

CHAPTER : IV

C O N C L U S I O N S

CHAPTER : IV
CONCLUSIONS

I

From the explication of the three novels in the foregoing chapter the following conclusions may be drawn :

The ideal of asceticism is a recurrent theme in the Indo-Anglian novel. Though the ascetic figures as a major character in only a few novels, he is seen as an ancillary character in a great number of them.

There are several categories of the ascetic. Though in the three novels chosen for our study the ascetic is a male, also females play the role of the ascetic either as a major or a minor character in several other novels. Thus, asceticism is not limited exclusively to males or females. The ascetics may be bachelors or householders or even those who have renounced their family and possessions after their marriage.

The term 'ascetic' has different connotations in different religions. Further, whatever be the ascetics' religion and sect, their ritualism, paraphernalia and ways of life are much identical.

Mostly, the saints as they are seen in the actual society or as depicted in the novels may be classified as benevolent and malevolent, to make a broad and loose category from the point of view of their influence on the society and their contribution to the culture and life of the people with whom they live.

II

We come across certain structural and attitudinal patterns in the treatment of the theme of asceticism. The most discernible of these is the 'picaresque' trend with reference to



the ascetics. Generally, an ascetic is a wandering character influencing the society directly or indirectly in a good or bad way.

Here too the earlier writers depict the ascetic as influencing the society in a beneficent way and the modern writers like Desani, Nargis Dalal and Mrs. Jhabvala who have necessarily a critical attitude, depict him for the satiric purpose. A writer like Anand with his Marxist outlook exposes the holy man as an evil force exploiting the Indian society. He has no word of admiration or sympathy for the ascetic. Bhabani Bhattacharya follows suit and uses the ascetic to expose the hypocritical high-class society. Being a stark realist, he does not idealise the ascetic but makes him the spokesman of his reformatory and revolutionary philosophy. Thus on the whole there is no romanticization of the ascetic in the novels of the modern writers. Further in Indo-Anglian novels, we do not find an evolution of the character of an ascetic in its totality. The writers seem to prefer an 'exotic' outlook towards him rather than giving him a metaphysical dimension. The ascetic is either blindly revered as in the early novels or mocked at as a comic character in the later novels. Most of the novelists dealing with ascetics lack probing too deep into the experiences that make the ascetics what they are. The character of the ascetic is treated horizontally and not vertically. Even R. K. Narayan with his objective and artistic approach has not looked at the ascetic as a purely aesthetic creation. He too seems to be 'ambivalent' in his attitude towards the ascetic. The ascetic

is found neither as a social figure nor an artistic creation. Narayan also shows an ambivalence regarding the influence of the ascetic on the society. This in a way testifies to his objectivity.

III

In the three novels chosen for our comprehensive study, the three ascetics have their influence on the society in their own way. The lowborn Kalo in He Who Rides a Tiger (1954) is a householder who is forced to take the robe of a sadhu only to take revenge upon the society which has done injustice to him. He is benevolent only when he is not under the spell of his self-imposed and visualized Brahminhood. For the rest of the time he is red with revenge. Raju in The Guide (1958) is also circumstanced to put on the convenient disguise of a saint. And once he puts it on, he remains benevolent throughout. Rai Gyan Chand in Seasons of Jupiter (1958) may be called an experimentalist in sainthood, involved in a series of experiments in philosophy and philandering. He too ultimately realises that he is not a person fit for the yogic discipline. He is neither a benevolent nor a malevolent sadhu. He is a self-centred introvert.

All the three saints 'ride the tiger of sainthood' that is not easy to dismount. Kalo kills the tiger in order to dismount it, and at a certain moment, Raju is on the verge of dismounting it but fails and has to continue the riding till the end. However, Gyan Chand rides the tiger as long as he can and is forced to put a full stop to his riding or to his 'journey', to use his own word.

The three ascetics are more or less made and none of them

seems to be a born saint. The causes may vary but the governing fact is that they are made so either by the circumstances in which they are compelled to live or by the society that venerates and worships them and establishes an unshakable faith in their sanctity and superhuman ability. In the inner corner of his being, the ascetic too knows the baselessness of his holy self, at certain moments he tries to expose himself by tearing away the 'saffron robe' but once the holy sainthood is thrust upon him it is very difficult for him to get rid of it.

Raju in The Guide initiates his role as an ascetic by extending a helping hand to a needy peasant, Velan, who is mesmerised by Raju's saintly power. Raju's charismatic personality is also a dominant factor in his ascetic make-up. His impressive face is enhanced by his grand prophetic style of speaking which holds the audience spellbound. Last of all, the holy robe is a matter of convenience for him as it promises him regular meals and enables him to conceal his identity which he badly needs after his life as a convict.

In the case of Kalo in He Who Rides a Tiger the circumstances that compel him to ride the tiger of sainthood are altogether different. It is his mute aspiration of coming out of his low-caste community, which is peeled open and sharpened by the insult and injustice done to him by the people of his community as well as the high society. A series of bitter experiences and incidents inflame the fire of revenge in Kalo and consequently he turns mad with the irresistible thought of performing the miracle of Shiva's emerging and manipulates to attain the state of false sainthood.

Now to speak of Rai Gyan Chand in Seasons of Jupiter, the causes that lead him to sanyasashram are more or less psychological. It is Gyan's aspiration to attain the completeness of his being by establishing a close contact with his sweethearts and also with his wives, but failure, that is an unfailing lot for him, leaves him frustrated and takes him to the ascetic practice for attaining a proper detachment. He develops a deep attachment whenever he is on the verge of attaining the state of detachment. Again, failure is his lot and he gives up his sainthood only to come back to his native town to live the life of a householder.

An interesting point concerning the three major ascetics is that they begin their ascetic career with a miracle or a strange happening. Raju's act of solving the domestic problem of Velan is a miracle, though not for him but for Velan and the villagers. Kalo's trick of causing Shiva's image emerge out of the ground leaves the so-called literate people of Calcutta baffled. Gyan Chand works the miracle in his early childhood when he controls Moti, the elephant, which runs wild. The first miracle is an accident or a coincidence which initiates them ⁱⁿ to asceticism. Thus, taking an ignoramus for an ascetic possessing miraculous power is a typical characteristic of the gullible Indians. It can be generalised that in India, sadhus are made and not born. In other words, asceticism is virtually thrust upon some amateurish sadhu-like people. The man in the saffron robe, thus becomes a recognised ascetic in the eyes of the pious Indians.

Another characteristic common to the three ascetics under discussion is that they have an uncommon and impressive

personality. Their faces bear an aura of radiance. There are recurrent references to their charismatic faces, in the narratives.

Another point of similarity in these three ascetics is that as soon as they acquire the role of an ascetic they pick up a prophetic jargon, speak in a pedantic style and show off their scriptural knowledge. Raju with his grand style impresses Velan by giving him a solution to his domestic problem. Like a philosopher, Gyan Chand consoles Narinjan whenever the latter finds himself under the spell of some evil star. Kalo justifies the act of giving the milk of the milkbath to the destitutes when an objection is raised by the trustees of the temple.

The three ascetics under consideration viz., Kalo, Raju and Gyan Chand are constantly aware of the fact that their sainthood is a disguise, a mask, which they are circumstanced to wear and in the inner corner of their self they are themselves. There are moments when they are flattered by their own ability and grand prophetic tone and eloquence but they soon recover. As Raju is compelled by Velan and the village folk to undertake the fast, thoughts of repentance do touch his mind. Kalo cannot forget his yesterdays even though he is now in the mask of the Brahmin, Mangal Adhikari. He gets irritated at the touch of Viswanath, a destitute, but the very next moment, he recovers himself when he learns that Viswanath too is a blacksmith. Gyan Chand confesses the reality of the failure in his life even after seven years of yogic austerities and meditation.

These ascetics put on the mask so long as it is convenient for them. Kalo and Chandra Lekha ride the tiger of sainthood but when they think that the mask pricks them, they kill the tiger.

Kalo confesses his reality to the people on the day of the 'Yagna' and thus kills the tiger and puts a full stop to his legend. Gyan Chand too comes down to the town of his birth and ends his yogic discipline when he fails to attain a proper detachment. It is Raju—and Raju alone of the three—who carries the mask till the end. He too tries to discard it, but fails. He realises that now the mask is his being and so he has to carry on with the disguise till the end. Of the three saints, Raju and Kalo confess their identity at the ripe moment of crisis. Even Gyan Chand makes a confession of his identity while analysing his constant failure.

The portrayals of the three ascetics of our study reveal the writer's attitude and philosophy. Kalo is depicted as 'an angry man' blind with revenge. His character represents the motif of social protest for which the writer Bhabani Bhattacharya himself is known. Kalo is the spokesman of the social philosophy of Bhattacharya who is out and out a committed writer. As a result of this, his Kalo gives an impression of a social revolutionary. Raju's career as a saint is an idealised portrait in fiction. Narayan being an objective writer scrupulously avoids tendentiousness and depicts his Raju with an artistic detachment and objectivity. For him the question whether the saint is a genuine one or a charlatan does not arise at all. Whereas in Bhabani Bhattacharya propaganda and social philosophy overbear art, in R. K. Narayan art overbears all other considerations. In other words, Narayan surpasses Bhattacharya in his artistic presentation of the theme. Bhattacharya is a purposive writer like Anand. Realism and social commitment are his fortes.

Naturally, his art recedes to the background and social philosophy occupies the foreground. Anand Lall is neither a committed writer nor an artist, he may better be called a chronicler. His novel is more of a spiritual discourse than a piece of art. He has neither the emotional gusto of Bhattacharya nor the aesthetic finesse of Narayan.

Bhattacharya's style tends to be artificial and less artistic because of his purposiveness. Narayan's style becomes simple by virtue of his naturalness of presentation. Anand Lall's style is matter-of-fact and prosaic. Judged from aesthetical point of view, Narayan, undoubtedly, surpasses the other two writers though as a purposive writer Bhattacharya also holds a high position. Anand Lall stands between these two poles as a mediocre artist but shows some merit in his autobiographical narration. For most of the time, his novel remains the 'brooding monologue of an introverted man', as Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly puts it.

IV

Incidentally, an important point to be noted here is that there doesn't seem to be any full-length novel devoted to the theme of asceticism with the ascetic as the central character. This is perhaps because of the Indo-Anglian writer's little involvement with the totality of Indian spiritual life. This is also because of his own training in English medium and his inevitable Westernised outlook. If at all he writes on a traditional subject like asceticism, he is inevitably critical, satirical and sardonic. On the other hand, writers from the Indian regional languages have treated the theme more seriously by virtue of the Indianness of their domicile, education and

language. The Indo-Anglian writers are mostly cut off these roots and alienated from the Indian ethos. The Indian writer in the regional languages has, thus, an upperhand over the Indo-Anglian writer.

Examples
Gandhi, Tagore, Premchand
Gandhi, Tagore, Premchand