not refer to lack of hygiene. The tasks such as announcing the news of death or epidemic, or beating of drums at weddings, funerals and festivals are considered polluting as these involve inauspicious events like death and contact with animal hide. One more irony is noticeable in Limbale's *Akkarmashi*:

I used to clean clothes, bathed everyday and washed myself clean with soap, and brushed my teeth with toothpaste. There was nothing unclean about me. Then in what sense was I untouchable? A high caste that is dirty was still considered touchable (Limbale, *Akkarmashi*, 9).

There is a host of themes and emotions in these lines. Firstly, there is a sense of anguish in being subjected to a set of rules that know no reason or logic. Secondly, the sarcasm at one level entails a critique of religion, ritual and caste; however at another level, it also captures a sense of helplessness in realizing one's

inability to break the vicious circle of pollution and caste despite bodily cleanliness. The person who is involved in the act of cleanliness is regarded as the pollutant and impure in spite of this fact that they are well clad and well suited. The following two examples entertain the same sentiment and feeling:

All I knew was that I did not want to go into the line of work that my ancestors had been doing for thousands of years. I had written to Pitaji, informing him of my decision to leave college and learn this technical work in a government factory. He was delighted. He kept saying repeatedly, 'At last you have escaped caste.' But what he didn't know till the date he died is that 'caste' follows one right up to one's death. The result is that although I try to forget my caste, it is impossible to forget. And then I remember an expression I heard somewhere: 'What comes by birth, but can't be cast off by dying – that is caste.' (Pawde, 17)

What is it about caste that makes it difficult to 'cast off'? The answer is that caste is justified by the logic of pollution; and hidden within the ideology of pollution is the issue of power. I shall argue that too much attention on the ritual aspects of pollution conceals the power aspect of it. Valmiki's life narrative reveals this aspect successfully. In the very act of giving joothan or leftover food to the Dalits lies an exercise of power by the Upper Castes. On the occasion of the landlord's daughter's wedding, when after all the guests have eaten, Valmiki's mother asks the landlord for some fresh food for the children, the landlord remarks: 'You are taking a basketful of joothan. And on top of that you want food for your children. Don't forget your place Chuhri Pick up your basket and get going.' (Valmiki, 74)

Thus, giving of joothan is a process which ensures

that the Chuhras don't forget their 'place' and the caste hierarchy and the corresponding power structure is maintained. Giving of joothan is not only an act of charity towards the impoverished, but is a means of robbing the Dalit of her/his humanity, dignity and sense of worth, and binding her into perpetual subordination. For the first time, Dalits are writing about their lives themselves. They have long been written about by others, by anthropologists, historians, and novelists. In fighting against the gross and tremendous injustice that has been their heritage for centuries, Dalit writers give voice to their aspirations for achieving equality. Translated into English for the first time from the original Hindi, Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography talks of growing up in a village near Muzaffarnagar in U.P., in an untouchable caste, Chuhra, well before the defiant term 'Dalit' was coined. As he states bleakly, 'Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences ... only he or she who has suffered this anguish knows its sting.'

In the context of traditional Hindu society, Dalit status has often been historically associated with occupations regarded as ritually impure, such as any involving leatherwork, butchering, or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses, and waste. Dalits work as manual labourers cleaning streets, latrines, and sewers. Engaging in these activities was considered to be polluting the individual, and this pollution was considered contagious. As a result, Dalits were commonly segregated, and banned from full participation in Hindu social life. For example, they could not enter a temple or a school, and were required to stay outside the village. Elaborate precautions were sometimes observed to prevent incidental contact between Dalits and other castes. Discrimination against Dalits still exists in rural areas in the private sphere,

in everyday matters such as access to eating places, schools, temples and water sources. It has largely disappeared in urban areas and in the public sphere. Some Dalits have successfully integrated into urban Indian society, where caste origins are less obvious and less important in public life. In rural India, however, caste origins are more readily apparent and Dalits often remain excluded from local religious life, though some qualitative evidence suggests that its severity is fast diminishing.

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The Dynamics of Ideological Dynamism in Krishna Sobti's Art

— Dr Syed Afroz Ashrafi

Abstract:

The paper titled “the dynamics of dynamism in Krishna Sobti's Art” seeks to unearth a few important aspects of her fictive narrative. The paper probes the dynamics of her bruised psychology and the troubles of living in troubled times. She does not lament, does not sound dolorous yet her impressions are powerful signatures on the forehead of time.

Keywords : Turbulence, values, conditions, revolt, anger, reconciliation.

There are few writers in the realm of literature who have traces of impact and to the extent that he / she goes on to become a metaphor to suggest the profundity of thought, the human touch to the crisis of soul and the disintegration of the society that keeps shifting values. Writers like Garcia, Dickens, Hawthorne, Steinbeck, Richard Wright, Najeeb Mahfouz, Manto, Mohan Rakesh, Chinua Achebe, Nawaal Al Sadi, Tolstoy, Gorki, Dostoveisky and Toni Morrison have changed the course of human thought, have interpreted and reinterpreted the dynamics of life without altering the podium of human standards. Among such writers Krishna Sobti has her own share of contribution and perhaps has left enough for posterity in terms of valued judgment on the collective wisdom of mankind. Hailing from an ordinary background, Sobti had flashes of insight to probe the nature of the very human deliberation on a host of issues ranging from crisis to construction. She can also be construed as a trailblazer known for her individualistic women

characters as their lively truthfulness. Known ever better for writing on issues that were not considered feminine domain but she intruded into them with a remarkable felicity and significant control.

Sobti lived under shadows of murky days in Sapru House in Delhi and wondered whether she could take to pen to pen some of the most endearing pieces that make, Krishna Sobti, the balm on the vexed human imagination, the wounds stitched through her penetrative, transcendental vision in *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke*, *Zindaginama*, *Mitro Marjani*, *Dilo-Danish* and *Samay Sargam* and created narratives of candour and crescendo. She questions the loneliness of the senior citizens in *Samay Sargam*; Mitro had the audacity to break the taboo, which Ismat Chughtai had to do in *Lehaf*, in a language that she only understood. “A genuine writer must have a clear soul” Sobti minces no words to suggest what a writer has to do and to the extent she herself has done is no riddle. Her characters are generally intrepid and resolute and live their lives without the artist’s interference. There is a touch of realism and even a more resounding sound of synchronous vibrations about dissent in terms of a disagreement with a set standard value as seen in *Mitro Marjani* or in an engaging dialogue of a daughter with her mother in *Ai Ladki* or Shahni’s association with the past or the revengeful nature of Shere in *Sikka Badal Gaya*, which symbolically suggests the transition of power and position. *Zindaginama*, a treatise on partition echoes the innocence of rural Punjab and some of her experiences she went through while growing up in her ancestral Haveli in Gujarat in West Punjab. *Zindaginama*, strikes a personal touch with impersonal resonance to recapture the moments lived but lost to a mindless event of human history. She confronts the tough, discovers the lost, redrafts the lost definitions

of life and tunes them with the sharp edge of her pen. Her artistic world is a coruscating portrait in the circus of varied human dilemmas. Says Sobti

My creative responses have been deeply rooted in electric and integrated human experiences. (Krishna Sobti). Epilogue (Mitro Marjani, iv)

A writer not interested in repeating the words, the encounters and the experiences she once had, is a huge testimony to the evolution of her own artistic persona. There is no literary leitmotif as seen in the case of James Joyce or the repetitive vibrations of E.M. Forster because she writes the experience once only and therefore *Sikka Badal Gaya* and *Meri Maa Kahan Hai* are the stories written on partition only because she was not involved too emotionally as the rest of the writers were, who did not look beyond the matrix of holocaust. I have selected two representative stories *Ai Ladki* and *Sikka Badal Gaya* to look into her milieu and her range of sympathy with human conditions, with the complex dynamics of social existence and the political chaos. My selection of stories is based on my own understanding of her art as the two stories would suggest a possible variety in terms of human encounters and her response to them in her own individualistic manner.

Ai Ladki

The story *Ai Ladki* is not only a dialogue between a daughter and mother as it seems on the surface but there are some serious questions involved and some difficult inquiries made through an ailing mother, bed ridden, haunted by the past, tormented by present and sceptical about life beyond. mother who is sulking in a hospital whose walls have turned into silent assassin, the air that darts in through the window is the air of death and the breath that she takes is the toxic one.

In the dialogue between the two the mother is on a recalling journey where there is question about life, where there is question about death and also she draws on the lost days of the splendid past. In fact in the very act of the dialogue there is a message that life is like a boat which floats on the surface of water and swims smoothly unless there are holes in it and finally it capsizes with a warning or two. At times daughter seems too unconcerned with the seemingly absurd murmuring of her mother, whose outburst of emotions does not impress his daughter to the extent it was or it is generally expected.

The mother knows that an ailing person is no thrill, he/she cannot be the source of any delight to the attendants but she babbles at times incoherently and at times sounds like a last minute discourse on the realities of life, world universe, relationships and the ultimate wish to escape the travails of existence.

The body is a cloth, Wear it and enter the world.
Take it off and go to the other world-the world of others. Not one's own. (Ai Ladki, 4)

The passage is highly revealing as Sobti here attempts a discourse on the reality of life and death, on the reality of what life will be like after death. It sounds philosophical and yet it has in its ambit the all important question as to where does a person go after death? Here I am reminded of a poem "*Phir Kia Hoga Uske Baad*", where a mother is engaged in answering the questions of her own son, where there is a series of what happens after that and the final question by the son leaves the mother clueless as to what will happen after life. Sobti here too possibly talks about a life unseen, a world too that is unseen. But Sobti here does not question whether the life hereafter is all that matters but she does have a concern for the life of the

mother in the story is almost certain to trundle through which sans any geography. Ambrosia is a reference to a desire to disappear and still be here in the world in some form.

Ladki, our relationship is not merely one of flesh and blood, but of the soul. Both are intertwined. I don't know why you turned out to be so different. (7)

Towards the final moments mother has a sense of regret for not finding her daughter the way she would have liked her to be and here the passage quoted also hints at the possible generational gap.

No, Ladki, it's not my dharma to test or judge anyone. I call to you again and again, because I draw strength from you, I feel I am still there, still alive. (9)

Here the emotional part of a mother comes to the fore as she makes it very clear that is not passing any judgment on what she is or will be but since she was a part of her breath it was natural for her to be harking after her, a point possibly Sobti leaves for the upcoming generation to raise the level of sensitivity. The mother has a sense of acute loneliness, as she is about to dip and looks for the emotional impetus in that hour of crisis, which she thinks is her final hour though not erroneously.

The story *Ai Ladki* like most of the short stories has an abrupt end where a cluster of questions have been raised through the dialogues between mother and daughter. The locale of hospital renders the milieu depressing with brief interregnums of thoughts intermeshed with a serious philosophical touch. The old mother recounts what she has gone through, the good old days, the element of nostalgia is the best medicine served to her by the artist and the mother is all aghast when she finds her end round the corner. *Ai*

Ladki bares the narrative of a mother's perspective on life, kids, universe and even the life after. Sobti has through the dialogues tried to communicate a number of issues ranging from life to death but there is no direct connection between what a mother wanted and what a daughter did. This story can be seen in some other ways too like a mother hospitalized with death gaining upon her and in her utterances lay the history of her own existence and the invisible pains she had for her daughter who she thought was not as sensitive as it ought to have been.

Krishna Sobti has not written much on the partition trauma like Urdu writers on either side of the border. Those who stayed back were hued with pain over the loss of land and those who migrated kept going back to the Tamarind tree in the orchard of the lost soil. Krishna Sobti does not write the history of the bloodshed or goes into the minute detail to count the number of bodies dead nor does she cringe with a sword in her heart to lash out at the forces responsible for the catastrophe. *Sikka Badal Gaya* symbolically conveys a disturbing message and perhaps the title serves as a reminder to the division of the country and in ways she does it leaves the impact even more disturbing though there is no reference to the violence, no bullets fired or swords swished but the language itself pierces through the sensitive hearts of the readers.

Shahni stood up abruptly. Plunged in deep thoughts; Shahni was moving away, Shera with solid steps followed her, looking around with suspicious eyes. The contours of his friends' points are echoing in his ears. But what will he find by killing Shahni?

Shahni

Yes Shera

Shera wanted to disclose some of the things

about the impending danger but how he could have said that.

Shahni

Shahni raised her head. The sky was enveloped by fog. Shere

Shera knew this is fire. Jabalpur was to be burnt and it did.

Shahni could not say anything. All her connections are there only. (*Sikka Badal Gaya, 11-12*)

The passages are references to the intent of Shera and the sense of fear that somehow crept into Shahni who did find something strange in the morning itself while bathing in the pond. Shahni is the loyal custodian of Shah's Haveli where wealth still catches the fancy of the plunderers and the irate Shera. Shahni was entrenched into her roots and she would have hated to be dislodged from the roots which Shera and company were to do.

And again

She was already inside the precincts of Haveli. She steeped in a state of vacuum. She could barely realize when Shera left. A frail body and without any assistance, hardly knew how long Shahni was there. Haveli is left ajar. Afternoon appeared to disappear only. Today Shahni is struggling to rise, her rights are being deserted by themselves, the owner of Shahji's Haveli but not...today the temptations are not going away as if she has been turned into a stone. The evening emerged while she remained in the same state but she still cannot think of rising up. suddenly she was caught off guard. (*Sikka Badal Gaya, 13*)

Shahni, shahni, listen Trucks are arriving. (15)

Trucks...she could barely say this much. The hands joined one and another. In no time the

news spread around the village. Bibi in a sour tone only murmured, there was never ever a thing like this, nor was it heard ever. It's bewildering, its all darkness dropping. (15)

It can well be ascertained from the passage that there is going to be a complete collapse of the past, present and the future before Shahni was like a long, dark night or perhaps a road whose end did not seem visible. Here Sobti peeps into the shattered soul of Shahni who finds herself completely incapable of defending the inheritance of Shahji and the aggressive strides of the likes of Shera who was brewing with revenge. It was Shera only who had passed a disparaging remark on Shahji that he plundered people and sucked their blood to raise his wealth. Shahni is the custodian of tradition, history and the glossy past while dwelling in Haveli. Since the death of Shahji she was the defacto master of Haveli and it was she only who had some emotional attachment with the Haveli but all broke, all was being consigned to history as she was being uprooted by the very people she thought would protect the heritage.

Truck was loaded by now. Shahni was dragging herself. There was a kind of smoke emanating from the throats of the villagers, Shere, bloody Shere's heart is collapsing. Daud Khan went forward and opened the gate of the truck. Shahni moved. Ismail fared forward and said in a heavy voice, Shahni, you must say something, whatever you might utter will not be lies and he wiped the tears with his handkerchief from its corner. Shahni while checking the threatening hiccups lugubriously muttered, God will bless you all, happiness and all...

The story *Sikka Badal Gaya* strikes a responsive chord as times were changed, the system came in for a transition as there was going to be a shift in history,

a moment of sheer loss, loss in terms of rootlessness, losing grounds, the anger in the eyes of the people against Shahji and the the likes of Shere rising in revolt but all, all was lost in no time. The story reminds of the *Kaali Raat* of Aziz Ahmad and *Gharerya* of Qudrutullah Shahab where the link with history is lost, where the heritage is abandoned and where the sides are switched in consolidation of religious identities. Krishna Sobti uses no violence, conducts no imagery of bloodshed but through a symbolic title *Sikka Badal Gaya* communicates a powerful sense of alienation, and the transition in power dynamics. Shahni is a symbol of past history and the tradition that was at least not hoary to her but to the perpetrators of division, it was.

Krishna Sobti is too pellucid and her narrative rises above the mundane and the ordinary while issuing toxin to the survivors of the troubled inheritance, to the mindless guzzling of history, to the animalistic response to the crisis of identity and the mendicant imagination bestial though ripping through the emotionally shattered skin of the beings engaged in the drama of devastation. Sobti is sensitive, tough but sensitive and yet the prism of a judgemental society that mocks at the freedom of a woman seeking justice to her body comes under a bit of stick. *Mitro Marjani* is coruscating, hugely prophetic and entirely audacious written in times of turbulence but there is a strong undercurrent of a rebel temper of a woman who takes the long stride forward unmindful of what the society would do to her. *Sikka Badal Gaya* sounds political, an oblique reference to the balkanized geography yet she is in tune with the turmoil that necessarily gripped all minds that could think. Sobti is a fine balance between two generations of writers and an old woman imbued with a strong sense of history, time can only be garrulous about it.

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Malgudi : The Metrics of Narayan's Mythic Vision

— **Dr. Ashok Kumar**

Abstract:

R K Narayan, the doyen of modern Indian English novel, is firmly rooted to his small semi-urban locale Malgudi largely indifferent to the political unrest going on in the country in those days. What interests him most is the cultural nuances of everyday life. It is this feature that gives Malgudi vibrancy, continuity and the dynamics of a character. The present paper tries to explore Narayan's metric of mythic vision and his perception of reality. It also probes how such metrics lend unity to his fictional world.

Keywords : Myth, reality, culture, objective correlative

In R.K. Narayan's fiction myth seems to operate as a catalytic agent. It does not seem to be an instrument for sharply discriminating its self-world from the world of living contemporary reality. The final impression of Malgudi is that of a mirror held up to a characteristically middle class reality having meaningful continuity with the past or Indian tradition. Malgudi illustrates and stresses this continuity and thereby, presents the metrics of mythic vision.

Apart from the fact that Malgudi imparts a level of unity to the fiction of Narayan, it also acts as a strategic metaphor for the fusion of myth and reality, and thus composes "a complex coherence" (Illusion... 338) of the pattern of myth and reality. And still, it is a microcosm of Indian life in the sense Hardy's *Wessex* is. Malgudi bears the interior signature of all that Indian culture signifies. It is, above all, an outer panoply of an inner abiding truth.

Every novel of Narayan, right from *Swami and Friends* to the *Painter of Signs*, centres in and around Malgudi. Malgudi makes an emphatic and inclusive presence. That is why “Malgudi”, says William Walsh, “is everywhere”. (Walsh, 130) This configuration of Malgudi invests this place with a kind of liveliness and vigour which belong to human character. N.C. Trivedi and N.C. Soni, therefore, call it “a character.” (Trivedi & Soni. *Indian Literature*.)

Malgudi’s presence in Narayan’s fiction, though imaginary, strikes one as a reality. One has only to see the way or ways in which this presence is rendered prominent, and also characteristic. The following extracts are illuminating :

- (i) River Saryu was the pride of Malgudi. It was some ten minute walk from Ellman street, the last street of the town, chiefly occupied by oil-mongers. Its sand-banks were the evening resort of all the people in the town. The Municipal president took any distinguished visitor to the top of the Town Hall and proudly pointed to him Saryu in moonlight, glistening like a silver belt across the north...(Narayan : 1972, 13)
- (ii) Malgudi in 1935 suddenly came into line with the modern age by building a well-equipped theatre—the Palace Talikes which simply brushed aside the old corrugated-sheet-roofed Variety Hall, (Narayan : 1978, 21)
- (iii) The Mahatma entered his hut. This was one of the dozen huts belonging to the city sweepers who lived on the banks of the river. It was probably the worst area in the town, and an exaggeration even to call them huts; they were just hovels, put together with rags, tin-sheets, and shreds of coconut matting, with scratchy

fowls crackling about and children growing in the street dust. The municipal services were neither extended here nor missed, although the people living in the hovels were employed by the municipality for scavenging work in the town. They were paid ten rupees a month per head, and since they worked in families of four or five, each had a considerable income by Malgudi Standards.... as an untouchable class they lived outside the town. (Narayan : 1976, 23-24)

In the first extract (i) Malgudi is presented with its 'pride' situation of river Saryu. It comes to us as an aesthetic spot with spiritual holy halo about it. Prof. Narasimhaiah writes :

“—Such is the spirit of the place that Narayan carefully creates to put his character in tune with it—an ancient temple, surrounded by hills, the river Saryu flowing in front of it, whose very name, if not the river... has its rich overtones and evocative power.” (Narasimhaiah 137).

Extract (ii) gives the impression of a growing physical density of Malgudi. But the presentation of Malgudi in the third extract (iii) is made in such a manner as particularises human conditions. The fact about 'hut', that is, poverty of the place, is gradually deepened by expressions like 'the worst area', 'hovels' and 'rags'. We are here given minute details of a particular class—"Sweepers".

Malgudi in all these extracts comes triumphant as a place pulsing with municipalities. However, "Reality in the village is what the people make it." (Church, 189). The expression "Malgudi Standards" comprehends "ten rupees a month per head", "children growing in the street dust", and "the untouchable class." These

extracts serve to accentuate the elements of diversity contained in a single unity called Malgudi. Malgudi, in a definite way, is a miniature form of India which is singular for preserving unity amid diversities. It is an imperishable content, and so mythical. C.D. Narasimhaiah is just when he says “The spirit of place can be a great reality” (Narasimhaiah, 41) Malgudi is a fusion of myth and reality. It is a place which is emphatically inclusive by spiritual implication rather than exclusive by strictly regional habitations.

Malgudi is imaginary. It keeps on returning in every novel of Narayan. This induces one to infer that Malgudi is Narayan’s myth of place, a myth of everywhere. It is a microcosm of Narayan’s portable eternity. And still in a different sense, Malgudi is not as absolutely imaginary as it is made out to be. It carries the echo of Lalgudi, the actual railway station of the South. Therefore, the prefix “Mal” for “Lal” is the only imaginary content. “Gudi” is common to both, and it calls up the real. The naming of the place, therefore, is imbued with both imaginative and realistic imports. Malgudi in the continuity with the fictional world of Narayan is mythic, but in the humdrum of life it portrays, it is realistic.

Malgudi is a microcosm yet for two other reasons. First, its continuity through all the novels imparts to it the character of a permanent witness to several variants of human conditions and situations, ranging from that of the famine in *The Guide* to that of the darkness of room in *The Dark Room*, from the age of childhood in *Swami and Friends* to that of the old age in *The Financial Expert*. This offers a form of permanence which invigilates and registers manifold stresses—social, economic, political, cultural and so on. These stresses compose patterns of reality.

In the first place, Malgudi is an aesthetic entity, in the second, it is a particular, a very sharply focussed “Specification”. (James, 362) of middle class reality. And finally, its mythic content lies embedded in its being a medium of imposing an order on various aspects of reality of the middle class. However, these three functions—*aesthetic realistic and mythic*—attributed to Malgudi are never intercepted by the process of industrial growth that overtake it.

However, the aesthetic and realistic attributes of Malgudi go a long way to present it as a metric of mythic consciousness. First, Malgudi registers development under the compulsions of modern life. But we are never given to feel that the modern and traditional part ways; they rather converge. Malgudi society is not just a code to measure an institution to control, a standard to define. This society is, in fact, a process that enters life to shape or to deform; a process personally known by all of the Narayan heroes, but then suddenly distant, complex, incomprehensible and overwhelming.

Its growth from *Swami and Friends* to *The Painter of Signs* is strikingly rapid, from an old, small town to a new one with modern buildings. For example, the new office of the family planning in *The Painter of Signs* is a new entry in Malgudi ledger. Thus Malgudi is a sensitive barometer of growth from a simple life of faith to a complex and highly industrialised life. This society delivers the mythic function of imposing an order of the kind T.S. Eliot emphasises with reference to James Joyce’s *Ulysses*:

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him.... It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving

a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which I believe Mr. Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious. (Eliot, 483)

Malgudi thus represents a form of consciousness which is mythic in design and function. Characters partake of this consciousness as much as they confirm it by upholding what is best in the Indian tradition. Raju puts on the mask of Swami with the full knowledge of the dangerous implications of this mask. He, however, lives at two levels which are contrary—his appearance of Swami is related to his criminal past by way of opposition. This opposition remains, and still it is bent to the exigence of traditional faith.

This Malgudian consciousness, like a myth, emphasises the permanent amidst concrete and particular variations. One of the elements of permanence is tradition as an “affirmed” (Rao,68) continuant in Narayan’s fiction. It is to be noted that tradition is surviving even after Malgudi has been industrialized to a great extent. Malgudi in itself, presents a complex coherence of tradition and modernity. Malgudi enters into “the modern age” in *The Dark Room*. Savitri’s adhoc revolt against her indifferent husband is corresponding to the spirit of “the modern age.” However, the fact that the spirit of Malgudi remains steady is fully enforced by the fact of Savitri’s return to the fold of the family.

Once we accept that Narayan’s consciousness is mythic, we shall be inclined to infer from this that all this consciousness comprehends must be informed explicitly or implicitly by a mythic spirit so that if the pattern of reality is to be determined, it is strictly logical to expect that any pattern of reality within the canvas

of Malgudi must have an undercurrent of myth.

A pattern implies an order in arrangement. It is the order imposed by mythic consciousness on the reality content of Malgudi. In other words, the fusion of reality content into mythic consciousness is achieved in the single entity of the place called Malgudi. The Malgudi pattern of reality glides into mythic consciousness which is assimilative in its inclusiveness of grasp. The following extract pertaining to the place is illuminating :

“When the going in the Taluk office struck four, the Mahatma invited Sriram to go out with him for a walk. He seized his staff in one hand and with the other supported himself on the shoulder of Bharati and strode out of the hut – a tall figure in white. He had tucked his watch at the waist into the fold of his white dhoti. He pulled it out and said : ‘Half an hour, I have to walk, come with me Sriram. You can talk to me undisturbed. A few others joined them. Sriram felt he was walking through some unreal dream world. The Mahatma was in between him and Bharati, and it was difficult to snatch a look at her as often as he wanted.... They walked along the river bank. The sky was rosy in the East.... He suddenly addressed himself to Sriram: ‘Your town is very beautiful. Have you ever noticed it before?’ Sriram felt unhappy and gasped for breath.... Should he say ‘yes’ or ‘No?’... He looked about. A couple of scavengers of the colony who had joined the group were waiting eagerly to know what he would say: they were evidently enjoying his predicament, and he dared not look in the direction of Bharati. The Mahatma said ‘God is everywhere, and if you want to feel his presence you will see him in a place like this with a beautiful river flowing, the sunrise with all its colours, and the air so fresh. Feeling a

beautiful hour of a beautiful scene or a beautiful object is itself a form of prayer.... When Gandhiji spoke of beauty, it sounded unreal as applied to the sun and air, but the word acquired a practical significance, when he thought of it in terms of Bharati. Gandhiji said : ‘By the time we meet next, you must give me a very good account of your self.’ (Narayan : 1976, 44-45)

This scene of Mahatma’s walk has three discernible accents: the initial accent falls on Mahatma, the second on nature and the third is made up of Sriram and ‘a couple of scavengers’. The third accent is relatively weak, and perhaps consciously so. It is noticeable that the novelist imports to Sriram a representative ‘positive’ quality of the average, in practicalness of his approach: “When Gandhiji spoke of beauty, it sounded unreal as applied to the sun and air, but the word acquired a practical significance when he thought of it in terms of Bharati.” Mahatma is there to interpret the symbolic significance of the former two to the latter. His assignment here is not only neat and precise but also symbolic. God is evoked only through the medium of enlisted references to nature. Apparently this is a continuity between nature and man, which derives from the supreme continuity between God and his creation. But within the fictional scheme or organisation, it is stressed, and so identified, a continuity between tradition and the process of sharp changes in the society of Malgudi. Thus, this extract fully defines Narayan’s conscious manner of growing inclusiveness, “conscious” because Mahatma feels the need to reprimand Sriram: “By the time we meet again next, you must give me a very good account of yourself.” The supreme myth is that God is brought to bear on the fictional situation of the plight of scavengers in the colony. In Mahatma, Malgudi gets an interpreter of its spiritual significance as distinct from the practical

significance. the spiritual or the mythical significance in this context seems to exist apart from the practical ones.

Furthermore, it is precisely this that happens in the Malgudi of *The Dark Room*; there the interpretation of “practical significance” is made by the author in the following line :

Malgudi in 1935 suddenly came into line with the modern age by building a well-equipped Theatre—the Palace Talkies—which simply brushed aside the old corrugated-sheet-roofed Variety Hall, which from the time immemorial had entertained the citizens of Malgudi with tattered silent films.... (Narayan, *The Dark Room* 21)

The contrast implicit in the epithets “modern” and “old” is suggested in terms of physical development from “the corrugated-sheet-roofed Variety Hall” to “a well-equipped theatre-Palace Talkies”. This Malgudi, is not only a “character” in the sense Virginia Woolf describes it as a “Literary convention”; it is a character in the sense Raju is a character in *The Guide* and Bloom in *Ulysses*. And it is ambivalent as most characters of Narayan remain ambivalent with the exception of Raman in *The Painter of Signs*. And as every Narayan’s hero signals a continuity of his existence into the beyond, the future, Malgudi also remains potential enough. The process of industrialisation proves it. From all these it is apparent that Malgudi is not a place, but a mind accommodating varieties within itself.

This mind of Malgudi is potential enough. It registers the vibrations of changes it experiences in the process of changing facets of industrialisation; but its interior remains steadily unruffled and uncorrugated. This uncorrugated inner being of Malgudi is a mirror to the hero of Narayan’s novels. As every Narayan hero remains exposed to himself, he accepts

no defeat or demoralisation; so does this Malgudi come to us as one that registers multiple physical changes but remains basically unchanged with regard to the situation of the river Saryu and the temple. As a matter of fact, Malgudi's mythic quality lies precisely here—in its steady indestructiveness.

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Sri Aurobindo : *On Original Thinking* (From Essays Human and Divine) : A Reading

— Dr Rabi Kumar Jha

Abstract:

India has passed several phases of history. The ancient India was the golden period of history when the freedom of thought was given the highest importance. Unfortunately the intellectual flowering nosedived in the medieval age. The great saints and reformers regenerated Hindu religion by preaching the eternal truths of Indian philosophy. The social transformation of the period had made the people more or less incapable to think independently. After that India advanced to the Modern age when Indian thoughts and philosophy were challenged every now and then by the Western thoughts and culture. Sri Aurobindo heralded a new age of renaissance and cultural regeneration by reviving the pristine thoughts of Hinduism. The paper is a modest attempt to understand and underline the significant aspects of Aurobindo's thoughts for the humanity in general and India in particular as enshrined in his book *On Original Thinking*. It proves how relevant his thoughts are even today. At the same time it gives a glimpse of Aurobindo's life.

Keywords: Hinduism, spiritual dynamism, philosophy, rationality

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), the seer, the fiery revolutionary and nationalist, the renowned scholar, the interpreter of the *Vedas*, the teacher, the philosopher, poet, dramatist, orator, critic was born on August 15, 1872 in Calcutta now Kolkata. Krishnanad Ghosh, his father, was a famous physician and an

anglicized Indian. Sri Aurobindo was sent to England for his studies. He received his early education at Manchester where Rev. William H. Drewett and Mrs. Drewett taught him. He became adept in English, Latin, French and history. He was also taught privately by Rev. William H. Drewett. During his long stay nearly fourteen years in England, Sri Aurobindo used English for all practical purposes.

In April 1901 Sri Aurobindo wedded Mrinalini Bose. During the period 1902 to 1905 Sri Aurobindo became a confirmed revolutionary in India's freedom movement. In 1904 he was attracted towards yoga. He was of the opinion that without the awakening of the masses nothing will be achieved. On May 4, 1908 he was arrested for Alipore Conspiracy Case. He remained in Alipore jail for a year. It is said that the journey of the jail completely transformed Sri Aurobindo. He became a mystic having a glimpse of god Narayan. He started the publication of a new weekly, *Karamyogi* soon after his release in 1909.

The period which he spent in Pondicherry was the period of spiritual enlightenment for Sri Aurobindo. From revolutionary he was transformed into a Rishi. He was governed by the Divine Force. His literary journey was guided by spiritual leanings and philosophical thoughts. The main theme of his writings is about the spirituality of India and the divinity in man. A great scholar of English literature, Sri Aurobindo never followed the hackneyed method of literary criticism.

On Original Thinking

On Original Thinking was written in 1912. The essay was published posthumously. In this essay, Sri Aurobindo lays emphasis on the importance of intellectual freedom. He also aspires for a successful

assimilation of Indian thought and Western knowledge. The original thinking has always been an innate source of pleasure for the sages. Only the intellectuals who are in touch with rarity, brilliance and potency can give birth to such kind of original thoughts. The people should be encouraged to develop their intellectual thinking. These thoughts are a blessing to mankind. But in the *tamasic* state of mind a *tamasic* man never gives any space to independent thoughts and opinions. He is always opposed to any kind of freedom of thought. He shackles the intellectual brain, censor the freedom of thoughts under the tyranny of authority. The fear of authority cripples the instinctual knowledge. The freedom of opinion is curtailed by the draconian rules and laws. Sri Aurobindo says:

Therefore tamasic men and tamasic states of society take especial pains to discourage independence of opinion. Their watch word is authority. Few societies have been so tamasic, so full of inertia and contentment in increasing narrowness as Indian society in later times; few have been so eager to preserve themselves in inertia. (9)

In certain nations narrowness displays its ugly and monstrous face. The Indian society is flexible. It welcomes the idea. It has been witnessed since the early days of Indian civilization. The Indian intellectuals more or less follow the preachings of Indian philosophy. Indian philosophy known for dynamism incorporates novel ideas. The Hindu religion has always adored the importance of the scriptures and the valuable comments of the commentators. They explain and elucidate the idea to the common people. The past of India is beautiful and fascinating. The Indian philosophy and religion are complementary to each other. They always strive for perfection. The perfectionist attitude is the mainstay

of Indian philosophy and Indian life.

Hinduism is not a static religion. It is not only a religion but it prescribes a way to lead life. Hinduism has oceanic depth. This religion always invited the opinions of religious thinkers and saints. Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavira reformed the corrupt practices of Brahminism in Hindu religion. When a religion does not accept any kind of reformation, it becomes a static religion. Indian philosophy and religion never offer any space to irrational belief. As Aurobindo says:

Otherwise we should long ago, have been in the grave where dead nations lie, with Greece and Rome with the Caesars, with Essarhaddon and the Chosroses. (10)

Sri Aurobindo admires the divinity of India, the religion preaches the spirit of self sacrificing attitudes. It has emerged from scriptures dictated by the holy saints. These saints were indeed secular as they stressed more on humanism and human values. The people of India always accepted these saints with great veneration and deep reverence.

Their philosophy of life always preaches love for humanity. Sri Aurobindo says:

I am inclined to give more credit for the secular miracle of our national survival to Shankara, Ramanuja, Nanak and Kabir, Gum Govind, Chaitanya. Ramdas and Takaram than to Raghunandan and the Pandits of Nadiya and Bhatpara (10)

Indian life has been governed by the principles of Shastra and custom. But it never advocates rigidity; rather it is known for flexibility of thoughts. It accepts the genuine thoughts to govern life.

This mighty intellectual thought of India has been challenged from different quarters from time to

time. India is known for her original thoughts. She has been the abode of elevated ethics, divine principles and profound philosophy. After becoming slave India remained under foreign yoke for nearly thousand years. The intellect of India declined sharply during that period. The intellectuals of India lost their original thinking and vision. The European invasion in the field of knowledge created hindrance to flourish Indian intellectuality freely. The people of India did not cope with the new knowledge coming from Europe with the English people. Sri Aurobindo advocated that the people of India should not imitate the West blindly. Only the knowledge which is necessary should be accepted and assimilated in Indian philosophy. The things which are not needed for us should be nullified and rejected. The Indian intellectuals must adopt the process of filtration of knowledge. First, the knowledge should be distilled thereafter filtered and later on it should be accepted, Sri Aurobindo says:

We have tried to assimilate, we have tried to reject, we have tried to select; but we have not been able to do any of these things successfully. Successful assimilation depends on mastery; but we have not mastered European conditions and knowledge. Our rejection too must be an intelligent rejection; we must reject because we have understood, not because we have failed to understand. (10)

Sri Aurobindo held that before rejecting any thought we should know why we are rejecting those thoughts. He further felt that ignorance is the greatest enemy of common people. The people of India follow life as suggested by the ancient saints without challenging it. They have the view that these things were followed by the ancestors, so he should also follow it. It is a matter of convention and tradition. They accept

everything without any challenge. The European tried to take advantage of the simplicity of Indian people. They always project themselves as the torch bearer of modern civilization. They only display the beautiful things of their culture and cunningly hide the lacunae of their culture. These European people always kept their ugliness in the dark. Their culture has challenged virtues of Indian religious life and philosophy. Sri Aurobindo says:

The Europeans want us to think about themselves and their modern civilization. Our English culture-if culture it can be called-has increased tenfold the evil of our dependence instead of remedying it. (11)

Sri Aurobindo further stressed that past knowledge plays an important role to shape future selection. One should not be dependent too much on borrowed knowledge. A person should use his intellect judiciously to select ideas. One should not follow blindly, foolishly and inappropriately the knowledge not known to him. One should not be prejudiced to any thought and knowledge. Sri Aurobindo further told that everything which is European is not good-but everything is not bad either. He suggests that one should admire whatever good element is there in European culture. The brightness of a thing does not establish its supremacy. But the inner beauty and eternal nature give a permanence to survive. Sri Aurobindo shows the way of life. He says:

Yet it is only by mastering the life and heart of things that we can hope, as a nation, to survive. (11)

A nation needs certain inherent principles to survive. It must possess her culture, tradition, philosophy, religion and original thoughts. There should be adequate space for intellectual adjustment and

reformation to accept others' views. There should be liberation of thoughts. One must not be tyrannical but the nation should compete with other nations. The good things should be protected and evil things should be terminated. The authority should be respected, but there should be no element of surrender of self-respect before the authority. One should not change his opinion. The good preachings of philosophy should be accommodated. There should be ample respect for other philosophical thoughts. Sri Aurobindo says that the teachings of Sayana and preachings of Shankara are the jewels of Indian Philosophy. We should admire them, study them and accept them. But the English people desired that the Indian people should assimilate foreign way of life. Sri Aurobindo says:

But they mean by these sounding recommendations that we should renounce the authority of Sayana for the authority of Max Muller, the Monism of Shankara for the Monism of Heackel, the written. Shâstra for the unwritten law of social opinion, the dogmatism of Brahmin Pandits for the dogmatism of European scientists, thinkers and scholars. (12)

The thoughts which are lofty and elevated, which enjoy esteemed status throughout Europe should be cherished for. We should never surrender our old Indian illuminations which have shown the path of enlightenment with European enlightenment which has not been tested. The Indian philosophy is spiritual and always tries to find solution of life. The European enlightenment more or less challenges materialistic pursuit.

Sri Aurobindo has high regard for Indian philosophy. It is one of the oldest philosophies of the world. In several aspects, it is unchallenged. Sri Aurobindo gives a clarion call to the youth to take the

moral responsibility to save this nation from danger. The youth should not imitate the European culture blindly. They should try to exercise intellectual knowledge to discriminate between right and wrong. They should spread the knowledge of Indian philosophy to make the people wiser so that they should be capable to face the life successfully. Sri Aurobindo gives a clarion call to the youth of this country :

Let our brains no longer, like European infants, be swathed with swaddling clothes; let them recover the free and unbound motion of the gods; let them have not only the minuteness but the wide mastery and sovereignty natural to the intellect of Bharata and easily recoverable by it if it once accustoms itself to fill its own power and convinced of its own worth (12)

India has passed through several phases of history. Ancient India was the golden period of history. During that period, the freedom of thoughts was given highest importance. At that time, India was the land of great intellectuals, renowned scholars and sacrificing saints. Then came the medieval age. It was the period of serious decline in terms of knowledge in the Indian society. Sri Aurobindo tries to make the people understand that if we want to survive as a nation, then we must know how to swim against the unfavourable tide and overcome the odd situation. When a nation comes to existence, it is not merely a geographical boundary but she has her own ethos and culture. She has her own values to be appreciated. When the ethics and values are eroded, the nation in principle comes to an end. So we should become the custodian of our own culture. Aurobindo says -

No, we must learn to swim and use that power to reach the good vessel of unchanging truth; we must land again on the eternal rock of

ages. (13)

In the concluding section of the essay, Sri Aurobindo suggests certain steps to overcome the imposition of foreign culture. He stresses on the importance of original thinking. It is the only way to eliminate the difficult riddles of intellectual poverty. Sri Aurobindo says :

We must not begin by becoming partisans but know before we take our line, Our first business as original thinkers will be to accept nothing, to question everything. (13)

Sri Aurobindo further offers his own observation that we must not ape the west or other foreign cultures without fully satisfying ourselves. We should try our best to get rid of all unfounded and unexamined opinions. One should not cherish the preconceived notions and judgements. When Buddhists declared that *Atman* itself did not exist and arrived at ultimate nothingness, it was not accepted by the great thinkers and philosophers of Hindu religion. Though, Lord Buddha established Buddhism, his teachings are relevant today but the intellectual acumen of the people of India and Indian philosophy prevent them to accept Lord Buddha's concept about *Atman*. Sri Aurobindo himself did not accept the concept of *Atman* propagated by Lord Buddha:

There are certain sanskaras that seem to me Aatma itself but an eternal and fundamental way of looking at things, the essentially of all being in itself unknowable neti, neti. (13)

In India Buddha's philosophy has been admired but not accepted in toto. They were tested on the altar of rationality. So, the European thinkers must not think that they can impose whatever they want to do over the simple Indians. European thinkers are admired but

they will be not followed blindly Of late, Europe has ceased to produce original thinkers. Of course, the continent has produced original mechanics and machines. Europe has become stereotyped and static. She is giving only material comfort by multiplying luxuries. Only India has the potential to become the spiritual leader. The nation like China, Japan and the Islamic States are sliding down as they are following the footprints of Europe. India has a great responsibility as Sri Aurobindo says:

In India alone there is self contained, dormant, the energy and the invincible spiritual individuality which yet arise and break her own and the World's fetters. (14)

The spiritual dynamism of Hindu philosophy, the sound rationality of Indian religion, the capacity of Indian civilization to survive and can save the world from ensuing danger.

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Repression of Women in R. K. Narayan's *The Dark Room*

— Dr. Nisha Singh

Abstract :

R K Narayan is greatly held as a great story teller with microscopic observation of natural life at semi-urban locale. Women characters in his novels are anticipated as the defenders and protectors of civilization and culture. Narayan presents in his novels the tradition-bound and orthodox atmosphere of the transitional class as well as bourgeois society where woman is second to the man who enjoys unopposed authority and ownership over her.

Male dominance in society has ensued in men a trend of looking down upon women as inferior to men. Hence, in any civilization, one's emotive rejoinder to the world, one's ambitions, goalmouths and occupational promises, one's attitude to aristocracies, parents and authority and the very doppelgänger one as of one self are all determined by the sexual category to which one belongs. The paper aims to explore the concept and modes of repression of women in *The Dark Room*.

Keywords : Tradition, Modernity, Gender, equality, Inequality, domination, patriarchy.

The novel in any age reflects the community, dogmatic and other related glitches of the age, a study of the projection of women and their problems in the novel will lead to a greater awareness of what society expects a woman to be, and whether woman as distinct and as an assemblage, finds self-actualization in living up to this doppelgänger. It is necessary to define woman as an assemblage. Paradoxically, women clearly

encompass the largest group in the world. They are also related to every other group in society and live in close intimacy with the other main group, namely men. Yet they have been embossed as inferior, both physically and intellectually, and have been consigned to a secondary position in society. Women are indispensable in society both for the prolongation of the species as well as for maintaining social order. Yet they remain outsiders. Women have often being allocated a marginal status because their physical or cultural characteristics are singled out from the others in the society in which they live, though they belong to the majority group. It has been assumed that happiness for women constitutes fulfilling the role of being a good wife and mother. As Simone de Beauvoir writes about patriarchal culture, "...humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him: she is not regarded as an autonomous being. (Beauvoir, XVIII)

Social ostracization of women who rebelled made it impossible for women to break away from socially laid down norms. Since women's ideal role was to be obedient and play a supportive role in the family, the idea that they might wish to define their lives differently or assert their desire for a more independent life or carrier of their own seemed unnatural.

The persistence of this stereotyped in society was faithfully reflected in literature. The popular sentimental novels upheld the Christian virtues of wifely submission in the face of ill treatment, drunkenness, infidelity, irresponsibility and occasional violence. One marries for better and for worse. Marital vows were serious and permanent vows - serious and permanent vows at least as far as the women were concerned. They established the dictum that women's place is in

man's world and created stereotypical characters.

Attempts were made by women writers like George Eliot, Jane Austen and Louisa M. Alcott to create women with a mind of their own. But even these women ended up as wives, thus submitting to the social code and reinforcing the traditional stereotype. One of the most celebrated of modernist poems, Yeats's *A Prayer for my Daughter*, written in 1919 continues to uphold the virtue of being 'rooted' like 'some green laurel'.¹ The assertive or rebellious wife was made out to be a shrew and was finally punished with misfortune or was tamed.

Narayan submits that women are nothing more than a shadow of their male counterpart. The slightest violation of accepted social principle invites trouble and stigma to them whereas man enjoys a relatively free life unbound by such strict norms of conduct and behaviour. In *Grandmother's Tale* Narayan tells the main attributes of a wife reflecting on man's perspective of woman :

A perfect wife must work like a slave, advise like a Mantri, look like Goddess Lakshami, be patient like Mother Earth and courtesan like in bed chamber. (Narayan:1992: 5)

Narayan follows Somerset Maugham's ironic mode and his artistic and aesthetic delineation of originals as characters of fiction and yet so close to life and living. *The Dark Room* is considered a unique novel in Narayan's whole oeuvre. In this novel he adopts an ideological viewpoint. Here he explores the feminist movement. The influence of Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen and his play *A Doll's House* is evident on his novel.

R.K. Narayan's presentation of Savitri in *The Dark*

Room is of a woman subjected to eternal slavery of domestic chores, and pious dutifulness towards her husband. The novel is full of gloom and social criticism, and Narayan is carried away a bit by Ibsenite feminism. Savitri in Narayan's *The Dark Room* is an archetypal victim of tyranny, autocracy and callous obduracy of her husband, Ramani. The only alternative for her is to bear insults and scolding without rhyme or reason, and humiliation heaped upon her irrationally by her husband, who also indulges in extra-marital relation with Shanta Bai, a newly appointed woman insurance agent in Engladia Insurance Company of which he is Secretary. Savitri sulks and retires into the privacy of the dark room of the house with her face to the wall, refuses food and does not speak to anyone. K R Srinivasa Iyengar defines this traditional concept of 'dark room':

"The 'dark room' used to be as indispensable as a part of an Indian house as a kitchen, and was a place for 'safe deposits', both a sanctuary -and a retreat:..."(Iyengar, 371)

Ramani hardly bothers about her sulking. Savitri does not suffer for a long time and decides to demand her rights as human being. When rebuffed by her husband, she determinedly leaves her house and escapes into the dark, inscrutable, but larger world to seek fulfilment.

Another aspect of Savitri's disposition which strikes a note of clash with her general attitude of docility, helplessness, tolerance and submissiveness, comes across when she quarrels with Shanta Bai. Ramani's dishonesty on this subject infuriates her and provokes her into rebellion. She abandons her husband's house then and there at midnight. The experience of the strange world outside her husband's house,

manifested in her unsuccessful effort of drowning herself in the Sarayu, followed by her employment in the temple of the village Sakkur with the help of peasant woman, Ponni who takes her towards self-discovery. Her ephemeral revolt against her husband's tyranny enables her to realize her helplessness and isolation. Her coming back home because of her maternal obsession with her children shows the feebleness and irrationality of such an attempt. Narayan in his novel *The Dark Room* has delineated women as victim of circumstances.

In *The Dark Room*, he demarcates a combination of women characters – Savitri, Shanta Bai, Janamma, Ganga, and Peasant woman, Ponni. They reveal the different faces of women. The novel has domestic disharmony as its theme and severed relations between man and wife causes the crisis in the novel. Narayan in his memoir, *My Days* clearly states the theme of this novel:

I was somehow obsessed with the philosophy of women as opposed to Man, her constant oppressor. This must have been the early testament of women's lib' movement. Man assigned her secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunningness that she herself began to lose all notions of her independence, individuality, stature and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was ideal victim of such circumstances.(Narayan : 1975, 119)

Savitri is the victim of her autocratic, repressive and egocentric husband Ramani. At the very beginning of the novel, Ramani appears as an all-powerful husband and father. He forces Babu to go to school despite his having fever. When Savitri tries to intervene, he rebukes

her and insultingly dismisses her by saying that she has no business to interfere with his handling of children. Narayan portrays Savitri as an ideal mother and a devoted wife. She is also pious and God fearing and attends her puja room in the house daily.

Savitri is middle-aged housewife with three grown up children. She is sulky though not always without reason. She reveals her position in the house and the treatment meted out to her by her husband; she tries to put Babu in bed, but Ramani sternly asks her to mind her own business and leave the training of the grown-up boy to him. She realizes how impotent she is:

She had not the slightest power to do anything at home and that after fifteen years of married life. Babu did lok very ill and she was powerless to keep him in bed. (Narayan : 1938, 8)

Once on the day before of Navratri carnival the light of the house goes off because of some fault in the electrical arrangement improvised by Babu in the doll's pavilion. When Ramani returns home to find the whole house in darkness, he flares into uncontrollable rage, shouts at everybody in the house and recklessly curses them. He beats Babu badly when he comes to know that things have gone wrong because of his interfering with the electrical system. Savitri cannot stand his inauspicious cursing on the auspicious day of Navratri. She is, however, helpless before him and has no alternative but to retire mutely to the dark room. She has little education and is rendered totally helpless at the hands of dictatorial husband. She is also worried because her husband is having an extra-marital affair with Shanta Bai.

She reacts and says:

I am middle-aged, old fashioned, plain. How can I

help it. She must be young and pretty. He has not been coming home before mid-night for weeks.(Narayan : 1938, 8)

Narayan focuses on the internal suffering of Savitri and the solution she so innocently thinks of. This is the fate of all wives:

Savitri went to the mirror and scrutinized herself in it once again... she applied a little scented oil to her hair and combed it with great care. She braided and oiled it very neatly.(Ibid, 103-4)

She even dreams of his arrival:

She dreamt that her husband has come home, held her in arms, and swore that he has been carrying about only a coloured parasol, and silly people said that he has been going about with a woman... (Ibid, 107)

But actually, her husband does not bother about her sulking, he knows that she will come out of the dark room when the anger has worn off.

In *The Dark Room* Narayan not only traces the necessity of women's liberation but also points out the equally discernible difficulties. In a traditional society where mythology is replete with stories of self-sacrificing women, where women are also perceived as sex objects, where women are more or less devoid of education and of economic independence, where the structure is still patriarchal, the women's liberation movement seems a distant dream. This is why Narayan, pained by the social reality of man-woman relationship in the contemporary Indian society, portrays women in a way that subverts Indian patriarchy.

Savitri shows remarkable patience and puts up with her husband's temper and his slights till the time his infidelity is not suspected. When she gets confirm

about the extra-marital affair with Shanta Bai, the rebel in her bursts out. She could realize that, her husband does not want to face her. He makes a demonstration of love to her in order to divert her attention. She frees herself of his hold and speaks with an anguished heart.

“Don’ touch me!” moving away from him, “you are dirty, you are impure. (Ibid, 112)

The quarrel that ensues is typically Ibsenite and Savitri also has to state categorically just like Nora, “this sort of a thing has to stop, understand” (Ibid, 109) She says: “ Don’t think that you can fondle us when you like and kick us when you choose”. (Ibid, 110) *The Dark Room* is influenced if not inspired by Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House*.

Narayan himself says, “Savitri...is named after the mythical wife to whom husband is God.” But this Savitri, like Shaw’s Pygmalion, is a modern Savitri in the sense of her limited patience, her limited capacity for suffering and a scope for rebellion when confronted with the husband’s concubine or kept women. Single minded loyalty and unswerving allegiance even after the husband’s death is what makes the ancient Savitri a model of womanhood. Narayan has named the heroine so because he cannot help being ironical. This tragic compulsion to be loyal when there is no other option left is Narayan’s version of the new Hindu sati. This is a forced sati system in life and throughout life, worse than physical-immolation, which Lord Bentinck forbade.

Savitri’s abandoning of her husband’s house is an overthrowing of the age-old inherited burden of tradition which binds a woman to home and denies her the freedom of release from her husband’s hold, however unjust he may be. It is considered an unjust act. She says, “the prostitute changes her men but a married

women does not. That's all, but both earn their food and shelters in the same manner" (Ibid, 120). Her bitter utterance reveals the sad, helpless plight of a woman in the Indian middle class society.

Savitri also raises a significant feminist issue, the economic independence of the woman in order to assert her independent personality.

What can I do by myself? Unfit to earn handful of rice except by begging.... Kamala and Sumati must take their university course and become independent. (Ibid, 120)

This feminist issue has incidentally been raised in Ibsen's *Ghosts* also. Savitri repents her dependence on male support: "what despicable creations of God are we that we can't exist without support. I am like a bamboo pole, which cannot stand without a wall to support it..." (Ibid, 189)

To conclude, Narayan's female characters in *The Dark Room* are exposed by their homely way of life. His characters are genuine in the sense that they do not disgrace human sensibility in the visual sense, nor do they violate human expectation of conative prospect. In proportion and dimension, in motivation and action, in their dreams and aspirations, they neither belong to Utopia nor to the Ivory tower; they are neither so cultured as to have been denaturalized nor aboriginal or purist enough to have escaped the effects of contemporary society.

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Writing In Genres Before They Become Established- An Appraisal of Jack London's Works

— S.Malathi

Dr. S.S. Jansi Rani

Abstract :

Jack London was a prolific American writer. He created many short stories and novels that were widely read. His works were translated in seventy languages. London wrote about Klondike gold rush, life of the natives, South Sea Islands, dystopian novel, science fiction, vision literature, psychological fantasies and hugely popular animal stories like the "Call of the Wild" and "White Fang". His versatility was amazing considering his brief life-40 years-and lack of formal education. This article attempts to describe how he prefigured future genres in some of his works. The significance lies in that these genres were established long after his death.

Keywords : Naturalism, existentialism, dystopian, psychoanalytic fiction.

Jack London is conventionally grouped with Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser as a naturalist. His writings have a definite naturalist flavour and he is a prolific writer. But his versatility does not allow confining him to naturalist genre alone. He has experimented with many literary forms. Many a future genre can be traced to his writings. This article is a review of his works in the light of Existentialistic writings, Science fiction, Psycho-analytical writings, Fantasy writing, dystopian novels and prison literature. (The Books of Jack London)

Jack London lived for forty years only. Even after

hundred years, his books are still in circulation and very popular. His *Call of the Wild* never went out of print, since 1903. It is a publishing record. Between 1900 and 1916, he completed more than 50 fiction and nonfiction books, hundreds of short stories and numerous articles. Several of the books and many of the short stories are classics. Some of his works have been translated in as many as 70 languages. He was an eloquent speaker. He advocated socialism in colleges through lectures and debates. He also wrote screenplay for some of his novels. His works have brought prosperity to the author from a humble beginning.

A man travels through Yukon; he reaches the border though he is warned by an older man about the danger but the protagonist ignores him. His story "To Build a Fire" is often termed as an example of naturalism. In this story, a man, (the protagonist), Jack London does not provide a name to him, starts a journey alone with a dog. The temperature is 75° F below zero. He slips into water under thin ice accidentally. He sets out to build a fire under a tree to thaw his frozen legs. He removes his mittens and gets warmed. The snow deposited on the boughs of the tree, melts and quenches the fire. His frantic efforts to build a fire again fail. The freezing cold numbs his fingers. He struggles in vain and lies down to sleep. Finally he freezes to death. The dog just walks away. Nature is treated as objective, invincible and does not take any special care of man. The struggle of man against nature is a vain endeavour. This is the naturalist explanation to the story. London depicts arctic and very cold conditions throughout the story. Karen Rhodes believed to build a fire represents London's Naturalistic Flavour. "It pits one man alone against the overwhelming forces of nature". He is also believed to build a fire, can either be interpreted as

the Pioneer American experience or can be read as an allegory for the journey of human existence. “It has come to be known as everyman trekking through the Naturalistic Universe”.

This can also be considered as an existentialist story. American Heritage Dictionary (3rd ed.) defines existentialism as “a philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual in a hostile or indifferent universe.” By the effective use of imagery and irony London imbues an existential spirit into this story. In the frozen wastes of Yukon, Man fails to survive but the dog does. The fire that could give life is quenched by water, another life giver. By not naming the man, London distances the character from the reader. The indifference and hostility of nature to man and his suffering is described. The struggle of man to live in the face of imminent death, its absurdity and his eventual acceptance of it make it existential.

The term “existentialism” itself is coined by the French Catholic philosopher, Gabriel Marcel, in the mid-1940s. Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) describes the Russian master Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novels, *Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Notes from the Underground*, as existential novels. The American editions of the works of Dostoevsky have been published long after London died. Existentialism as a philosophical school gained momentum only in the post World War II period. Thus Jack London in his *To Build a Fire* and other stories like *Love of Life* can be said to have written in a genre that developed much later.

Much the same way, *Before Adam* (1907) is a fantasy written by London years before fantasy writing became popular. In this sense, he could be taken as a forerunner. The story revolves around a modern American haunted by his dreams since childhood. He

dreams of Pleistocene age. Through his dreams he visualizes his alter ego among pre-homo sapiens. As an adult he has studied psychology. He realizes that in his deep unconscious psyche lies a range of racial memories of an ancient ancestor transmitted over generations. Through his daily dreaming he reconstructs the life of a hominid species before the advent of modern man. His species is called the 'folk'. They live in caves, and hunt and eat. Below them in the evolutionary scale, ape like people called the 'tree people' live. Above them 'the fire' people live, who know to light fire and wear animal hides. They have also invented the bow and arrows. In the frequent internecine wars many of the less evolved species die out and the fittest group alone survives.

As H.G.Wells in his *Time Machine* (1895) builds a mechanical contraption to travel in time, London uses dreams to travel in time. London admires H.G. Wells but never does he imitate him. He cleverly uses the dream of a modern man to give us an imagined glimpse of what life was like in the mid-Pleistocene age. London is keenly aware of the limitations of using dreams to reconstruct the past. But he deftly sidesteps them as can be seen in the paragraph below:

This, as you have already discerned, violates the first law of dreaming, namely that in one's dreams one sees only what he has seen in his waking life, or combinations of the things he has seen in his waking life. But all my dreams violated this law. In my dreams I never saw ANYTHING of which I had knowledge in my waking life. My dream life and my waking life were lives apart, with not one thing in common save myself. I was the connecting link that somehow lived both lives. (*Before Adam* p.3)

- The technique adopted by Jack London to bring out the collective unconscious is based on Jung. Before Jack London, Gothic novels extensively dealt with dreams, ghosts and supernatural elements. But in *Before Adam* Jack London faithfully adheres to his study of Jung. On Jung's Psychology world web page has this observation:

- Rather than being born as a tabula rasa (a 'blank slate' in Latin) and being influenced purely by our environment, as the English philosopher John Locke believed, Jung proposed that we are each born with a collective unconscious. This contains a set of shared memories and ideas, which we can all identify with, regardless of the culture that we were born into or the time period in which we live. We cannot communicate through the collective unconscious, but we recognize some of the same ideas innately, including archetypes. (psychologyworld.org)

- The psychoanalytical fiction has come into existence much later but Jack London has clearly appreciated the study of mind which has then been under evolution. That he chose Jung in preference to Freud is indicative of his perceptive skills. Thus *Before Adam* is a pioneering work at two levels one as fantasy, novel and two as a psychoanalytical fiction.

- Next let us have a look at Jack London's dystopian novel, *The Iron Heel* (1908). M.H.Abrams defines dystopia as

- The term dystopia ("bad place") has recently come to be applied to works of fiction, including science fiction, that represent a very unpleasant imaginary world in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order is projected into a disastrous future culmination. (Abrams p.413)

- George Orwell's *1984* is a dystopian novel published in 1949. Jack London has written *The Iron Heel* has attended his dystopian novel published in 1908 long before Orwell. In this novel set in 2600 A.D, *London* describes a failed revolution, then centuries-long rule of oligarchies and the ultimate victory of socialism. He visualizes the uneven nature of social dynamics. *The Iron Heel* is the first American novel in which a female character narrates the events in a story written by a male author. From the orthodox Marxist theoretician, Leon Trotsky to sworn anticommunist, George Orwell, many have admired his dystopian novel, *The Iron Heel*. Frederic Engels has published his incisive classic *Socialism-Utopian* and *Scientific in English* in 1852. As a self-taught scholar, London has read this book and all available socialist tracts in his time. He admits it in his nonfiction classic *John Barleycorn*. Though he died a year before the Russian revolution in 1917, he places revolution in Russia in 1918 in this novel. Russia disintegrated in 1991 and China abandoned socialist economy under Deng Xiaoping in 1978 in an eerie similarity as anticipated in *The Iron Heel*. Essentially the imaginative power of Jack London has enabled anticipating the possible futures of the capitalistic society.

- Utopian and dystopian works are often a reaction to the economic depression an author experiences in his life time. Jack London has witnessed the depression and effects of the cyclic changes of capitalism during his life. Depression has devastated the lives of the working class in United States in 1896. But unlike Thomas Moore's *Utopia*, London has not painted an all rosy picture of a perfect future. His faith has been on a Socialist state after protracted battle. Curiously, Orwell has anticipated a Socialist dictatorship marked by

government deception, universal surveillance and concocting history in his 1984.

- *The Red One*, a novella, was published two years after London's death in 1918. The story is about an extra-terrestrial object worshipped by headhunting natives in Guadalcanal. A red sphere emanates a strange sound. Basset, a scientist, falls in their hands. Spurred by his scientific curiosity to unravel the secret sound, he feigns love to Balata, a native ugly girl. Through persuasion he manages to see it. He marvels at the exquisite workmanship. He wonders how the helmet-wearing images could have been carved by the savages. He values the importance of the discovery and the possibilities it could open to the civilized world. When he falls seriously ill with malaria and other tropical diseases his desire to carry the secret to his world wanes. He enters into a formal agreement with the witch-doctor Ngrun. Ngrun cures the heads of men by slowly smoking them and Ngrun craves for Basset's head. Basset agrees to give his head if he is allowed to see the *Red One* for a last time. He is taken to the object and he enjoys its magical sound. He signals Ngrun to behead him.

- Helmet-wearing, alien cultures from beyond is a theme now worn out through endless variations. But Jack London is the precursor of this theme. Besides, for a man who could not gain a University degree, his mastery of narration is awesome. The story ends with this paragraph that runs like the prose of Marcel Proust.

“He knew, without seeing, when the razor-edged hatchet rose in the air behind him. And for that instant, ere the end, there fell upon Bassett the shadows of the Unknown, a sense of impending marvel of the rending of walls before the imaginable. Almost, when he knew the blow

had started and just ere the edge of steel bit the flesh and nerves it seemed that he gazed upon the serene face of the Medusa, Truth - And, simultaneous with the bite of the steel on the onrush of the dark, in a flashing instant of fancy, he saw the vision of his head turning slowly, always turning, in the devil-devil house beside the breadfruit tree.” (p.213)

Jack London has written several stories which are now classed under science fiction. Encyclopedia Britannica explains the features of Science fiction thus:

The customary “theatrics” of science fiction include prophetic warnings, utopian aspirations, elaborate scenarios for entirely imaginary worlds, titanic disasters, strange voyages, and political agitation of many extremist flavors, presented in the form of sermons, meditations, satires, allegories, and parodies—exhibiting every conceivable attitude toward the process of techno-social change, from cynical despair to cosmic bliss.

Jack London’s *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) deals with a pandemic (an occurrence in which a disease spreads very quickly and affects a large number of people) that leaves a few survivors. They regress to the level of hunter gatherers. The language is forgotten. The lone old, civilized survivor who could re-narrate the past life is ignored by the half-savage youngsters. Again, in his *Unparalleled Invasion* (1910) he sets the story in future, in 1976 A.D. He envisions the rise of China. The population growth of China results in the colonization of countries previously held by the European powers. United States and other powers decide to stop the onslaught of Chinese. They wage a biological war against China. Germs spread plague and the entire Chinese race is exterminated. Even those who are left

behind are killed. Chinese land is taken over by the victorious powers and a superior culture flourishes. Notwithstanding the frequent identification of racial overtones and advocating genocide, the story is relevant even today. Demographically China and India have the numerical superiority. Just as the United States and the other western powers in London's narrative have the technological capability to launch a biological warfare, contemporary geopolitical alignments too underscore the same superiority. In the story after 'sanitizing' China with germ laden bombs, the victorious powers meet at Copenhagen and resolve not to start genocide again. Some of the noted biological warfare fictions that have been published much later are James Tiptree. *Jr's Last Flight of Dr Ain* (1969) and *The Screwfly Solution* (1977), Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978) and Frank Herbert's *White Plague* (1982).

It would be preposterous to claim that future genres are created by London in their full fledged form. But he has tried writing as illustrated above a variety of genre in the elementary form which later developed into popular genre his innovation in the field of genre needs to be appreciated and acknowledge his pioneering attempts have been successful as justified by his popularity in his own times. He has started as a naturalist writer but his continual learning has made him attempt experimentation in a variety of genres. His innovations in the field of genre needs to be appreciated and acknowledge his pioneering attempts have been successful as justified by his popularity in his own and his remarkable felicity with his craft continues to endear him to the contemporary readers.

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Gandhian Vision : *Waiting for the Mahatma and Maila Aanchal*

— Shuch Smita

Abstract:

Gandhi was a perennial source of inspiration not only for freedom fighters, political and social activists but also for creative writers in every language in India during independence movement and its aftermath for years. Even today he is unquestionably the most inspiring figure of the twentieth century. Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R K Narayan known as trio novelists were highly influenced by Gandhian vision of life. However, in R K Narayan he is present only in one novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*. The present paper is an evaluation of Gandhian vision operating in *Waiting for the Mahatma* and Phanishwar Nath Renu's *Maila Aanchal*. It is an endeavour to see how they reflect in their respective novels on socio-political issues like communal unity, untouchability, prohibition of alcohol, advertisement of Khadi and charkha, Gramodyog, Laghu Kutir Udyog, Cleanliness of the village, Health education.

Keywords : Gandhianism, purn swaraz, region, politics, romance.

The Gandhian vision is seen in the Gandhian revolution from 1920 to 1947. In the words of K.R.S. Iyengar the above mentioned period is known as 'The Gandhian Age'. (Iyengar, 248) Another prominent writer and critic, Prof. M.K. Naik is of opinion that it is the period of 'The Gandhian whirlwind' (Naik, 114) with a unique awakening of 'a distinctive national identity' (Naik, 116) in every walk of life. It became a style of living and thinking with notes of the spirit of India, a search for identity and 'Purna Swaraj' which gave a

new meaning and 'a new significance' (Sarma, , 183) to the national movements and made strong the Gandhian touches of 'deep faith in love for all' (Sarma, 182)

Gandhi is the sun himself. The sun never sets. It only changes its place. This is true of Gandhijee too. He has seen nothing but poverty and disease everywhere. It is all due to the British Government. But what can be done? The people are ignorant. They do not know that freedom is their birth right. They are lost in the darkness of ignorance and seemed even to enjoy this fearful darkness. He drives aware this darkness. He gives us the light of knowledge and leads our nation to freedom.

Gandhijee comes and begins to influence both national politics and national literature after returning from South Africa. In South Africa he professes himself as a bold champion of the masses. His best way of dealing with the imperialist Government through satyagrah, civil disobedience, love, truth, non-violence, fires the vision of Indians including the creative writers. He pleads the social and political issues, religion, culture, village-economy, education, Khaddar, Charkha, Tiranga, the rejection of Child marriage, dowry system, widow marriage etc to rouse national awareness. This is why Katha Samarat Munshi Premchand the Father of the Modern Literature, remarks:

“... Mahatma Gandhi is the greatest man in the World. He also aims at the happiness of labourers and peasants. He is launching movements to promote them. I am encouraging them through my writing. Mahatma Gandhi seeks the Hindu-Muslim Unity. I also want to make Hindustani by mixing up Hindi and Urdu.” (Devi, 95)

Indeed '*Waiting for the Mahatma*', a political novel lays emphasis on the influence of Gandhiji and his movement in India. Sriram's teacher recognises him

after joining the Congress.

“I am proud to see you here my boy. Join Congress, work for the country, you will go far, God bless you... (Narayan, 35)

Whereas on the other hand Sriram's Granny thinks that the Mahatma is one who preaches dangerously who tries to bring untouchables into temple.

No doubt, Gandhiji is the main character of the novel and all happenings move round him. Bharti, the heroine of the novel is his true follower. According to her, Bapu and the agitation are more important than her affair with the hero, Sriram. Sriram is really the shadow of Bharti and he joins the national agitation for the sake of his love willingly or unwillingly.

In the novel, *Waiting for the Mahatma*, R.K. Narayan presents the miserable condition of municipal sweepers as he remarks:

They were paid ten rupees a month per head and since they worked in the families for four or five, each had a considerable income by Malgudi standards. They hardly ever lived in their huts, spending all their time around the Municipal building or at the toddy shop run by the government nearby which absorbed all their earnings. (Walsh,23)

In the novel, we see that M.K. Gandhij himself participates not only in the freedom movement but also in the agitation for social justice. He delivers a speech on equal distribution of wealth and says boldly that the rich in India will always remain rich and the poor will remain poor. The simple fact is that the rich know how to multiply money while the poor don't know the trick. He introduces the social and political activities of Gandhiji through the romance of Sriram and Bharati. He comes to Malgudi to address a meeting of the public on the bank of the river, Saryu and exhorts them to

cultivate a sense of unity. When he stands on the dais, people begin to cry 'Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai'.(Narayan, 26). He speaks in Hindi and expresses thus:

“I will not address you in English. It's the language of our rulers. It has enslaved us. I very much wish I could speak to you in your own sweet language, Tamil.... I shall be able next time to speak to you in Tamil without troubling our friend Nitesh.” (Narayan,27)

In his words “All women are your sisters and mothers” (Narayan, 29) He says that we should love and not have bitterness. He praises God very much and expresses:

God is everywhere and if you want to feel his presence, you will see him in a place like this with a beautiful river flowing, the sunrise with all its colours and the air so fresh. Feeling a beautiful hour, or a beautiful scene or a beautiful object is itself a form of prayer” (Narayan, 68)

He goes to Neel Bagh in the aristocratic Lawley Extension which is the house of Mr. Nitesh the chairman of the municipality of Malgudi. He avoids the palace to stay here. Many people assemble. The chairman himself feels helpless that some are plucking flowers. He gives a tray, filled with oranges to Gandhiji and Gandhiji gives an orange to an untouchable but the untouchable does not dare to take it. He calls him near and smoothes out his matted hair with his fingers.

R.K. Narayan describes Gandhiji as the champion of harijans, villagers, children and volunteers. Bapu settles the marriage and blesses Sriram and Bharti who are waiting for his permission for a long time. His routine early in the morning spinning, Ramdhun and prayer, fast, love for children and untouchables, regard for the national and regional languages of India all assist to complete the many sided personality of the Mahatma.

In brief we may say that *Waiting for the Mahatma* by R.K. Narayan is a beautiful novel in which the political movement has developed with the romance of Sriram and Bharti. Indeed it is a masterpiece of art which is full of Gandhian vision.

In the novel of Phanishwarnath, *Maila Aanchal* also we find the wide impact of Gandhi in so far as he remains dominant. People in different villagers of Purnea District (Now Arariya), Bihar are much engaged in the movement for freedom. The condition of chaos, disorder and turmoil is seen everywhere. The British rulers, landlords of the villages, collectors of revenue, police officers and so on exploit, torture and torment the people of this area. Even people are physically punished when they do not pay revenue. More or less it is the wretched condition of the entire nation from 1942 to 1948.

The novel, *Maila Aanchal* is a sociological saga of contemporary India. It is related to the social, cultural and political condition of Maryganj, a village of Purnea (Araria). Although the villagers of this village remain entirely out of touch with the public movement of 1942. Still they come to know the news of upheavals, events etc. which befall in the local area of Mithilanchal. The British tyranny was on climax. A British soldier at Moglahi Station was kidnapped, For it, a fight was fought between the Sikhs and the English soldiers: Bullets were fired. The entire village, Dholbaja was set on fire. Not a single child could be saved. Musharu's father in law saw with his own eyes just like a fish fried in the fire the dead bodies remained for months even a crow could not eat it. The military was on watch." (Renu, 9)

Indians tremble with fear. A malaria centre is to be opened in Maryganj for which people are restless. There is a political worker in Maryganj namely Baldeo

who puts on Khadi and speaks 'Jaihind'. People believe that they are tortured and tormented only because of Baldeo. As a result, "People of yadav toli arrest Baldeo because there is an award on the arrest of the absconded freedom fighters" On the one hand there is the terror of the British rulers and on the other there is avarice for gaining the award. It is the condition of the general plain hearted public.

Baldeo, a political worker, wants to bring political awareness in the village. He has firm faith in Gandhian thought so when the yadavas and the Rajputs are ready for conflict, Baldeo says "you are going on the path of violence conflict which is not the way of Gandhijee"

By this time Gandhi has been popular among people. Baban Das is another character beside Baldeo in Maryganj who has firm faith in Gandhism.

Baldeo takes an active part in the movement of 1942 of Gandhiji. He suffers a lot by the Englishman. He says:

"In the movement when I was caught by the British Military, I was beaten black and blue till I was senseless. Instead of water, urine was given me to drink." (Renu, 30)

Not only Baldeo is the victim of the British tyranny but other freedom fighters are also tortured and tormented. In Maryganj, Baldeo only is such a man who has to suffer who is basically the resident of Channanpati. The political awareness has come in the village. The workers of the various political parties are working for awareness. In spite of the British rule, some people dare to oppose the government. Agamu Choukidar says:

"you have not to unfurl the flags and fastoons of Gandhiji otherwise will be beaten" (Renu, 32)

Introducing Ram Kishan Babu, a prominent

freedom fighter, Renu expresses:

“Ram Kishan Babu was peculiar in form he had big eyes. He delivered his speech. He roared like a lion. When Ram Kishan Babu practised as a lawyer the judges never went against him. They never went against Ram Kishan Babu. But at the call of Mahatma Gandhi he gave up to practise as a lawyer. (Renu, 35)

It is the result of Gandhian influence that people began to join the procession. The people of Maryganj have gone to Purnea once under the leadership of Baldeo. The people of this place also are aware of violence, fast and satyagrah. Mahatma Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal, Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel, and Jai Prakash Narayan have been so popular that every body of the village knows them. Their works and sacrifices are weaved and expressed through the folk song in this way-

Ayi re Horya ayi fir se!
Gawat Gandhi rag Manohar
Charakha Cahlave Babu Rajendra
Gunjal Bharat Amhai re!
Holiya ayi fir se!
Veer jamahi shan hamaro,
Ballav hai abhiman hamaro
Jai Prakash Jaiso bhai re!
Holiya ayi fir se! (Renu, 126)

After great sufferings and sacrifices India gets independence on the 15th August 1947. The joys of the people of Maryganj know no bounds. They make merry with great pomp and rejoice. Women are given liberty and equality in the society and they are offered high position in every sphere of life owing to the influence of Gandhi. Gandhiji lays stress even on education and health attributes along with mental cleanliness as essential.

We come to conclusion that R.K. Narayan and Phanishwarnath Renu have thrown light on communal unity, untouchability, prohibition of alcohol, advertisement of Khadi and charkha, Gramodyog, Laghu Kutir Udyog, Cleanliness of the village, Health education, Basic education, Love for mother and nation, economic equality, peasants' union, labour union, students' union, swadeshi Andolan, uplift of the weaker sex, love for our country etc. for the welfare of the society which signify the Gandhian influence.

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Feminism in Anita Desai's *Cry The Peacock*

— **Ajmal Fatma**

Abstract :

Anita Desai is one of the best known contemporary women writers of Indian fiction in English. Born to a Bengali father and a German mother she is an excellent example of the bicultural heritage of post colonial India. She occupies a place of prominence among Indo-Anglican novelists. The present paper attempts to probe Desai's expression of her pre-occupation with the modern ideal of building the society free from male domination. An attempt has been made to show how Desai represents the theme of uniqueness of sensibility of woman as compared with male counterpart and how they suffer on account of emotional as well as physical repression and become victim of male dominated social and cultural order.

Anita Desai seems to be aware of the relationship between feminism as a political movement and movement within literary writing. Feminist movement aims at studying literary text from the point of view of languages, biology/psychology, ideology and culture. The rendering of feminine sensibility and the dilemmas of women oppressed by male dominated social order constitute her fictional works.

Keywords : Feminism, alternative discourses, patriarchy, domination

Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock* (1963) is one of the most poetic and evocative Indian novels in English. It brings out the unique sensibility of a sensitive woman in sharp contrast to the detached and practical attitude of an insensitive husband. The novel can also be seen as spectrum of presentation of the ways of dealing with the binary opposition of male versus female as objects.

All the options from girlhood through motherhood and manless life – style are open. Equality and Liberty are the two operative words here. It is seen to be difficult for a woman to reconcile with the reality of life, bend down as she is weighed by the traditional Hindu values.

Desai's work reveals another dimension she had added to her fiction importance to woman a neglected class of society. The true picture of woman is also given by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, "Beat them, starve them, how you like them, they will sit and look with animal eyes and never raise a head to defend themselves..." (Ruth Prarwar,97) Prof. K.R.S. Iyengar says; "Cry The Peacock scores because Maya is at once the centre and circumference in this world. Her insanity – rather she is sane, hysterical or insane – fills the whole look and gives it form as well as life. "(K.R.S. Iyenger, 16) Meena Belliapa asserts that it is "a remarkable attempt to fuse fantasy with perpetual experience"(Meena Beliappa, 25) Some critics like Som. P. Sharma and Kamal N. Awasthi point out that Maya despite her over-protective childhood does not seem to be a spoilt woman. She has the capacity to differentiate between her childhood friends, the indulgence of a doting father and clamorous demands of her lawyer husband who often withdrew in asking her for a cup of tea; Maya feels destabilized even after four years of marriage, Gautama had failed to fecundate, "now you are too young"- perhaps because of the barneness Maya had developed a slightly greater capacity for philosophy that she was born with. She blames Gautama for his grossness, for his concern with the fundamental and basic prosaic life in terms of money: "...it's always money or property – never a case of passion and revenge, murder and exciting things like that – not for love or life's basic things- like Toto dying."(Orient Paperbacks.24)

Mrs Desai, by powerful searchlight of her observation dives deep down and presents the world with her findings which include her prime concern to

bare the hard covering of emotions to bring out sheer womanliness in them to prove that they are actually devoid of feelings but in search of a pit of love and life. *Cry The Peacock* is a story of highly emotional, sensitive and imaginative woman told by a woman novelist. Maya is shown to be fast disintegrating under the pressures of marital discord. Married to an unresponsive and insensitive husband Gautama, she is driven from emotional instability in the beginning to madness, insanity and murder towards the end. Even though Anita Desai owes no explicit allegiance to feminist cause, she is preoccupied with the plight of woman in the male-dominated oppressive order. Her *Cry The Peacock* is a unique example of or an illusion of the feminist point of view. The novel has almost all the features of women's writing. Anita Desai defines the uniqueness of feminine sensibility through the reactions and responses of the heroine to the events and situations in the novel. A highly emotional, sensitive and sensuous woman, Maya has obsessive love for life.

It is apparent from Maya's own account of her relationship with her husband that their marriage was broken from the very start; it is clear that while Maya is extremely sensitive, imaginative, passionate and sensuous, her husband is materialistic, practical, pragmatic and unresponsive. It is difficult to agree with the critics who consider Maya to be a neurotic. She is perfectly normal and healthy woman. Her only sin is a perhaps she is too sensitive, imaginative, passionate and sensuous. These are in fact the characteristics of a normal female with reasonably good social status and upbringing. Maya in her view is driven to emotional instability, insanity and even murder under the pressures of marital discord. It is clear from the following statement regarding the marriage:

... It was broken repeatedly, and repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together again, as of scarred iron with which out of the prettiest

superstition, we could not bear to part...(40)

Maya and Gautama are poles apart. There is complete lack of communication between the two. This is clear from the attitude of her husband towards her after the death of Toto. For Gautama it is “all over” and she simply needed “a cup of tea”. He fails to realize her “misery” and does not know how to “comfort” her. Insensitivity of the husband becomes clear from the following:

...he knew nothing that concerned me. Giving me an opal ring to wear on my finger, he did not notice the translucent skin beneath, the blue flashing veins that ran under and out of the bridge of gold and jolted me...(9)

The cold and unresponsive attitude of husband becomes further clear as he asks Maya to go to sleep, “while he worked at papers.” Maya is a victim of emotional as well as physical depression. She says :

“...He did not give another thought to me, to either soft willing body or the lonely waiting mind that waited near the bed...”(9)

Maya’s attitude to nature and physical world also shows her obsessive love of life. She gives highly sensuous account of the world of nature – of flowers and fruits, forms and colours. She has the deep sensitivity, quite deeply inclined by the sights and sounds, forms and colours of the natural world. She is infuriated when she finds that her husband fails to notice the dust storm. This indicates his insensitiveness to life. Gautama for her is representative of male-centered materialistic civilization and culture. There is no doubt she kills her husband due to her obsessive love for life. The act of murder is a revolt against callous materialistic social order. Maya believes that she is not fit to live in this world based on male-centered wisdom, reason and order. She doesn’t like the civilization based on logic and normality. She wants to be free from the chains of slavery based on customs

and established norms of the society. Her revolt against the social order is an aesthetic revolt- the revolt of sensibility against the logic of the so called normality that seeks to colonise desire through a network of institutional mechanisms:

“... All order is gone out of my life, all formality, there is no plan, no peace nothing to keep me with the pattern of familiar, everything living and doing... (195)

Maya represents the disturbed psyche of modern Indian woman. She tries to strike a balance between instinctual needs and intellectual aspirations. Deeply exhausted by this crucial act, she is further bewildered when the existential absurdity of life is brought before her. When she experiences loneliness and lack of communication she finds herself in mental crisis. Feminine studies show that Indian woman-passive or aggressive, traditional or modern-serves to reflect the writer's sense of isolation, fear, bewilderment and emotional vulnerability. She evokes continuous discussion of social values. She is the focal point of contact between the writer's consciousness and the alien world, her experience of reality and hope for salvation. As a symbol not only of growth, life and fertility, but of withdrawal, regression, decay and death, she is a powerful figure indeed as a protester against social and sexual inequalities and discrimination.

The awakening of women's consciousness establishes a new set of values in the fictive system. The typological experiences of the women have constant elements like the abrupt awakening. Intense introspections and an abrupt ending with conscious decisions. The ending does not lead her to resolution of her problems, but the fictional shaping of a very specific kind of crisis seen through her eyes is rewarding, for it leads to inner enrichment, a sense of exhilaration and vicarious achievement as she fights to harsh reality, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* reveals

the patriarchal politics, whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over women. She shows the dichotomy of femininity as a cultural bias. Sex is biological and gender is social imposition. She asserts that patriarchal authority has given women a minority status that inflicts on her a “self-hatred and self rejection, a contempt both herself and for her fellows.” (Kate Millett, 55)

To conclude it can be said that an understanding of the male-centered world-its discourse, institutions and practices, civilization and culture is a pre-condition for women’s liberation. To understand their nature is to understand the nature and mode of domination, repression and oppression. All those alternative discourses which challenge and combat these institutions and practices which heighten our awareness about domination contribute to emancipation and liberation of women.

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Experiencing Life's Miracle – A Reading of Paulo Coelho's *Veronika Decides to Die*

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Abstract :

The magical stratum which is created by the intermingling of philosophy, spirituality and existentialism in the book *Veronika Decides to Die* by Paulo Coelho, is not only noteworthy but it also makes its readers experience the miracle of life along with the protagonist Veronika. She, like most of us, finds herself unproductive and powerless to bring about any change in the things going on around her. She is young, beautiful and self dependent, has a bright future prospect of being loved and get married to a man of her own choice. What she lacks is enthusiasm, the fervour of excitement in her day to day monotonous, mechanical and robotic life. To her death appears more attractive than living a vegetable life of eating, working and sleeping just to wake up and begin the next day with similar routine. However her unsuccessful suicide attempt lands her in the purgatory of Villetete, the country's famous lunatic asylum. It is here that she reacquires the will to live and love.

Through the blend of religious and philosophical overtones, Paulo Coelho focuses on the most oft asked question by us: 'Why do people go on, when life seems unfair and fate indifferent?' The answer to this question is gradually unfolded to us by the author and we all agree as does Veronika that we 'can become blind by seeing each day as a similar one. Each day is a different one, each day brings miracle of its own. It's just a matter of paying attention to this miracle.

Keywords : Veronika, Monotony, Suicide, Miracle, life.

In *Veronika Decides to Die*, Paulo Coelho takes us

on a distinctly modern quest to find meaning in a culture overshadowed by angst, soulless routine and pervasive conformity. Based on the events in Coelho's life *Veronika Decides to Die* questions the meaning of madness and celebrates individuals who do not fit into the patterns society considered to be normal. Poignant and illuminating, it is a dazzling portrait of a young girl at the crossroads of despair and liberation, and a poetic, exuberant appreciation of each day as a renewed opportunity. The stratum which is created by the intermingling of philosophy, spirituality and existentialism in the book is not only wonderful but it also makes its reader experience the miracle of life along with the protagonist Veronika. She like most of us finds herself unproductive and powerless to bring about any change in the things going on around her. She is young, beautiful and self dependent, has a bright future prospect of being loved and get married to a man of her own choice. What she lacks is the enthusiasm, the fervour of excitement in her day to day monotonous, mechanical and robotic life. To her death appears more attractive than living a vegetable life of eating, working and sleeping just to wake up and begin the next day with similar activities.

Thus on 11 November 1997 Veronika decided to die. The mechanical manner in which she prepares herself for suicide shows her indifference towards life's positivity. She is not upset, the decision is not rash, and rather keeping her head cool she does the last preparation for her death. "She carefully cleaned the room that she rented in a convent, turned off the heating, brushed her teeth and lay down." (Coelho, 1) That her decision was not tempted by some sudden crisis in her life is obvious from the fact that Veronika does not take the sleeping pills all at once. She takes them one by one because she thinks that "there is

always a gap between intention and action, and she wanted to feel free to turn back half way”.(Coelho, 1) “However with each pill she swallowed, she felt more convinced”: (Coelho, 1) The coldness of her decision to end her life, becomes more obvious when she takes a magazine casually and starts reading it to spend the time waiting for death to overcome. It is as casual as someone reading a magazine or a newspaper article at the station or airport while waiting for the vehicle of their destination to arrive.

She could dare to laugh at the thought of controversies which would come up in newspapers, clearly shows the peak of Veronika’s frustration with her monotonous life. Death could not scare or disturb her a bit. She decides to write a letter to the magazine which she was reading and explain “that Slovenia was one of the five republics into which the former Yugoslavia had been divided”.(Coelho, 5) She does not write a letter to her mother or her loved ones – she writes final or last words to a magazine just a few seconds before her death. We are convinced by the writer in the passages that follow that Veronika ‘was not killing herself because she was sad, embittered woman, completely depressed”.(Coelho, 6)

Veronika “believed herself to be completely normal. Two very simple reasons lay behind her decision to die. The first reason: everything in her life was the same and, once her youth was gone, it would be downhill all the way, with old age beginning to leave irreversible marks, the onset of illness, the departure of friends. She would gain nothing by continuing to live: indeed, the likelihood of suffering only increased. The second reason was more philosophical: Veronika read the newspaper, watched TV, and she was aware of what was going on in the world. Everything was wrong, and she had no way of putting things right – that gave her a

sense of complete powerlessness.”(Coelho, 6)

Going through the first few pages of the book we apparently feel that through his protagonist Veronika, Paulo Coelho tries to send a message to his readers that life lived with fear and insecurities of boredom, loneliness and monotony has no meaning at all and it is better to defeat all these negative feelings by taking refuse in death – a very bold and unconventional step taken by Veronika. However as we progress through the pages we realize the writer’s actual philosophy of life – the message that he wants to convey to his readers. The sense of fear which Veronika feels of the ‘unknown’ just a few minutes before her unconsciousness shows the spark of faith in life which touches every individual when he or she is face to face with death. It is this spark on which the writer works throughout the novel and makes his central character Veronica realize (as do we too) the truth that each day of life is a miracle.

On gaining consciousness Veronika finds herself in the ICU of the much feared lunatic asylum of the country – Villetete. It is very interesting to note that Paulo Coelho does not express his philosophy through the leading characters or primary episodes of his novel only – but minor characters and small incidents in the novel too act as eye opener. According to him each individual has a certain role to play in this huge cosmic affair and that role no matter how small can have a never ending impact on every survivor. Thus even a nurse who aids Veronika in the ICU is capable of sharing a wonderful personal experience with her. She relates the story of her aunt’s suicide who came out of her passivity only when her husband brought home another lover. “Absurd although it may seem, I think that was the happiest time of her life. She was fighting for something, she felt alive and capable of responding to the challenges facing her.”(Coelho, 12) Thus the

treatment of Veronika begins – not the physical treatment but curing of her mind and heart as well as her soul from the blindness which does not make her see and feel the magic wand which life keeps rotating each day to make itself worth living.

Veronika is informed by Dr.Igor that she has in her hands just a couple of days to survive, because her ‘heart was irreversibly damaged and soon it would stop beating altogether.’(Coelho,25) The story follows Veronika’s intense week of self discovery that ensues. The ‘fear of unknown’ that overcame Veronika just before her unconsciousness in her room now becomes frequent with her. Every night she is afraid because ‘it was one thing to die quickly after taking some pills, it was quite another to wait five days or a week for death to come, when she had already been through so much.’ (Coelho,27)

Veronika’s life has always been a long waiting – witing for her father to come back home – waiting for a letter from a lover of her imagination who actually did not exist – waiting for exams to get over – waiting for the train – the bus – waiting, waiting and always waiting. But for the very first time she was going to experience a completely new form of waiting – waiting for death who had, as if, made an appointment with her. And it is this waiting which brings her closer to life. However waiting for death was the toughest experience for Veronika and she tries to reattempt suicide instead of sitting idle to die. In this process she meets Zedka (another inmate of Villette). Zedka tells her the story of a powerful wizard who wanted to destroy the kingdom and the king who finally in order to control his already turned mad countrymen, drunk from the same poisoned well and started behaving as absurdly as his people did. The story touches our heart and so is Veronika influenced and she too like us realizes that Zedka is

actually not mad.

Paulo Coelho very cleverly defines insanity when he makes Zedka explain why the people outside Villette are called normal. She says: 'they think they're normal because they all do the same thing.' (Coelho, 32) She further continues 'well I'm going to pretend that I have drunk from the well as them.' (Coelho, 32) Veronika too agrees 'I already did that, and that's precisely my problem. I've never been depressed, never felt great joy or sadness, at least none that lasted. I have same problems as everyone else.'(Coelho, 32) The conversation between two ladies, in fact, to be more precise, between two inmates of Villette is very interesting to note. The conversation reminds us of Coelho's famous lines from Alchemist –'when a person really desired something all the universe conspires to help that person to realize his dream.' (Coelho, Alchemist ?) But the tragedy of these people is that they never desired anything. They accepted what came in their life. And even if they dared to desire, somewhere in the depth of their hearts, they did not act brave to take risk. Same is the condition of all the prominent characters of the novel– may it be Veronika or Zedka or Mari or Eduard.

This attitude of treading the trodden path under the pressure of societal norms and values and not listening to their inner voice, forces them to land in the lunatic asylum. It is not that they are mad; they just hang between the socially defined normal behaviour and the inner calls of their souls. Undecided they follow the mass because they do not have the courage to be different. Veronika cannot be a pianist because her mother would be hurt and as everyone else she too agrees to get a simple and secured job which could provide her everyday bread. Mari a successful lawyer could not leave her career and work for the deprived

people as her heart told her. The thought of deviating from the league of successful people, gives her panic attacks. She knows no one will understand and she could not justify it as well. Eduard is forced to abandon the dream of painting the heaven of his thoughts and this dilemma of 'to be or not to be' (Shakespeare's Hamlet) lands him in Villette.

Maria says in *Eleven Minutes* (one of other famous books of Paulo Coelho) "Everything tells me that I am going to make a wrong decision, but making mistakes is just part of life. What does the world want of me? Does it want me to take no risks, to go back to where I came from because I did not have the courage to say "yes" to life?" (Coelho, *Eleven Minutes* ?) These lines could be placed in the mouths of any of the above discussed characters, the only difference is that Maria dared and took risks and harvested pleasure and pain, agony and ecstasy in the process. Whereas these characters caught in dilemma suffer passively.

Paulo Coelho's clear message throughout the novel is that life demands a "yes" from all of us. We have to actively accept the challenges of life, it is only then that we remain emotionally active. Be it sorrow or happiness – we do feel something which motivates us to take interest in what we do. Life does not turn monotonous, the way it did in case of Veronika. It is in the four boundaries of Villette that these emotionally surcharged yet passive people learn to live, develop the passion towards life and towards their own self. They realize that 'You have to take risks. We will only understand the miracle of life fully when we allow the unexpected to happen.' "At any given moment in our lives, there are certain things that could have happened but did not. The magic moments go unrecognized, and then suddenly, the hand of destiny changes everything." (Coelho: 1995) The destiny thus overpowered these

characters because they failed to recognize those magical moments in their lives. However in *Villete*, when life seems slipping away like sand from their hands, these people recognize the bliss life can offer. Veronika's impending death planned by Dr. Igor, not only purges her out of passivity and mechanical attitude towards life but it also acts as catalyst for other inmates to make them conscious of their heart's call. With the feeling that she has just two days left in her life, and that death could rush any moment to her, Veronika falls in love with Eduard – the schizophrenic. She plays piano for him and she realizes that "Eduard was the only one capable of understanding that Veronika was an artist." ((Coelho, *Veronika Decides To Die*, 118) Here Veronika reminds us of Astha in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* who fell in love with Aizaj simply because he realized her worth. Veronika too felt someone had recognized her talent, her worth as a pianist and appealed to her womanhood which was so obvious from his blank looks which bore so much meaning to her. It was possible because she had given herself a chance – a chance to be what she actually is; what she actually wants in life and not simply pretend to be like others. Now with the feeling of death knocking her door anytime, she has no fear – no fear to possess or lose a lover, to annoy or upset her mother, to get reward or punishment from society. She is free to do what she wants. After all she is in a place where nothing is unexpected, where she has every right to give free vent to her inner feelings, nothing would be considered unnatural. After all she is considered as 'lunatic'. She confesses to Eduard "you're the only man on the face of Earth with whom I could fall in love, Eduard."(Coelho, *Veronika Decides To Die*, 119) She surrenders herself to him and satiates her physical urge. Sex could be so liberating, she had never thought.

“She had concealed her hidden desires even from herself, unable to say why, but she needed no answer. It was enough that she had done what she had done; she had surrendered herself.”(Coelho, *Veronika Decides To Die*, 122) ‘But even so she felt no shame or fear.’ Veronika ‘had never known panic, depression, mystical visions, psychoses – the limits to which mind could take us. Although she had known many men, she had never experienced the most hidden part of her own desires, and the result was that half of her life had been unknown to her. If only every one could know and live with their inner madness. Would the world be a worse place for it? No, people would be fairer and happier.” (Coelho, *Veronika Decides To Die*, 123)

For Veronika the moon had never shone clearer, as it did the night she played the piano for Eduard and her heart danced throughout the four boundaries of Vilete for the woman inside her. Even the little things like the rain, the snow, the coffee offered by young men, the kiss she gave her mother – all of which went unnoticed by her own self; now appeared so precious that Veronika requests Dr. Igor ‘in short, Dr. Igor, I want to feel the rain on my face, to smile at any man I felt attached to, to accept all the coffees men might buy for me. I want to kiss my mother, tell her I love her, weep in her lap, unashamed of showing my feelings, because they were always there even though I hid them.’ (Coelho, *Veronika Decides To Die*, 127) Veronika realized the value of every second, every minute things in life when death threatens her, and it is the news of her coming death which gives Eduard courage to confide his own secrets to her because he knows that she will not survive long to disclose his secrets to others.

Seeing Veronika’s condition Zedka too decides to give life another chance. She understands how invaluable each moment of life is and it should not be

wasted in living a vegetable life. She admits “I know my soul is complete, because my life has meaning. I’ll be able to look at sunset and believe that God is behind it. When someone irritates me, I’ll tell them what I think of them, and I won’t worry what they think of me, because everyone will say: she’s just been released from Villeté.And I will say: ‘of course I am, I was in Villeté, remember! And madness freed me’.”(Coelho, *Veronika Decides To Die*, 148) Mari too accepts ‘the death of that young girl made me understand my own life.’(Coelho, *Veronika Decides To Die*, 155) It will not be out of context to quote a short excerpt from Coelho’s book *Brida*, “never be ashamed; he said ‘accept what life offers you and try to drink from every cup. All wines should be tasted; some should only be sipped, but with others, drink the whole.’“How will I know which is which?”By the taste. You can only know a good wine if you have first tasted a bad one’.” (Coelho, *Brida* ?) We see that caught in the crisis moments, inside the four walls of Villeté, all the characters start valuing life and start listening to the inner dormant calls of their souls; which all of them ignored when they were outside. Veronika would have never taken the steps she took expecting the forthcoming death to overcome any second. She runs away with Eduard. Mari and Zedka too leave Villeté. Villeté seems to stand for a ‘purgatory’ – a place which cures and teaches how to live life.

Thus this is the story of not only Veronikas but of Eduard’s, Mari’s and Zedka’s rediscovery of life, of living life fully and of their ultimate rejection of death. Living as if we are immortal can spell death-in- life. Walking hand -in-hand with death, says Coelho, we become more alive to the business of living and living well. These five days of life for Veronika is a kind of metamorphosis, which gives her rebirth into life. The fear of death makes her realize the pleasures which

life gives.

Coelho in his books provides general spiritual inspiration, but also offers guidance in more mundane matters, explaining the specific motivations behind childish, immature behaviour, cowardly moments, feeling of spiritual emptiness and reluctance to change. Some of the passages are common inspiration fodder. However every short passage invites us to live out our dreams, to embrace the uncertainty of life, and to rise to our own unique destiny. Like he does in *Warrior of the Light: A Manual*, here too in this book Paulo Coelho shows readers how to embark upon the way of a warrior: the one who appreciates the miracles of being alive, the one who accepts failure, and the one whose quest leads him to become the person he wants to be. Thus we can conclude by quoting the writer himself that “you can become blind by seeing each day as a similar one. Each day is a different one, each day brings miracle of its own. It’s just a matter of paying attention to this miracle.” (<http://www.goodreads.com>)

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Dr. Ira Jha , Writer and Home Maker

POETRY

Sunworship

This evening I got drenched
in a sunshower
that soaked me through and through
to the abysmal pit
clogged nectar sieve
a bottomless soul I may own, disown

Uncharted regions clinically palpable
impenetrable, imperceptible, though
worms feeding on-without a feedback
ruffled sea in the offing
creepy crawl of a scrawl
insinuating an epitaph
I may never write

Setting sun in crimson blush
throws up, around its rosy halo tint
powdering the sky
Red cooling eye wide with wonder...
how to bless the countless rapt-shut eyes
and the flowering fruitful sweet cereal hands
raised in prayer
footplant in water that flows
or stands still

I rise a fragrant wreath curling
a soundless flute note
not an exotic classic fluted column
with no unbidden flash of a random wish

to be a ruined tower on the homely plot
for generations of visitors
on sightseeing to scan the rubble
and polish the stone pages
to email a bust
for pedestal printing with care

— **Amarendra Kumar**, Hajipur, Bihar

Life Divine

You have mastered
the mechanics of grammar alone
missing mostly the essence of words
that transforms
the earthly into ethereal
releasing the mystic energy of ages
dormant so far in the unconscious ocean
of the mental caves.

Life is not guided by logic alone;
it is like scratching
the surface of life for eternal spring.
For sparkling gem
you have to delve deeper and harder
to find a piece of diamond
in the dangerous womb of the earth.

Be ever ready to move the mountains
not for yourself, but for a grater cause
influencing the longtime fate
of humanity at large;
thus, making you to move up
from a glow worm to the Pole Star.

— **Pashupati Jha**, Humanities Dept., IIT, Roorkee

Faultlines

Taunted by the tragic the poet drew his arc of fire round the earth's core.
Left unguarded, the earth's wholesome heart unveiled its faultlines,
And spelt the disaster that kindled the epic's onward drift.

From dawn to dusk the pain hung on and through the night
Clawing like a wild cat or an ageless, monstrous angst
Until the poet shattered the mirror of the all too familiar.

Afterwards, every seeker is bound to trace that stormy arc—
The real is never found till it dies a mortal death
Crying out in treacherous voice in pretentious guile

Even tempting the silent one, beguiling the sordid self.
The tragic and the perfect seldom drift farther than a shout
Suffering is the smallest toll that any art demands.

For in this case, perfection was the golden stag that Sita espied
When desire plunged its arrow right through her heart
While Rama was left to chase the melting mirage,

Picking his way carefully through each bush and thorn,
A deception that taunted both eye and mind
Till under the massive trees' overhang

He had to kill the beast to awaken his self from the stupor
—An error that all art had to commit.
Deserting beauty's enchantment and earth's light.

Even for a treacherous while, to lead into space,
There is always a stag of gold; its gait flawless, unhurrying,
Perhaps, swift enough to revert the keen arrows into the magic circle of the self.

—An imperial act of perfection that tempts
The questing human mind
Away from truth and peace and bliss.

Once the poet drew his arc of fire round the earth's core and yet
Unguarded the earth's wholesome heart bared its faultlines
And spelt the disaster that kindled the epic's onward drift.
Every artist is bound to trace that stormy arc
The real is never found till it dies a mortal death
Crying out in treacherous voice in pretentious guile
Even tempting the silent one, beguiling the sordid self.

The face of truth is always covered with a golden theme—
To dazzle the eye that returns to it over and over.
The earth is then left unguarded time and again, for the evil one to abduct

And the fierce fight that ensues is what the grim epic foretold;
In the chronicle of the poet's eye in all frenzy rolling
In the fleeting tracks of a golden stag; in the momentous

Arc of another hunter's arrow that stayed the heart of a mating bird.
The tragic is forever etched in the soul of perfection, the very quest.
No war is ever completed, no force wins every battle; for when is it ever done?

Each day when strife ceases in the thoughtless world, another golden stag
Awakens and runs. Perfection is but a glorious dream
An event that happens when earth is left unguarded.

That's every art's fate, every artist's feat—a fiery defeat.
Because in the end it is fire that purifies the elemental self:
Discarding truth, beauty and being at once, to wander

And surrender to the quest for perfection.
The tragic fate of all art is never to complete that final arc.
Leaving the faultlines incomplete—

Till another Sita is born.
And another Rama to bear the bow
And afflict the dreams of a lonely poet.

— **Murali Shivaramakrishnan**, Pondicherry,
smurali@gmail.com

Note : The references are of course to Ramayana and the poet Valmiki. The episodes are fairly well known—the Adi Kavi or the Ur Poet had been an brigand who was mystically transformed into a poet; the primal instigation for the creation of Ramayana was the encounter with the hunter who kills one of a pair of mating birds; during their period of vanavasa, or time spent in the forest, Sita espies a golden stag and sends Rama to procure it for her—the deer turns out to be a demon in disguise and the incident spells disaster because Sita is kidnapped by Ravana the Demon King during Rama’s absence. Fault lines geologically speaking are fine lines that figure on the earth’s crust when rocks are formed and the reveals the line of intersection between the fault plane and the Earth’s surface. In context here the concept is also symbolically associated with fate-lines, or traces of happenings.

Your ambrosial poetry

— **U Atreya Sarma**

Chief Editor, Muse India
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Don't the dark patches of the lunar princess show as beauty spots?
Don't the just plucked peanuts taste so well, un-fried or un-roasted?
Doesn't a just born calf look beautiful with all the streaks of flesh around it?
Does a diamond cease to be itself just because it's uncut or unpolished?

A beautiful damsel bathes in a clear, clean and gurgling river
And comes out nude, beaded over by sparkling pearls of water –
An embodiment of cherubic innocence and a golden purity of heart.
She is not a scintilla conscious of her pearly-pure nude nubility.
Try to clothe her out of your guilt, and aren't you occluding her beauty?

A tiny tot's prattle and pranks, broken and jumbled words
Defy grammar and logic: Yet won't they regale us?
Won't they fill us with a pristine joy?
A joy that an arcane solemn philosophy can't afford.
The song of a nightingale or warbler is non-verbal;
Yet the whiff of their dulcet notes elevates our spirits.

So what, if someone carps,
"Your poetry is flawed in grammar or diction?"

Yet your poem does have a certain beauty and fascination about it.
Is it due to your mesmerizing sense of imagination?
Is it due to the theme you take up that casts a spell?
Is it due to the love that seeps through your poems?
Is it due to some ineffable lyrical grace that dances about?
Is it due to some fragrance or sweetness that enchants?
Or is it due to the personal equation you maintain?
What if your poems don't follow the rules of language?
What if malapropisms caper about in your lines?
Do mere outer blemishes undo the innate beauty of your rhyme?

When poetry is your passion and mission
When muse is your breath and lifeline
When poems gush out of the spring of your emotion
When your mind, heart and soul are angelic –
How can your poetry ever be fallible?
How can it be for editorial pen liable?

It requires an empathic, matching soul
It needs a transcendental aesthetics
To quaff, relish and enjoy your ambrosial poetry.

Why Do We Not Care To See?

— R.C. Shukla

We are ever engaged
in a journey towards others
and these others
our friends
our adversaries too
build our prejudices.
It's not desirable
we waste
a large amount
of our energy on others.

Why do we not
care to see
that
we are not acquainted
with all the corners
of our house
corners which are untidy
corners containing cobwebs.

It is not difficult
to get situated
within ourselves
and know that
most of our anxieties
emanate from our ignorance
ignorance of which we are
ignorance
of which we are not.

Do we ever care to see
the spot on our chest
a pimple on our cheek

and
the cover of dry skin
around our testicles?

Dr. R.C. Shukla is a retired Professor from K.G.K. College, Moradabad. To his credit, he has ten poetry collections namely: Darkness At Dawn (Thanjavur: The Kambuja International, 1990), A Belated Appearance (Kolkata: Writers Workshop, 2000), My Poems Laugh (Ranchi: Writers Forum, Ranchi, 2001), Depth and Despair (Kolkata: Writers Workshop, Kolkata, 2001), The Parrot Shrieks I, II & III (Kolkata: Writers Workshop, 2003, 2005 and 2008), Ponderings I, II & III (New Delhi: Adhyayan, 2010, 2012 and 2012 respectively).

Media the Medusa

— Prof T V Reddy

What is there sensibly to write?
No day passes without a crushing risk;
What is there freely to say or speak
where corruption is at its improbable peak?
What is there gainfully to read
when almost all of us are brought to bleed,
when media is fond of cheap mass masala
spreading wild rumours, cancer tumours
and newspapers become private pamphlets?
Morning news paper spreads foul smell
of pages of rotten material rising in its pitch
as the sickening smell of a rotten rat
by the wide roadside with traffic jam
wet with stagnant drops of stingy rain.

All these papers are like thrown away leaves
at the end of a corrupt political banquet,
spicy smell soon spreading the foul odour
hitting the nose and spreading the noose,
full of lifeless puns and guns scoring zero runs,
stuffed with sensational lies, not a slice of truth;
Truth is scared of our sight, haunting human sight,
We don't like to care for a slice of cleanliness,
to keep mind to be clean, tongue to be clean;
Morally we are nil or lean sans any sheen.
Unless we rise above this filth and foul smell
we can't rise above the lines of enveloping hell.

The Beaten Track

Let me not tread the defaced trodden path,
though a walk ago for many the gloried way;
Overnight people turned on it their wrath;
May be, familiarity breeds quick contempt.
Not all have prohibited it as squarely wrong
for reasons best known to them as strong;
a few still cling to it and sing, a few shrink,
they know the old is gold, yet they limp and blink.
Their dark deeds have danced in a trance,
Clouds overpower and envelope the day,
Day with mutilated wings lies a fallen prey;
Negative powers grow strong in dark, they say.
The bold and the old alike like the golden track;
Though a beaten track, they don't go back.

Men, brave and grave, shrink to fight the stink,
Shut their ears and go back to sleep and sink;
While lame legs run, blind eyes glow as fireflies
Where power corrupts, fear buries the truth.
Father, Father, glowing bright high above,
hide not Thy luminous face behind the rainbow;
Uproot the wild vicious weed with lightning speed
and with Thy thunder protect those that bleed.

— **Prof. T.V.Reddy**, Flat No. 202, Brizvasi Apts.,
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Ant

— **Dr Sushil Kumar Mishra**

Ant! Ant! Looking cute
Black colour looking sweet.

Thy disciplined life inspiring to human beings
Thy politeness and civility is lesson to all beings.

Thy unity preaches the human beings
Thy up and doing teaches all beings.

O creature of strong will power!
Thou art blessed with divine power.

Thou continue your journey facing all troubles
Without surrendering before troubles.

Thou live in highly organised colonies
And work together to develop your colonies.

Thou art fascinating and highly social insect
And maintain unified entity in fact.

Thou live in underground
Or ground level mound.

Thou have unique capabilities
To protect your communities.

Thou believe in co-evolution
And innovation.

Work with division of labour
By winning each one's favour.

Defend thy selves
And survive thy selves.

Glory to the God for creating fabulous
and disciplined insects
For inspiring undisciplined human beings,
other creatures and insects.

— **Dr Sushil kumar Mishra**, Associate Professor
& Former- Head, Department of English, SRM
University, Sonapat, Haryana

1. BANGALORE

No walkways:
food vendors line up
with pushcarts and vans
techies throng with backpack
bikes and friends
dealing with digital touch

mobile eateries
overwhelm footpaths:
remnants of chilli fish
chicken curry, biryani
nan, uttapam, dosa
and what not add to
sensory chaos

what if pedestrians
snake through killing pace
of traffic on footpaths
Bangalore is colorful
and affordable too

2. HOMA

Random flames in colors
meld unnamed images of fire
freezing on the kitchen walls
the soot thickens solitude

with dimming watery eyes
and asthmatic mantra
mother offers homa
each day and night
but no Agni is pleased

3. REMORSE

Unemptied
the cup of remorse—
begging bowl
before the dumb deity
years of noisy silence

4. RESURRECTION

The deities are dumb
so they speak
louder and louder
vie with each other
for godhood
descend from mosque top
to Supreme Court
now await
resurrection

— **R. K. SINGH**, Retired Professor of English,
I S M, Dhanbad, Bihar.

ORDAIN

What was.
What am.
What'll be:

Upshot of His ordain.

Atmaiva pramatma ...

Brahmoasmi ...

Actions

Thoughts

Rain from HIM.

Only medium

To shape them

In proportion to ken:

Good or bad.

Good is HE

Bad, verily me.

Bliss embraces

At the touch slight:

Existence, actions

Due to HIM.

Breaths,

Heartbeats

Obey His decree.

Only a bubble...

Panchabhootas ...

May burst

At any moment

At His Will:

Jatasya hi dhruvomrityu ...

— **D C Chambial**, Ed : Poetcrit, Maranda, H P.

BOOK REVIEW

God of the Less Fortunate, by Chandrasekharaiah, Mysuru: Shashwathi Publication, 2017. Pp. 366. Rs. 275.

Though India happens to be a land of many religions, religious literature, including hagiographical fiction and drama, has, unfortunately not grown proportionately in terms of secular literature in the modern context. After the expiry of idealistic puranic period, realistic religious literature has not been produced in Indian languages, least of all in Indian English Literature, for a variety of reasons. One conspicuous reason for this phenomenon is that the Indian English writers (most of them being professors of English having sold their souls to the devil of the Western culture) are willingly anglicized and hence have no deep knowledge of Indian culture and religion. But Dr. Chandrasekharaiah is an exception to such anglicized professors as he is bilingually armed and qualified and has a deep knowledge of Hindu, especially Virasaiva religion and culture. An author of more than thirty works, he has already produced his magnum opus in Kannada, *Jagada Nanta* (The Kin of Humanity), which is a novel of epic dimensions, dealing with the life and mission of Basaveswara, the super-sarana and social reformer of twelfth century Karnataka. It is easily comparable to Dr. H. Tipperudraswami's *Kartarana Kammata*, (The Maker's Mint) and B. Puttaswamaiah's *Kranti Kalyana* (Revolution at Kalyana). His latest work, *A Survey of Virasaiva Religion and Literature* was awarded the much coveted D.Litt. Degree from the Rani Chennamma University of Belagavi recently.

The present work, *God of the Less Fortunate* originally written in English by Dr. Chandrasekharaiah is an interesting hagiographical novel, which belongs

to the galaxy of similar religious novels like Raja Rao's *Cat and Shakespeare*, Sudhir Kakar's *Ecstasy* and Basavaraj Naikar's *Bird in the Sky* dealing with different aspects of religion, philosophy, mysticism and social reformation.

God of the Less Fortunate deals with the life and mission of a religious reformer of the eleventh century Karnataka, Marula Siddha, the disciple of Revana Siddha. It delineates the transitional period of Karnataka history, when the society was undergoing a change from the practice of Kalamukha order to Virasaiva order. Another additional difficulty is that the novelist ventures to deal with remote history and not with the recent history. In depicting the remote history a novelist has to face the difficulty of lack of proper historical records, except the epigraphs. Marula Siddha, the protagonist of the novel emerges as a representative of the newly formulated Virasaiva religion with its stress on the symbol of God (*istalinga*) thereby doing away with temple-construction, idol worship, priest craft, caste rigidity and hierarchy. Marula Siddha, belonging to a low caste, has lost his biological parents and is brought up by his foster parents, Mallamma and Bachegowda, of a village called Kaggallupura. Right from the beginning he has been an unusual child (a miracle child). Originally baptized as Siddhalinga, he came to be called Marula Siddha (Siddha, the Moron) due to his quixotic and crazy behavior. Until he attains his adulthood, he is employed by his foster-father for tending the cattle. Although initially he has a crisis of identity, he overcomes it very soon as his spiritual nature is awakened when he grows into a young man. He exhibits the unusual habits like climbing a coconut tree, swimming into the waters of Nagarkatte and pulling a loaded cart alone. Then he leaves his home and goes wandering aimlessly until

he is able to find a guru and a direction for his spiritual quest. At Chinmuladri he finds the guru in Revana Siddha, who gives a direction to his life by investing him with God's symbol, istalinga, asking him to work for social amelioration like fighting against caste hierarchy, struggling for socio-spiritual transformation, varna-transgression, equality, brotherhood of mankind, educating the masses, and experiencing the unity of all life.

The new lesson taught by Revana Siddha is quite revolutionary when seen against the background of the orthodox Brahmanic Hinduism prevalent at that time. Besides, the Kalamukha Order also provides a good contrast to the Virashaiva order preached by Revana Siddha. (Gothra Siddha, Kapala Siddha, Gananatha Siddha and Panchanana Siddha happen to be the earlier disciples of Revana Siddha). The Kalamukha acharyas worship a big sized idol of god by placing it on a trivet and decking it with vibhuti and flowers. (Chidananda Bhuvana Kartara Pandit and Abhinava Kalideva Pandit of Asagodu represent the Kalamukha creed prevalent at that time). When compared with this elaborate and cumbersome worship of an idol, the wearing of the istalinga on one's chest and worshipping it by placing it on one's left palm and staring at it with transcendental meditation appears to be simpler, more fruitful and more comprehensible to the people. Thus Marula Siddha undergoes a great psychological and spiritual transformation after being initiated by Revana Siddha into Virasaiva order. He takes a vow of engaging himself in humanitarian service. He enthusiastically launches upon his agenda of social amelioration by investing the willing disciples with istalinga, thereby teaching them the democracy of devotion, the gospel of equality, brotherhood, unity of life and social change. He is accompanied by his companions like Ramitande, Jattiga

and so on. Without being attached to a particular place, they go on perpetually wandering from place to place and educating the masses and transforming the society from orthodox practices to democratic and rational ways of life. In course of time, (when Marula Siddha is in his fifties,) he seems to have developed some occult powers reinforcing his philosophical teachings. Thus journeying becomes the way of his life thereby making him a wandering saint or jangama.

Marula Siddha starts his journey towards Chinmuladri via Asagodu, Kurudi and other places. On the way they go on preaching their new religion, invest people of lower castes with istalinga thereby helping them overcome their inferiority complex, changing their uncultured habits into cultured ones and reorienting their attitude to life. When King Vijaya Pandya of Nolambavadi wants to punish him, Marula Siddha exhibits his occult powers (of panto-morphism) by assuming as many shapes of himself as there are soldiers to capture him. At Bethur, Marula Siddha opposes the animal sacrifice to be conducted by the Brahmin priests, who are afraid of his occult powers. Yet they bury him in a silo, but Marula Siddha is seen sitting on top of the silo afterwards. Then they stuff him into a sack filled with quicklime and throw him into a tank, but Marula Siddha is seen sitting on its bank on the next morning. Then they go to Dorasamudra, meet King Ballala Raya at his court and deliver a discourse by which the king is deeply impressed. Next they go to Hullur where unexpectedly many people volunteer to be invested with istalinga. Marula Siddha materializes as many istalingas as there are people to be invested with them. At Kumbalur, Bhairavagonda, the village chief is intending to offer a human sacrifice of a boy, although his wife Nagai opposes it strongly. But when Bhairavagonda looks into

the pond he sees the face of Marula Siddha in it and is instantly transformed. Consequently he cancels the human sacrifice that was to be conducted. In the last phase of his missionary career, Marula Siddha goes to Kolhapur, where Princess Mayadevi, the daughter of King Karhada is ruling over the kingdom. Being deeply interested in magic and witchcraft and a great hater of men folk, she has been tyrannizing over them by keeping all the men who oppose her in prison. In other words, she has been a sadist and arrogant queen delighting in torturing men thereby showing the superiority of feminine gender and power. But when Marula Siddha goes to her court, although she opposes him initially, later she is won over by him through his occult powers. She, who is sitting on her glittering throne, is ejected and thrown down at his feet. Then she realizes his great power, repents and relents and asks him to bless her, sanctify her throne and help her rule over the kingdom with a humanitarian attitude. She releases all the men that she had imprisoned sadistically. After curing Princess Mayadevi of Kolhapur of her disease, and bidding farewell to her, Marula Siddha proceeds to Telugubalu where he works one more of his miracles by granting the power of speech to a dumb boy called Siddayya and taking him as his disciple to succeed him by the consent of his parents. Thus after accomplishing his great task of educating and ameliorating the society and bringing in a great change, Marula Siddha predicts his own death and asks his disciples to bury him at a certain spot and orders them to continue his noble task and mission after his departure.

The novel thus depicts the life and mission of Marula Siddha in preaching his new religion of equality, brotherhood and unity of humanity. The language employed by the novelist is at once poetic, picturesque and idiomatic. It is definitely a welcome addition to the

genre of Indian English fiction. It helps all those who are interested in the study of comparative literature and religion. It provides good materials for the young researchers of India who are interested in working for their M. Phil., and Ph.D., degrees by comparing and contrasting it with similar novels that I have mentioned at the beginning of this review.

Since the novel, being written in English, is meant for the non-Kannada readers, who are not familiar with the political and religious history of Karnataka, it is better for the novelist (if a reprint is called for) to provide an ideological picture of the background in a Preface or in an Afterword or clarify the facts and dates within the body of the novel itself thereby helping the reader to understand them more clearly.

— **Dr. Basavaraj Naikar**

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Voiced Thoughts (Collection of Poems) by Mrs. Tangirala Sreelatha, published by the Poetess, 33-25-33A, Bellapu sobhanadri St, Suryar a opet, Vijayawada-520 002, pages 16+36. Price Rs.150/-

Tangirala Sreelatha's first anthology of 30 poems, *Voiced Thoughts* in her own words, "is the result of God's blessings showered on me" (Acknowledgements). In the opening poem, "My friend "she pays tribute to her friend who is in her heart and friend for ever. The last 2 times, "Oh, my dear / Please do not wipe me off from your heart (p.1) sound ernoational and eahoe her andent love for him/her!

“The Omnipresent Sky” to her is the Almighty’s abode; the pleasant moon drives away the tiredness of the summer moon; the luminous stars are our immortal ancestors. “Poor” trees speak about the storm victimized trees which have lost their leaves, flowers and fruits. Though some trees lost their limbs and heads still some nude trunks stand with many hopes to become colour ful again.

Every lady will be in ecstasy when she bears her babe in her womb and in the process of motherhood. Sreelatha also has their experience.

“ He, a calm mischievous dancer,
Danced around me..... (p.4)

She bears his lovely blow though severe. She is much behoiden. “Oh God! How much do I owe thee?/ For this precious fruit of thrine?” (p.5). “Sweet Memoirs” is a tribute to her madams (Teachers) who imparted her many things, especially, Be sincere and devotion. They treasure trove” speaker high about her parents - mother who showered on her unconditional love and father who taught her fight the stormy life with valour. They made her realize affection, conviction, philanthropy and inspiration.

Often family members appear in one’s writings. “My Sweet Home” records her family with 2 sisters and their parents. The three damozels meet to learn during the nights, their dad used to narrate epics and myths. “The Musenm of Heart registers the absence of her mentor - at 15 she was dazed and alone; at 24 her life war glorious and colourful; at 64 when he died she is much saddened. “I am drowned in the flood of dejection / My soul always grieves for you ...” (p.10)

Every girl when she gets married she will have to face new people, environment and experiences. It seems that it is addressed to her life partoner. She moans,

Never have you cared for her to appreciate
appraise and praise.

Never have you dared to inquire her buried
grief atleast in brief (p.13)

Not only that-he pushed her advices for off,
putting her to all sorts of stress and loads of distress.
She glorifies women, “Defeats man with her steady
and simple indifference / Destined to be the most divine
of all the creation, she is the / noblest boon on the
earth.” (p.14) Since she is the moon of the noon she is
“The Better Half” for ever!

How about the disabled? In “Ability of the
Disabled” she considers disability is not a sin but a
challenge gifted by God; escorted by the lofty self -
reliance and optimistic poise. To her, mother is a
Goddess. This she narrates in “Mother Goddess.” She
asserts, “Thy unfailing finger showed the Providence.”
She is her Goddess on earth and she likes to adorn her
feet with the garland of her soul.

She narrates both marriage and divorce in
“Marriage and Divorce.” In the same poem both are
dealt with - first thee verse paras for marriage and the
remaining two for divorce. This could have been done
separately for more poetic effect. She accuses both
husbands and wives, for, they fail to realize that “love
is the phoenix that reappears a new”!! (p.17)

“Six” narrates the domination of number 6 in
one’s life - the daily chores commence at 6 o’clock tastes
are 6; length of the garment one drapes meter six;
Karmas 6; stature of a charming guy feet 6; pit for
eternal sleep is feet 6!

In “Forbidden Fruits” she laments the trend of
today’s children who are insanely busy and stone -
hearted. They never reciprocate the perpetual parental
love. When they remain obstinate she warns them -

life will be incomplete. Which parents are fortunate? She says, “Parents who have children to deliberate and create / A blissful world in their old age are truly FORTUNATE” (p.32) It is cent per cent true.

“Cycle of Festivals” is informative and didactic. She writes,
“Festivals teach us to worship the elements of Nature
They teach us to value and respect many a creature.
They bring the Almighty and Nature to equal stature
And contribute to man’s safest survival in future’ (p. 34)

“Chords and Cards” poem categorizes the various cards– Birth card, Identity card, Swipe card, White card, Link card, Pan card, Sim card, Aadhaar Card, Voter card, Debit card, Credit card, Travel card, Admit card, Visa card which are in use. She writes very correctly.

“Man has lost his logic and forgot to strike a chord
With humanity and with God who is our real guard.” (p.35)

The last poem, “Personal Space” speaks about the longing for comfort zone; a nation leads a peaceful existence and progressive when the neighbouring states cease their conflicts. THE anthology ends with

It is the PERSONAL SPACE that adds much grace
It is that personal space which gives all essential space.” (p.36)

On the whole meaningful, easily understandable and aphoristic lined poems’ collection makes Tangirala Sreelatha, a true poetess in the firmament of poets. Many more anthologies the poetry lovers expect from her facile pen! Her thoughts are voiced successfully in *Voiced Thoughts!*

— **Dr.K.Balachandran**, Prof. of English (Retd), Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar-608002, Tamilnadu. E-mail: prof_k_balachandran@yahoo.co.in

My Two Novels : *The Coexistence and The Chhattisgarh*
By Stephen Gill, Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly, U.P., 2017,
pp.571, Price: Rs. 950:00.

Stephen Gill, the author of both these novels, is a well-known literary figure among the contemporary Indian English writers. He is not only a novelist but a poet and an essayist too. It will not be an exaggeration to call him a multi-talented and multilingual writer as he has written in Hindi and Urdu too. Born in Sialkot, now in Pakistan, he too like many has witnessed the pain of separation from his native land. Although Christian but like many Hindus and Muslims the intensity of hatred and trauma of partition affected him a lot and this makes him up a sensitive person and a passionate writer.

The protagonist of both the novels is Raghu , who is a brilliant scholar and like Gill he leaves his motherland for higher studies and settles down in Canada. Raghu is the mouthpiece of the writer and the readers may find basic similarities between the protagonist and the novelists. Raghu of the first novel *The Coexistence* and that of the second one *The Chhattisgarh* is characteristically similar yet different. Gill's uniqueness lies in the fact that in the first one the readers witness a person who is in search of similarity within dissimilarities and in the second one Raghu is a experienced intellectual who has learnt to respect all.

Both the novels though have separate place of action but they act as sequel of similar ideas projecting respect for multiculturalism. Gill expresses his respect for all living things in this universe and forwards a beautiful thought of live and let live.

Raghu in first novel *The Coexistence* says:

I believe that diversity or coexistence means recognition of every one's right to survive. It also recognizes interdependence among communities and nations. It is more than tolerance. It incorporates equality, diversity and interdependence to prosper, having mutual trust and respect. (92)

This is the primary idea of both the novels. Raghu supports multiculturalism and respects it and thus he has high opinion for the Canadian society because he finds that it is a place unlike his native land where each individual is unique yet they rely on each other for survival. Raghu believes that Indian partition was the result of the absence of coexistence and feels sorry for the Indian mass. Stephen Gill in both the novels revisits Indian philosophy especially reminding the readers of the Buddhism and Jainism and makes a giant attempt to make his readers conscious of the glorious past of Indian tradition and culture that has the capacity to teach the entire universe the lesson of peace and good will.

He in both the novels gives a glimpse of the great Indian heritage that pays respect not only to all humans but also to trees, animals and in short from the largest to tiniest living thing of this universe. In the first novel *The Coexistence* Gill celebrates human freedom and thus he shows Raghu as a world citizen. Gill contemplates on many burning global problems thereby the novel is a revelation, a warning bell for all learned lots who although knows well yet behaves irresponsibly. Gill invokes his readers to awake from their slumber and act.

The next novel Chattisgarh witnesses a grown up and scholarly Raghu who has come back to pay a visit to his motherland. But this Raghu is a self exiled man who visits India once in ten years and thus a NRI

and a visitor at Kaligarh University. He is an honoured and a special guest of the vice chancellor of the university. He is a poet who is back to his native land He is back with his own ideas of revolution but with a difference. His revolution is that of love and peace among all humanity. Gill writes in *The Chhattisgarh: Raghu* was convinced that more than five thousand year old detachment theory of India was based on self-love. Every object of creation manifested the love of the creator and every creator loved his creation(to Gill God is the Supreme Creator)...His(Gods') gift, like the water,air,the sun and earth, had been for His creatures to share among themselves. It was wrong, Raghu believed, to say that one should be at peace with himself or herself first, before creating peace in the world. (p.480)

Stephen Gill in his writings talks of peace , these novels are, in fact, soothing documents of peace and goodwill. They appear more as documentation of Indian philosophy. It's like re-reading a compressed, all understanding and easily comprehensible document of world peace.

Both the novels are worth reading as they give a glimpse of modern global society. The pros and cons of the multiculturalism is discussed in detail as if a live seminar is witnessed by the readers. The readers never feel the topic heavy on their mind as the novels are so well written that it feels like spontaneous flow of heartfelt ideas.

Indian and Canadian history has been well woven in one string to show the peculiarities and similarities in a unique and entertaining way. Gill makes one laugh and contemplates at the same time while describing the great Indian and Canadian heritage. All other characters play a minor and insignificant role. Although

Raghu meets so many people both in Canada and India but they are depicted like the passing phases of the life of Raghu.

The women characters are also not so memorable. A lady named Kalpna is described but she is as vague as imagination can be. The literary meaning of Kalpna is imagination and here too Raghu's Kalpna is too like an absurd dream. She appears like a sweet breeze of a changing climate and disappears. Like a wind readers can just feel her appearance but never see her. Raghu admits: Kalpna is an enigma for sure. (p.571)

Both the novels seem like an eighteenth century English picaresque novels but with a difference, and that is Raghu is not a typical picaro figure. Nevertheless, the novels are interesting, re-interpretation of Indian philosophy. It is at same time a well-documented book of world mythologies and a modern interpretation of all traditions and cultures that have been ruling the world since its civilization.

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***The Midnight's Grandchildren* by Varsha Singh,
Authorspress, New Delhi-11016(2017) Price Rs.600/**

The very title of the book *The Midnight's Grandchildren* after Salman Russeid's Booker Prize winner novel, is dashing enough though altogether different in content and form. It is designed to articulate the postmodern spirit in English fiction in India. Varsha Singh's book as the author claims is a critique of postmodernism from an Indian perspective as we in India perceive and practice it differently from the Westerners.

The book first introduces the theoretical concept of postmodernism in the context of the cultural implications regarding English fiction in India. It also interrogates the existence and necessity of postmodernism in the Indian context. In fact, the current generation novelists are averse to writing on the dotted lines. They want to carve out their own identity out of their own culture, myth, history and palpable reality. A *mélange* of sorts though essentially Indian showing postmodern features.

The author has discussed the prominent works of three novelists, Amit Chaudhuri, Pankaj Mishra and Tabish Khair as specimens of the premodern works. Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics* being an exhibit shows the hero's inner turmoil to adjust in an ever changing world, his encounter with the West which compels him to snap his roots of his Brahmanic past. He is a Brahmin intellectual languishing in a changed environment. A remarkable postmodern trait in this novel testifies to postmodernist's concept of morality as one's personal discretion. Multiculturalism and intertextuality also from part of the novel's postmodern design.

Amit Chaudhuri usually negates the tendencies of postmodernism by reestablishing the traits of modernism which is claimed to be left incomplete in India, His novel *The Immortals* shows the relationship between art and commerce as much as the clash between old and new, high and low, tradition and current, localisation and globalisation. In this novel Nimalya has deep fascination for his roots but later moves to London and the novel is left open ended. This open ended attribute of the novel confers on it the postmodernist feature. The postmodern writers often leaves their stories without any end, without any conclusion. Contradictions rule the roost as the opposites dominate and the conclusion hangs in the

balance. Such is the trait of postmodernism.

The author maintains that postmodernism reciprocates history critically probing the entire supposition of historical cognizance and cultural presumptions. The essential thing lies in the way of conceiving history with its limitations and flaws. Tabish Khair's novel *The Thing About Thugs* is a good example of a historical novel in the tradition of historiographic metafiction. It looks at the process of decolonization in a subtle way. It underlines the racist attitude of the British towards the orientals and thus is an anti-colonial novel.

Varsha Singh's book is an attempt to define modernization vis-a-vis a postmodernism. She holds that in postmodernism literature is much about assembling or installing as intertextuality or pastiche is just to paste together multiple elements. She regards Pankaj Mishra, Amit Chaudhuri, Tabish Khair, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai and Geeta Hariharan as the Midnight's grandchildren as they have a less troubled relationship with realist form and rationalized intake of history.

The book provides a good theoretical study of postmodernism illustrating it with some Indian novels.

— **Ram Bhagwan Singh**

R.K.Narayan : A Critical Study of his Novels and Short Stories, edited by Dr. Chhote Lal Khatri

Sarup Book Publishers (P) Ltd. New Delhi-110002, 2017, PP, 252, Price ?? 950/

A new book on R.K. Narayan is yet another attempt to find some more juice from the gigantic vessel, the enormous corpus of his novels and short stories. His works stand stable but their ramifications seem sprawling on the surface as well as underneath. The

fictional stream of R.K Narayan is ever full and flowing for the interested one to slake his thirst and find gems in the bargain.

The present book, a virtual monograph on R.K. Narayan is a full range critical study of his fiction and some non-fiction prose. The scholarly papers in this book approach his works from different perspectives such as, regional and post-colonial, social and psychological, traditional and dynamic and comic and ironical. The thematic thread runs on but it does not run out. The ironic vision encompasses the whole humanity and spares none, their virtues and vices alike. He seems to hit hard with velvet gloves on social, cultural, political and even religious irregularities and incongruities. Though not a social reformer, even yet as a comic writer he means a better and peaceful world order.

The articles in this book cover the entire range of R.K Narayan's novels and some short stories. If Prof. R. A. Singh has analysed the comic overtones in *The Financial Expert*, Dr Bhavesh Chandra Pandey has studied *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* as a postcolonial text. Needless to say, R.K Narayan remains till today the unchallenged champion of the comic mode with an engaging story. Though the comic and ironic strain sustains all through his works, the best examples are *The Financial Expert* and *Swami and Friends*. Dr C.L.Khatri has explored regional ambience in *The Bachelor of Arts* which is in a way endorsed by Ravi Prakash who finds Indianness in Mr *Sampath* in particular. The fact remains that R.K. Narayan is, by no means, a regional writer, but the stamp of his environment and local practices show some distinctive features of their own. The feminine sensibility finds ample space in R.K. Narayan's novels. Woman as mother, woman as wife and beloved, woman as a prostitute, woman as docile

and conservative, woman as modern and liberated all are here to represent a class of Indian womanhood. R.K. Narayan is generally regarded as a traditionalist who upholds the traditional image of Indian woman as exemplified by Savitri in *The Dark Room*. The sufferer Savitri frets and fumes but finally returns to the family fold. In *The Guide* we have Rosy, the liberated woman who sick of her husband, chooses her own way.

Dr. Dipika Sahai's focus is on marital bliss in *The English Teacher* which happens to be R.K. Narayan's semi-autobiographical. Right from adolescent love to conjugal bliss to mystic meeting he has explored the different facets of romance and love in his novels. Sahai has expatiated on the marital bliss of Krishna and Susila which outlives Susila's death as Krishna establishes connection with the spirit of his dead wife. Kumari Rashmi Priyadarshini has explored radical feminism in *The Painter of Signs*. Daisy is obviously a clear-cut avatar of a radical feminist who pooh-poohs marriage saying , 'married life is not for me . I have thought it over ...I can't live, except alone. However, she accepts to marry Raman on two conditions.

One that they should have no children, and two, if by mischance one was born, she would give the child away. On any day you question why or how, I will leave you.

Narayan's fictional exuberance is not limited to any particular theme or incident; he is a master presenter of all human passions and worldly affairs. A local painter in Malgudi writing a story of innocence in *Swami and Friends*, a Gandhian Nationalist in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, pushing a palatable pie of comedy and tragedy in *The Vendor of Sweets* and an imposter maturing as a spiritual swami in *The Guide* show R.K. Narayan as a multi-dimensional artist. Over and over a

consummate writer of innocuous comedy in the gripping tale. Dr Ganga Bihari Purohit is all appreciation for Narayan's *A Tiger for Malgudi* written in a fable mode, a sort of nationalistic discourse. Dr S.K. Arora finds *The World of Nagaraj* a microcosmic world of the protagonist by proxy the modern world of a nuclear family vis-à-vis a joint family. Dr Neeraj Kumar finds search for self apart from social, political and psychological commitments in the *Painter of Signs*. Kapileshwar Parija in detail has examined and discussed the short stories of R.K.Narayan both from the perspective of plot construction and the art of telling the story.

The book also comprises an essay on non-fictional writing of R.K.Narayan for example, his experiences in a foreign land in *My Dateless Dairy*. The personal account is as simple as the author himself writing in simple, unpretentious style. The experiences of the author though subjective in his response to the new environment, can be enlightening for the general public.

As a whole, the book deals practically with all the novels of R.K.Narayan, though not a full study of the novelist. In fact, the bulk of Narayan's writings cannot be summed up in a single volume. However, apart from thematic evaluation the book has no paper on the style and form of his writings the R.K.Narayan's pet pattern of synthesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. Also the omission of a paper on *The Guide* leaves something to be desired. No doubt, it is a scholarly collection of papers and a comprehensive reference book for students and researchers of Indian English literature.

— **Ram Bhagwan Singh**

Foaming Fountain (A Collection of thoughts and sealisations) by O.N.Gupta, Sai- sadan, 26/1002 Rajatalab, Raipur- 49 2006

Prof. O.N. Gupta's *Foaming Fountain* is 'a collection of thoughts and realisations'... as the very title avers. The revered professor of nearly four scores is himself a depository of thoughts and experiences practically prosaic by nature. Poetry by nature is less so, more heart and heartfelt mind.

At first sight, I was lured by the seductive cover of the book blue, a sail in blue waters but forlorn, unmanned, boasting of its audacious sinews. The inside claims to have a mosaic of love, lilacs, feelings, actions and reactions. It further likens itself to a sugar free model with all the frills and filigree. No doubt, the trappings are there masking the sordid truths and realizations of life in as many as seventyseven poems.

Much like a political manifesto the Foreword declares; "It has little emotion but a good deal of warning to desist from senseless violence, racial discrimination, religious prejudices, communal feelings, devil of downy ironically exposing economic, political, social offences, veneer of hypocrisy, irksome myths and sexual abuses, all very precious precepts. Again, like oyster he produces pearls of wisdom in a language of his choice, "...he watches the films of Age, questions the sorry state of affairs'. Prof. Gupta means his poetry to be 'useful and, beautiful and delightful' that jolts our mind and touches our hearts.

Buffeted by sordid jolts of life the poet regrets his filial generosity as he disposed of wife's Mangal Sutra for Bahu's caesarean, withdrew GPF for daughter's wedding and commutation to liquidate house loan. Again, he does not apologize for scripting some books that could not buy a hundred bananas.(11) The note of irony is crying silently here. The poet rationalizes his private pain in view of the labyrinthine lane of life crisscrossing many footpaths and then "the beast of

Age slouches sloppilyas shadows lengthen, you grow fatalistic, the fabric of life changes , you suffer alienation and embarrassment; (12) Thus, to add fuel to fire

Your disobedient daughter dogs you
to a lavish spending matching her
college status, and son goes
window-shopping. Matrimony over
You feel pyrrhic victory,
children go honey mooning
and you kick fact on squeaky bed.(16)

The poet presents different stages of conjugal relationship as a doting husband deifying 'his dearie darling for favour but the die- hard keeps him hanging in air.' And more,

She croons a different song
not to whet his appetite,
not as a floozy.
She is nonchalant and noncommittal.
As year elapse,
depreciation creeps in
...silt gathers on both banks,
dust dirties love,
and peace retires into museum.

(Saranga Bird 35)

The poet feels out of tune of modern fashion and life style e.g. 'live-in-relation, gay marriages, rave parties and senseless violence.' He recalls 'Buddha, the prince left palace/ in search of peace/while we Budhoos bargain peace for palace'. (48) About city life he feels 'Here everybody is an atom bomb/ acetic and jaundiced/ life hectic and feverish/ one knows not who lives upstairs/ you look like a Lilliputian/ in the land of Brobdingnagians.' (58) Therefore, he seeks refuge in traditional culture. In the poem 'Culture' a mother gives her daughter on marriage a wallet containing vermilion

and Lord Krishna's photo saying ' it is our culture/ use it in crises/it would protect you/from deviation. (71)

Prof. Gupta wonders at Nature's vast museum which showcases many miracles like an octopus with three hearts, a crab with ten legs, a kiwi sans wings, a chameleon changing its colour and showing its tongue bigger than its body and a crocodile shedding tears while preying on its victim. The poet finds nature varied and magnanimous. No wonder, Bismark wished to be born an ant, the strongest of all creatures.

The poems in this book are simple, down-to earth written at leisure more for profit than pleasure, a party for chosen humanity.

— **Ram Bhagwan Singh**

Toponymics: A Linguistic Study by N.S.Sahu, Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly, (2016) Pp.170, Price Rs. 350/

Toponymics happens to be a branch of Onomastics, the study of proper names which is not a very popular discipline of knowledge. It requires both extensive and intensive research as finding the history of place names entails a lot of hard work in the field as well as in the archive. However, such a study presents very interesting facts and some hidden truths behind naming places. The writer Prof. N.S.Sahu must have undergone a saint's rigorous researching on place names.

The present book is the improved and revised version of *Toponymy* published in 1989. It deals with different aspects of the study like aesthetics, history, culture, linguistic influence and accidental factors etc. The book is divided into ten chapters, according as the factors that characterize naming places. The writer holds that the most ancient word for name exists almost alike in many languages for example, 'nāman' in Sanskrit, 'name' in Germanic, 'nomen' in Latin and

'name' in gothic. However, all proper names show both peculiarity and some perceptible sense.

The first chapter deals with the aesthetical aspect of nomenclature of a place. Place names stand as anieon, as animage or a sign signifying its individuality. The second chapter is a study of place names as a genre in onomastic science along with a short history of the earlier works conducted on place names. The third chapter is a specific study of place names in Chhattisgarh, its socio-cultural history, the impact of flora and fauna on naming places. In fact, such names become the exclusive property of a unique reference and identity. However, there are no water tight rules or logic behind naming places. The fourth chapter concerns the linguistic boundaries of the dialect of Chhattisgarh which plays a significant role in labelling a place. The fifth chapter is a study of the phonemic and morphemic structures of place names while the sixth chapter studies the nature and types based on the meanings of the names. Such names have mythological, racial and historical references. In the seventh chapter there is a classification of place names based on human beings and domestic animals. The eighth chapter deals with the social and cultural trends that suggest sociolinguistic implications and caste structure of the area, the ninth chapter focuses on linguistic stratification of place names, how Sanskrit, local dialects and foreign elements have contributed towards naming places. The last chapter is a backview or a retrospect. The study tries to find out the connection between meaning and the text. The place names have functional mobility and referential value apart from aesthetic, cultural and typographical implications.

Dr. N.S Sahu's book is a comprehensive and rigorous study of place names. The author has worked out a theory of labelling places and understand its social,

religious, cultural, racial, historical, mythological and linguistic complications particularly of Chhattisgarh. The book is of utmost value for researchers and social scientists.

— Prof Ram Bhagwan Singh

***A Time to Forget* by Rajiv Khandelwal, Poetry Society of India, Gurugram-122002, (Haryana), Pp. 117, Price HBRs.300/**

Rajiv khandelwal is a celebrated poet in English. *A Time to Forget* is his fourth book of poetry. It is a collection of as many as sixtyseven poems. It opens with “Praise for *A Time to Forget*” containing a plethora of praise contributed by stalwart poets, critics and professors like Dr Stephen Gill, Dr N.K Neb, Dr Rama Rao Vadapalli and Dr Shaleen Singh. It has a “Foreword” by Reginald Massey, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts of the United Kingdom of the city of London. Bhupinder Parihar has contributed a “Preface” underlining the beauty and finesse of Khandelwal’s poetry. He is all praise saying “The outer and inner forms combinedly constitute the linguistic and cultural, determinant of the poet’s imagination...” *A Time to Forget* is a postmodernist step in this direction. Moreover, his greatness lies in reconciling thoughts with sensations. The author has himself narrated the birth of a poet in him while still a student in an engineering college and later under the inspiration and guidance of Dr Som Ranchan, the reputed poet. Towards the end of the book there is a special acknowledgement to literary journals in which poems from this book have been published with dates. As an Annexure there is an account of Rajiv Khandelwal’s other published works with loud praise and admiration from well-known poets and critics.

Having read so many reviews excerpts and views

on Khandelwal's poetry I am already biased in his favour and I find myself fumbling for something distinctly new in his poems which may lie still unearthed. A poet's views and emotions are his individual property, they may coincide with others by chance without prejudice. However, I have been overwhelmed by the poet's ingenious images and similes for example, emotional tsunami, emotional union, stitching scraps of memories, perfume of a wise parliamentarian, effervescent as a chemical reaction, lust breasts, fancy dressed trust, violent dreams, plundered faith, paper wasp, citrus breeze, crisp air, swinging hopes, coils of doubts, sexual magnetism etc. His images are both sensual and cerebral, an evidence of his masterly poetic strokes. To quote, "the day moves like the slow movements of baby in pregnancy", "tension like that created by the unopened income Tax notice", "your thoughts wear me like shoes", "head felt like a lousy street, stood with coils of doubts like pedestrians at zebra line", "happiness stands poised like birds in flight", "pain settles like dead leaves" and "helplessness of the male virgin in bed with a lesbian", etc. They serve as strikingly new objective correlatives.

As regards the choice of subjects, to me the poet seems obsessed with woman and woman as woman "discreetly dominant dripping emphasized curves." He is sure enough "When I see you / Something clicks/ An explosion gushes/ Fireworks explode/ I do not feel this/ In your absence."(30) Again,

When your thoughts are not with me
Grouchiness embraces my being
My feelings
Do a disorderly dance
A dream edges back
Suicidal misery and bleeding mood. (32)

The woman's 'sexual magnetism' and her 'seductive aura' finds him 'stood moth light-struck in her glow.'(49). In "Ambrosia" woman is just ambrosia to him. I appreciate the poet's predilection. But I only wish a sublime sublimation, maximization and spiritual optimization.

The poet turns his tool towards politicians for exposing their hypocrisies and misses no occasion to satirize them. He calls them imbecile, finds them on terror tourism; they dish out caste separation speeches, they are scam scathed, murder maligned; they are a bunch of moral imbeciles governing the country. (54)

On the whole, *A Time to Forget* will remain green in the readers mind and will distinctly add to the corpus of Indian Poetry in English. However, I wish to quote Shakespeare: "good wine needs no bush".

— Prof Ram Bhagwan Singh

Turning Point by M S Venkata Ramaiah, A Bizz Buzz Publication, Bangalore, 2016, Pp 56, Rs 100/

M S Venkata Ramaiah's third poetry collection *Turning Point*, though a slim one consisting of 51 short and crisp poems, is a reflection of the contemplative mind and sensitive heart of an elderly poet. He is able to transport the readers in his own world of stylised thoughts and supple sensibility. A conscience stricken poet focuses more on the seamy sides of life around like ecological imbalance "Unable to stop invaders within,/ Who have not spared hillocks, mines and the earth." In "The Shaking Easel" he presents how a man becomes a 'bulldozer'. Continuing his tirade on the problem of environmental hazard of global proportion, he lambasts the planners in "Constructivism":

Unable to realise the
Basics of public interests

Planners exhibit poor
Numeric skills. (4)

some other poems like “Nature the Preservable!”, “Irony”, “Conscience Stricken”, “Ecological Danger” echo the ecological concerns of the poet in simple straightforward terms.

Poetically such message oriented poems may not hold much after first reading or may not be a poetic puzzle; but the poet here is more concerned with delivery or communication rather than artistry. Simplicity, too, has its own beauty. He is so anguished on the rising cases of sexual assault on young girls and women and wonders “Whom to Blame.”

Many of his poems bear the imprint of Gandhian thought. Gandhi once said that Nature has everything to fulfil our need but not our greed. Ramaiah says:

“Wishes have no limits
One after the other stand
In a queue to get fulfilled
Will he oblige for ever?
Never.” (6)

In “The Method” he recalls Gandhi’s “Ahimsa and Sathyagraha” and his goal “swaraj” and how he achieved his goal of India’s independence. In “The Moment” he quotes Gandhi’s famous prayer in Hindi “Iswar Allah Tere Naam sabko sanmathi de Bhagwan” (17) In another poem “The Thoughts” the poet celebrates Gandhi’s weapon of fasting for purifying “Mind, body and thought...../ And for this Gandhi went on and on fasting/ He was seeking the support from inside/” (17). The other poems on Gandhi are “The Path”, “The Experiments”, “The People”, “The Truth” and “The Preference”. The next poem is based on Atal Behari Vajpayee entitled “Patriotism & Nationality”:

Let us be friends with our

Neighbours and shall fight
With our enemies- thus
Spoke Atal Behari Vajpayee (21)

Ramaiah is at his best in his poems of imaginary/
personal anecdotes like “Sleeping in the Woods”

I climbed a short tree
Stretched my body on a branch
Sleep driven away the fear
Until I fell down on the ground
Of course, from the cot in my bedroom. (5)

“Running Out Time” seems to me one of his best
poems:

My eyes struggling to concentrate
The Math’s paper on my desk
In the intermediate examination
Each line blurred while glossing over
As if words are disappearing. (13)

On the whole *Turning Point* is a welcome addition
to Indian English Poetry for its flavour of Gandhian
wisdom, short and simple anecdotal poems and direct
communication.

— Prof C L Khatri

***Encounters with People and the Angels of Hope* by H
K Kaul, published from Authorspress, New Delhi,
2017, Pp 210, Rs 450/**

H K Kaul, founder Secretary and now President
of The Poetry Society of India, is a well established
signature in Indian English Poetry. The book under
review is his sixth poetry collection. It is a collection of
138 poems written between 2006 to 2016 on his
personal encounters with persons and situations. The
poems are classified in eight groups namely: Society
and Culture, Struggles for Survival, Kashmiri Pandits,

Crime and Violence, Religion and Spirituality, Environment, The Professionals and Craftsmen, and Decaying and Death. The poet rightly affirms that “these poems encapsulate the events and situations that I have encountered in the past, it seems now I have unburdened some baggage that had settled in the deeper recesses of my consciousness.”

H K Kaul’s poems are difficult to categorise as they subtly operate at different levels and are amenable to multiple reading. Hence I am not going to talk about the different headings but some of the common poetic traits that I observed in this collection. Kaul’s poetry calls for patient reading and re-reading. It is not hit and run. It engages the readers with deft manipulation of images and symbols. The subjects are not hackneyed; even when they are they are refreshingly new or different. “Whirlpools” are not concrete image of whirlpools but abstract phenomena in human life:

Whirlpools remain active
In sleep, under the masks.
Only sizes vary.
Minds that matter get sucked in too
Only the swirling remains in its downdraft. (19)

Whirlpool here is the central image around which the structure of the poem is built. The centrality of image is a distinguishing feature of H K Kaul in this collection. Again in “Blunt Axes” the blunt axe is the central image suggestive of a new mindset that ‘Won’t let you stand firm/ On solid grounds.’ Similarly in “Social Pyramids” pyramid is the key image round which other corollary images of ‘hollow spaces’, ‘sloping walls’, ‘pinnacle’, ‘lone entries’ and the reinforcing image of ‘peas’ ‘falling and scattering’ are structured to suggest a strange phenomenon of pyramids :

The lone entries to the hollow spaces

Attract the stressed and the strained
Entomb all those that run away
From the heat and dust...(21)

Ovid's oft quoted remark "Art lies in concealing art." holds good in the case of Kaul's poetry. There are different devices through which he achieves this; and no where it seems a laboured engineering. It seems to be there in his Muse as he is not so interested in describing a situation or an encounter but in what he infers or deduces from it. So it is the abstract thought or say the significance of an encounter that is his focus. Let us take one or two examples:

In a brief interface with the real world
He found that the tales told
Were getting difficult to understand.

He couldn't find why and how prickliness
Stemmed from soft centres in play.
How a slow burner could turn
The noble will of others to fumes
Frighten, limit life, its abilities to heal:
Life was twisted. (Stonewalling Change, 31)

Or

"After every shrilled peak
Hopes thinned out fast.
A firefly turned the darkened spaces
Into flickers of hope. (Bucking the Trend, 33)

One can easily notice how deftly he uses abstract images and even when they are concrete; the perspective is almost invariably the abstract connotations implied in them. Take for example a very simple poem "Temples of Stone":

Gods in the valley are alone now.
No watchmen around
No worshippers either.(143)

Another remarkable feature of his poetry is that it is virtually devoid of poetic clichés, conceits, decorative ornamentation and craze for difficult, uncommon words and phrasal constructions. Simple words and expressions serve his purpose of making a philosophic discourse that stems from his lived experiences of social, political and cultural ebbs and low, and some disturbing realities of our time as reflected for example in "Blood Stains":

Midway mass funerals were held
Of the blood-soaked myths, of
The extraterrestrials who vanished midair

Without removing blood stains from their shadows. (47)

He expresses his anguish at so many divides operating in the society in the name of caste, religion, region, etc and looks for 'the universal consciousness/ Feeding all bridges, all divides/ Into the melting crucible of time.' (62)

His Nature poems have their own seductive appeal to the readers voicing both its beauty and environmental concerns:

Swiftly a valley opens to sunshine
Swiftly another turns its back to it.
Life on rough slopes sleeps in its huts and holds
Big castles paint fire on their sloppy roofs
And breaking stone, all ready to get washed

Down when unseen floods turn their backs on them. (My Hills, My Valleys, 159)

A review has its own limitation. But let me quote a concluding couplet in a poem "Dead in the Debris" to show what a master craftsman H K Kaul is!

Dead don't matter when the matter is dead
Debris needs the seed to groom its seedbed. (163)

The poet displays a matured vision of life, cool composed tone even on the face of provocative situation, and felicity of language with deceptive simplicity and marked density of thoughts and feelings communicating at same wave length. Today when we write more and read less my humble submission to the budding poets is to read this poetry book.

— Prof C L Khatri

***Parnassus of Revival* by Manas Bakshi published by The Poetry Society of India, Gurugram, 2017, Pp. 79, Rs. 250/, \$ 18.**

Manas Bakshi needs no introduction in the realm of Indian English Poetry. The present book *Parnassus of Revival* is his twelfth poetry collection. Dr Dalip Khetarpal rightly calls it ‘a blend of dialogue heteroglossia’ in his Preface to the book. The book consists of 51 short and crisp lyrics with intriguing effects of variegated compositions covering philosophical, social, topical, cerebral issues. What Polonius said in *Hamlet*, “Brevity is the soul of wit” is truly justified by Dr Bakshi in this poetry book. His poems are marked by epigrammatic density despite affordable simplicity of language. Look at the his aphoristic feature:

For a nightmare to end
Point needs counterpoint

.....

And he continues
In the morning
The residual wax
Of a burnt-out candle
Finds none

To convey:

Last night’s bomb blast
Was all in vain. (60)

A fine semiotic articulation of humanity winning over brutality.

Another aphorism: “Your first succour, last resort/ It’s me Mother Earth” (7)

Yet another example of this kind:

Silent God,
At the other end
Playing Sudoku
In the secluded corner of human mind. (13)

The book is suffused with such brilliant flashes of poetry that leave you mesmerised.

On the other hand ‘Indian Woman’ presents a different facet of his poetry. It is comparatively a longer poem tracing the chequered development of Indian woman from Treta to Dwapar to modern age in a narrative mode. Here the whole historical incidents right from Sita’s fire ordeal and Draupadi’s *cheer haran* to Nirbhaya’s gruesome rape and murder are narrated by the poetic persona “I” and ends with an optimistic note:

I will for sure, one day
Make India worthy
Of women’s existence—(4)

He reflects on topical issues confronting the country and the society today like volatile situation in valley: “Dawn that brings a shade of darkness/ Signs on the valley of solitariness, //.....// Swept by night waves/ Abandoned by morning sun rays!(6) or on overpowering Cyber age showing his measured reservation:

Cyber Age; word seems within reach.
Flower, fruits and vegetables—all hybrid...
Days nearing the pinnacle of global warming
For a fresh start with neo-human seed? (10)

Poems like “Live from a Kolkata Pavement” or monsoon misery in “If at all, Kolkata Could Be” and a few more poems are concerned with everyday ills and odds of life.

Some of his poems like “The Eternal Truth”, “Moving Leeward”, “A Poem of Untold Moments”, “Saluting the Sun” “All About a Transitory Game” cater to the philosophic taste of poetry.

Cutting across all categorisation his poems muse on the dilemma in life, complex psychological situations in life born of socio-political and cultural incongruities. The external crisis or situation often echo the internal ones lending an intellectual and emotional density to his poems:

A thought in human mind
Impregnating an afternoon
That was sure to abort
At the tip of legitimacy
Till the inkblots around a rising star
Hazed some cupid eyes
With the smoke of present day
Social delinquency—(54)

The poet brilliantly manipulates images drawn from mythology, Nature and science without converting them into incomprehensible poetic cliches to powerfully convey the existential angst of contemporary life around and uphold the perennial virtue of love and life. Manas Bakshi is not a poet of promise but a chosen Muse of Parnassus. The book offers an invigorating and thought-provoking read and is a value addition to the corpus of Indian English Poetry.

— C L Khatri

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