

NEWS VANGUARD IN CONVERSATION WITH DR BHASKAR ROY BARMAN ABOUT SAHITYA ADDA (LITERARY RENDEZVOUS)

Ms Sharbani Das Datta, representing News Vanguard, one of the leading electronic media of Tripura, conversed in a live telecast with Dr Bhaskar Roy Barman, Patron, Sahitya Adda (Literary Rendezvous), on 11 November 2017 from 7 pm to 8pm on the eve of the celebration of the fourth anniversary of the forum on 12 November at his house, Banamalipur (Middle), Agartala. Retired Professor Saroj Chaudhury and Dr Sayak Mukhopadhyay, Tripura Central University, assisted Dr Roy Barman in the conversation.

Sharbani Das Datta (SDD) (addressing the viewers): I think you all have heard of Sahitya Adda (Literary Rendezvous). inaugurated on 12 November 2013 At Ujjayanta Book Market with the active co-operation of Tapas Roy, proprietor, Sriram Prakashani. Last year on 28 February about this time we interviewed Dr Bhaskar Roy Barman. Patron about Sahitya Adda (Literary Rendezvous). Prantosh Karmakar, Music co-ordinator, assisted him in the conversation. This organization, nay, this forum, as it is called, is going to celebrate its fourth anniversary on 12 November at 6pm at Dr Bhaskar Roy Barman's house at Banamalipur (Middle), focusing on Shakespeare, Kalidasa and Rabindranath Tagore. Today we've invited Dr Bhaskar Roy Barman in this conversation in this talk-show captioned 'Ring the Bell' about why Sahitya Adda (Literary Rendezvous) has taken on Shakespeare, Kalidasa and Rabindranath as its idols. With him in the conversation are retired Professor Saroj Choudhury and Dr Sayak Mukhopadhyay, Tripura Central University. (Turning to Dr Bhaskar Roy Barman) Tell us, Dr Roy Barman, why Sahitya Adda (Literary Rendezvous) has taken on three literary giants as its idols and picks them on to discuss at its fourth anniversary celebration tomorrow, but why not other poets, novelists or dramatists who have acquired international recognition?

Bhaskar Roy Barman (BRB): Your questions are, I think, linked to 'Why should we study Shakespeare, Kalidasa and Rabindranath?' I take it upon myself to aver that we cannot bring ourselves to think of world literature without Shakespeare, Kalidasa and Rabindranath.

SDD: Were not Shakespeare, Kalidasa and Rabindranath born, would there not have been world literature? What's special about them?

BRB: It was Goethe, the world-famous German thinker who first conceived of world literature. No one previous to him had ever imagined such literature. Even if these three literary giants were not born, world literature would have been there. The question is who is eligible to gain entry into world literature. If you strive to gain an entry into world literature what is required of you is you must make yourself heard or read and if you want to make yourself heard or read you must needs worm your way into world literature. Do you think

dozens of books you have written will entitle you to gain an entry into world literature? No, they won't, even though they sell millions of copies, until they merit the criteria that govern entry into world literature. You should have to advocate just one unswerving concept that binds peoples of all nations together. Rabindranath Tagore has propagated and adhered to a concept throughout his whole life and his entire work centres on it. The concept is Jivan-devata, life-God. Goethe's is God and Nature as One and Shakespeare's human psychology in its entirety. Kalidasa's is steadfastness in love. These concepts are special about them. What we...

SDD: (Interrupting him) I'm afraid the discussion of these concepts will bore our viewers.

I would rather ask Prof. Saroj Chaudhury to tell us whether he thinks Shakespeare is still relevant to the present age.

Prof. Saroj Choudhury (SC): Yes, Shakespeare is still relevant to the present age. If you ask any student who has not studied English literature whether he or she has heard of Shakespeare, he or she will say to be sure he or she has heard of Shakespeare. Shakespeare dominated literary and academic spheres. Teachers and students alike love talking about Shakespeare and Rabindranathnath to aggrandize themselves and talking about them vouchsafes to establish their learnedness.

BRB: But they never mention Kalidasas's name. Nowadays it is recognized that Kalidasa was no less great as a dramatist than Shakespeare. You yourself know, Saroj Sir, Goethe has heaped unreserved eulogy on Kalidasa's Shakuntala.

SC: Because of the eulogy heaped on Kalidasa's Shakuntala European scholars started studying Kalidasa and his works and they have written no mean number of books on Sanskrit literature with a particular emphasis on Kalidasa.

SDD: Would you please tell us and our viewers why Indian scholars are so lukewarm about Kalidasa and his works. I myself did an MA in Sanskrit literature. I often find myself conjecturing about the reason.

BRB: It seems an herculean task to unearth Kalidas and his works from the debris of the religious orthodoxy surrounding Kaldasa and his works. I venture to say it is difficult to reinterpret Kalidasa's works in the light of the modern literary theory. You know Kalidasa composed three poems, three plays and an incomplete epic. Because of his profuse use of simile he is endearingly called a poet of simile. His poem 'Meghadutam' and his play 'Shakuntalam' abound in similes. All his plays have an happy ending.

SC (interrupting him) It's common knowledge that no Sanskrit play has a tragic ending. It is not beyond criticism. If Shakuntal had ended with the rejection of Shakuntala's love by the king Dushmanta it would have been a tragedy. Kalidasa did not intend it to be so, sohe went farther to have the play end in the happy union of Shakuntala and Dushmanta..

SDD: What's your opinion, Dr Sayak Mukhopadhyay, about Saroj Sir's comment:?

Sayak Mukhopadhyay: (SM): I do not like to enter into a controversy about Saroj Sir's comment. Indian tradition has always striven towards happiness and to keep aloof the feeling of sorrow and conquer it. This tradion has been reflected in Sanskrit literature and drama. Kalidas has himself kept true to this tradition so did not end 'Shakuntala' with the rejection of Shakuntala's love by Dushmanta, but proceeded further to end the play with the happy union of Shakuntala and Dushmanta..

SDD: Your opinion doesn't intrinsically collide with that of Saroj Sir, I see

. Please tell me why Kalidasa has still now been brought to modern light? Is orthodoxy

working against it?

SM; I think orthodoxy does not prevent it being brought to modern light. But it seems opposed to it being re-interpreted in the light of the modern literary theory, as Dr Roy Barman said. But Rabindranath Tagore was profusely influenced by Kalidasa's poetry.

SDD: But Rabindranath didn't do anything to bring Kalidasa's works up for re-interpretation?

BRB: There is a birth myth attached to Kalidasa that, I think, prevents it being re-interpreted.

This myth has ascribed divinity to his genius.

SDD: We felt curious to know the birth myth*. The time allotted to us has almost neared its end.

We shall wait another opportunity to hear it. However, we are really grateful to all of you for having spared an hour for us.

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*Birth-myth: It is a commonplace of opinion to ascribe the growth of Kalidasa from an illiterate idiot to the greatest poet and dramatist in the Sanskrit literature to the grace and blessing of Saraswati, Goddess of Learning. We have grown up, accustomed to listening to this story surrounding Kalidasa. There also exists another version which replaces Saraswati by Kali, Maya Shakti. No one knows which is authentic. In this article I shall deal with the alternative version which sounds more realistic in the religious sphere, since his name suggests servant (dasa) of the goddess Kali.

It is traditionally believed that Kalidasa previously lived nine lives, worshipping Kali, and ended each life by sacrificing himself. Kali was to him 'Ma' (Mother). 'When I'm disgusted, fed up with the world, I always turn to my Mother. She comes to me in any form I request, and I play that way. Sometimes she comes to me as my Mother, sometimes as my wife, sometimes as my child. She's always with me; She'll never go away. Long ago we promised each other to stay together always. If she ever leaves me I will not live even an instant longer. Who is She? My ego, the Shakti which self-identifies with my body. If she leaves me I have to die. Most people don't know the true value of the ego, and they misuse Her. I think I am the luckiest man in the world, because my Smashan Tara has taught me all about my own ego, and how to realize Her as Adya, the Original Shakti. She is the being to be realized.' (2008:59). Adya means that which is first and eternal, having neither beginning, nor end; it is ever existent. Of Shakti, the source of all knowledge and of both delusion and release of delusion, Kalidasa said She had taught him well and told him about some of his previous births, which mattered most to his tenth life and to our discussion of how Kalidasa was transformed by his Ma, Kali from the illiterate fool to the greatest poet and dramatist.

In this tenth birth Kalidasa was born a woodcutter, extremely dull-witted and ugly. People capitalised upon his stupidity to pay him less than its actual price for his wood. Kalidasa would not grumble. The king of the kingdom in which Kalidasa lived had a daughter he decided to give in marriage. She was learned and beautiful and extremely proud.. She announced she would only marry the man who would outargue her in debate and that should anyone fail to argue her out he would be executed. Many princes, attracted by her singular beauty, accepted the challenge and, outargued, were beheaded.

At last the king himself lost patience, exasperated at having had to have many princes beheaded, and ordered the minister to locate the stupidest man in the kingdom. The minister went out in search of the stupidest man and it did not take long to hit on Kalidasa, busily chopping off a branch of the tree he walked by, sitting on the branch itself. The minister made Kalidasa climb down the tree and accompany him to the palace, telling him that the king wanted to present something to him. The king was amazed at the extreme stupidity and horrible ugliness

of Kalidasa. After the first impression had flitted away, he offered to marry his daughter to him. Kalidasa objected to marrying the princess, but his objection fizzled out at the command of the king to marry the princess; he married her,

The wedding ceremony was over, he and the princess were taken into the bedroom beautifully and gorgeously prepared. She had not seen her husband's face, because she was veiled. It was a beautiful rainy night and she looked out through the window and saw a light streaming drizzle. It was the rutting season. She heard many of the forest animals giving full throat to their mating calls. She looked round and saw her husband sitting quietly, facing the opposite direction. At that instant a camel delivered its peculiar rasping call. In order to trigger in her husband the sexual urge she asked him, 'Who is calling for his mate?' The idea behind asking this question was to make him realise her desire for him to have sex with her.. But the idea did not sink in.

The Sanskrit word for camel is Ushtra. Kalidasa could not pronounce it correctly. He said 'Utra, Utra'. At the utterance of the word, the princess's sexual desire died out and she turned him out.

So humiliated and disgusted with his life, he left his house and went over to a Kali temple. He started striking his head against the feet of the image until blood oozed out on to the feet of the image. That was enough to make the Goddess appear outside the temple and bang on the door.

Kalidasa got up and stood behind the door to prevent the Goddess entering the temple. After much persuasion Kalidasa stuck his tongue out, opening the door a crack. The Goddess then struck his tongue and immediately he was endowed with divine speech and became tall and handsome.

When he returned to the palace no one recognized him.. He knew the king loved listening to poetry. Kalidasa recited a poem, describing the wrinkling in the princess's hips when she turned, her high projecting breasts, the curvature of her waist and her navel. Famous for aptly using similes and metaphors, he compared each part of her body to an appropriate image from nature. Hearing all the parts of her body described in the poem, the princess wondered how the poet described them so accurately. When Kalidasa introduced himself, the joy of the princess knew no bounds and the king was vindicated for having married his daughter off to that poor idiot Kalidas.

Kalidasa ornamented the court of Vikramaditya, the king of Ujjain. Kalidasa composed the great poem Meghadutam. This poem was based on the experience on his wedding night. The story of the Meghadutam is as follows: Kuvera, the treasurer of Gods, has a group of yokshas (angels) working under him. One day one of the yokshas became so obsessed with his wife he ignored his duties. Enraged at his negligence in his duties, Kuvera banished him to the earth. He was living in the woods, pining away for his lover. One day, when monsoons arrived on the earth, he saw a rain cloud passing by. He exhorted the rain cloud to carry his message to his lover. This great poem owes its composition, so to say, to the desire of Kali. Ma Herself had the illiterate and stupid Kalidasa marry the princess and pass through this humiliating experience on the wedding night so that he could compose such a great poem as Meghadutam, based on this experience. She made him leave the comfort of the worldly life and the luxury of the palace to devote himself, his mind free from worldly cares, to composing the masterpieces that have enriched the Sanskrit literature and immortalised him.

References:

2008: Svoboda, Robert E; Aghora: At the Left Hand of God; Tupa & Co, New Delhi