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THE
THE ASCETIC IN AN INDO-ANGLIAN NOVEL : SOME GLIMPSES

SYNOPSIS

The present dissertation aims at a critical evaluation of the theme of Asceticism in Indo-Anglian novels. There is no denying the fact that a large number of novels depict the 'man in the saffron robe' and there has been a continuous stream of his portrayals ever since the appearance of fiction in Indian Writing in English, right from Bankim Chandra Chatterji's Anandmath (1882) to this day.

A detailed assessment of the three major novels viz., He Who Rides a Tiger (1954) of Bhabani Bhattacharya, The Guide (1958) by R.K. Narayan and Seasons of Jupiter (1958) by Anand Lal with reference to the theme of asceticism and also a brief survey of novels right from Bankim Chandra Chatterji's Anandmath (1882) to Nargis Dalal's The Inner Door (1975) is undertaken. Only three novels have been chosen for the detailed assessment partly because it is only in these three novels that the ascetic figures as a major character, and partly because of the scope and limitation of the dissertation.

The first chapter is devoted to a brief theoretical discussion of the ideal of asceticism, the second gives a brief survey of the Indo-Anglian novels in which the theme of asceticism is a minor one, the third presents a detailed explication of the ideal of asceticism with reference to the three major novels chosen for the study and the fourth contains a few observations.

CHAPTER - I Asceticism as synonymous with renunciation - a recurrent theme in many Indo-Anglian novels - sadhus and saints as an integral part of the Indian society - the term

'asceticism' derived from a Greek word meaning 'training' - a rough definition of : 'sadhu' - the religious meaning of asceticism as the practice of the denial of physical and psychological desires - a detailed account of the paraphernalia of the sadhus or ascetics - the Law Book of Manu and the formal conditions and rules of ascetic life - the Jain Ascetics as practitioners of rigorous religious austerities - ceaseless efforts to attain the state of the Supreme Being and readiness ~~to~~ to offer intense devotion for its accomplishment as a common feature of all ascetics - the Upanishads and the nature of morality and external life - jivanmukta - the ascetic exercising a considerable influence on the life and literature of India.

CHAPTER - II Contains a brief survey of the Indo-Anglian novels from Anandmath (1882) to The Inner Door (1975) in which the ascetic figures only as a minor or associate character, for gaining a proper perspective on the theme of asceticism.

CHAPTER - III (1) He Who Rides a Tiger (1954) - a novel of social protest by Bhabani Bhattacharya - projection of social, cultural and religious life in a Bengal village called Jharana and the city of Calcutta - Kalo, a blacksmith and protagonist of the novel - insulted at various stages of his life by the caste Hindus - his imprisonment for a petty theft - the counsel of a fellow-prisoner, Biten (B-10) - Kalo's desire to take revenge - his disguise as a saint - making the image of a fake god emerge out of the ground - his pleasure at the sight of caste Hindus bending before him - his final confession of his identity.

Bhabani Bhattacharya - a committed ^t writer and a propagandist writing novels of social protest - his characters as the spokesmen of his views and attitudes - Chandra Lekha undergoing a spiritual transformation in the ascetic practice - the

identification of Kalo's face with the mask of sainthood - not as perfect as that of Raju in The Guide - Bhattacharya's conscious experimentation with language - wonderful power of narration - the attitude being 'Art for life's sake', his art as a vehicle of social reality - juxtaposition - a special virtue of his novel - the symbolic title.

(2) The Guide (1958) - the magnum opus of Narayan's Malgudi novels - Raju the protagonist - an average human being, ex-shopkeeper, ex-lover of the married dancer Rosie, ex-jailbird, ex-tourist guide, turned by inevitable circumstances to sainthood - his fifteen-day fast to bring rain to a drought-stricken village - his martyrdom - a wonderful attempt at presenting a full portrayal of an Indian ascetic.

A remarkable transformation in Raju in his attempt of the ascetic penance - Raju a lovable rogue - superior to Anand's priests and pandits - effective method of narration - lack of melodrama - objectivity - wonderful story - no experimentation with language - use of limited vocabulary - a comparison between The Guide and He Who Rides a Tiger.

(3) Anand Lall's Seasons of Jupiter (1958) - a full-length portrait of Rai Gyan Chand - the protagonist himself telling his story - his quest for personal happiness - philandering and extra-marital relations with Jennifer, Pushpa and Askari - family life with Basanti and Sulochana - constant failure in establishing close relationship with them - frustration - flight to the grove of a sadhu - ascetic training and lessons in exercising meditation - attempt at gaining proper detachment - failure again - return to the ancestral house - and his tragic death.

The novel - in an autobiographical narration - lack of aesthetic appeal - occasionally poetic and emotional style - loose plot - pages replete with Hindu philosophy and wisdom - a novel of picaresque tradition - comparison between Seasons of Jupiter and The Guide.

CHAPTER - IV CONCLUSIONS - The ideal of asceticism - a recurrent theme, either as a major or a minor one - several categories of ascetics though it is a male in the novels of our study - the ascetics either bachelors or householders or else those who have renounced the world - ritualism, paraphernalia and ways of life identical - their effect on the society - either benevolent or malevolent - the general depiction of the ascetic in the picaresque tradition - influence on the society.

The modern writers like Desani, Dalal and Jhabvala depict the ascetic for satiric purpose, Anand depicts him as an evil force and Bhabani Bhattacharya introduces him to expose the hypocritical high-class society. No metaphysical dimension is given to the character by the novelists. Only R.K. Narayan has attempted to look at the ascetic as an ~~art~~ artistic creation but he too seems ambivalent.

Kalo in He Who Rides a Tiger puts on the robe of a sadhu to take revenge upon the society, Raju in The Guide puts on the guise of a sadhu in order to conceal his identity after his jail-life and remains benevolent throughout and Gyan Chand in Seasons of Jupiter puts on the robe as an experimentalist in spiritualism. All the ascetics that we come across are made either by the circumstances or by the persons amongst whom they live.

The three major ascetics of our concern initiate their

ascetic career with a miracle. They have an unusual and impressive personality to which there are constant refer^ences in the novels. After putting on the ascetic robe, they pick up a prophetic and semi-philosophic jargon. The three ascetics are aware in the inner corner of their self that the sainthood is a convenient disguise which they are circumstanced to put on. They confess their identity at the moment of a crisis.

The 'exotic' element is dominant as mainly the western audience is kept in view. On account of their little involvement with the totality of Indian life, the Indo-Anglian novelists have not so far given a full-length novel on the ascetic. On the other hand, some novelists in the regional languages have treated the theme of asceticism in full-length novels because of their involvement with the Indian ethos and their training in Indian languages.

Bhattacharya (like Anand) is a purposive writer. Naturally, social philosophy overbears his art and his style becomes artificial. R.K. Narayan's art and objectivity overbear all other considerations. Anand Lall gives an impression of a chronicler in spiritualism. Artistically, Narayan surpasses both of them and his Raju, the guide, is the best portrayed of the three ascetics.