

RAJESH TRIVEDI'S *DEATH BE NOT PROUD AND OTHER STORIES*; THE FICTION WITH A NEW EXPERINCE

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Death Be Not Proud and Other Stories (Amazon Books; Kindle edition) is a collection of six long short stories written by Rajesh Trivedi. The Book comes out with a number of experiments along techno-thematic dimensions that have hitherto been untouched by the fiction writers of Indian English fiction. The collection has no less than six short stories however there is a close struggle regarding the form and genre that a reader can associate with the works contained therein. Four out of the six stories cover a narrative span that come close to the very idea of a novella. First story of the collection – “Rcoket; Elegey Written on the Death of a Stray Dog,” which is in form a fictionalized memoir, can however be taken as a short story, but the other four works that follow- “The Toss,” “The Confession,” “On the Railway Platform,” and “Happy Birthday Papa” demonstrate great struggle from the point of view of generic identity as the work of fiction. These pieces of fiction, on one hand satisfy the criterion set for a critical analysis of the short story and at the same time, the complexity of themes and techniques often deny the singularity of the impression and unity of action that remind a reader of the experiments in the domain of novel writing. There is picaresque touch in the cast of the narrative, the narrator frequently demonstrates his inclination towards the techniques used by the writers of psychological novels, and at the same time, the pains and pangs of the protagonists, the emotional and ethical predicaments of the protagonists impart the pieces of fiction a characteristically Indian form. The title story- “Death Be Not Proud,” which owes its title to the celebrated poetic work of John Donne, denies the struggle for the generic identity and falls within the criterion set to define a novella.

Cultural transition is undisputedly the defining aspect of the themes and various technical dimensions of these stories owe their genesis and justification to the cultural transition that determine the very nature of the action of these stories. The ideas and emotions, the sentiments and predicaments, the techniques and structural predicaments delineated in the narrative owe their genesis to fast cultural transition that now seems to have acquired perpetuity as a result of the proliferation of new valued watered by technology and media.

The first story of the collection- *Death Be Not Proud and Other Stories*, titled – “Rcoket; Elegey Written on the Death of a Stray Dog,” is an animal story knit around the protagonist’s nine year long experiences with a stray dog which was eventually names Rocket. The most unique aspect of this obituary to a stray dog is that the narrator not only limits his pen to unidirectional emotional delineations, but he also stuffs the narrative with the cultural values sinking down and coming up as a follow up of the cultural transition. The story on one hand deals with protagonist’s fond and sentimental love for the tiny monster that comes to his life as a crippled stay dog and, on the other hand, in the small narrative ambit, there is curious and vigilant exploration of the society peopling the surroundings. The most scintillating aspect of the

story is that sudden philosophical twist given to the narrative where the narrator presents the so called stray dog with the action and meaning of life. The narrator confesses;

And when the cacophony of my ill-maintained bike reverberated in the narrow lane making many new tenants frown and making old acquaintances laugh, Rocket came like a west wind wagging and panting and made it a day for me. I realized that I am needed. I realized that I am doing something. I realized that, despite 23 hours of inaction, I am alive.

The narrative is very much conventional which is manifest in form of a pyramid and like a Shakespearean tragedy, it ends with the death of the canine protagonist.

“The Toss” is the narrative with sudden and unpredictable denouement, the sudden fall of the unexpected that looms as a result of the conflict of the old and new. The narrative is conspicuous for the complexity of experience and theme. There is a wonderful conflict between the two mediums-language and colors; there is equally remarkable conflict between the two distant species of expression. For a longer part of the narrative, the protagonist is preoccupied with the task of creating a masterpiece for his beloved. The the third person narrator who can easily be indentified with the author display sound artistic sensibility. The making of the painting is not just a flat description of the art work that comes up before us but the narrator skilfully weaves finer subjective aspects of the making of an art form and eventually the narrator narrates the whole mechanism of creating an art form. In the circumstance of the blith towards the medium, the narrative impresses more of a painting. The structure of the long short story is another eye catching aspect of the which comes as a contradiction to all previous impressions that are nurtured in the narrative. The reader endures the emotional turmoil with the protagonist on the way to cathartic climax of the story.

“The Confession” according to me, is the most complicated narrative with a rich complicity of thematic perceptions and technical innovations. It is the narrative knit around a brilliant young boy who suffers a set back as a result of the break up with his girl friend and eventually becomes a ruined fortune. The aftermaths of this ruination eventually oblige him to opt for the study of theology and inturn the making of a priest. The author shredly touches upon numoursou allied aspects laterally connected with the philosophically rich theme of sin and confession. The author is satirical about the clever means of conversion. He is also acutely revealing about the discrepancies pervading the hierarchic order of the Church and at the same time malpractices adopted by the protagonist for acquisition of name, fame and power in the clergy system. The theme is defined by the coincidence which brings and priest and his beloved together and the result their sexual union. The guild looms and disappears and the climax of the narrative is knit amidst the space defined by the ambivalence between the rebellion realization. The narrative comes to a startling end where and reader’s participation in determining the meaning and experince inherent in the narrative becomes more important and significant.

“On the Railway Platform” is the re-echo of the thematic predilections of “The Toss.” The narrator relies heavily on the surrealist imagination which is ratified by the narrator through an allusion to Salvador Dali, the noted surrealist painter. The protagonist/ narrator lives in a Lawrentian with his mind oscillating between two different sources of gravitation. The author in a very extrovert manner displays the influence of surrealist painters like Salvador Dali and Marc Chagall. He writes;

I entered the world of dark repose. My lids, carrying the weight of all mountains, fell, like a dead sun on my eye balls. It was a cool and comforting desert, with the fragrance of pregnant mango trees. I walked

along the shade towards the sensuous past. It was a dark roof and a darker floor. The send was dark. The sky was dark. I moved towards the scintillating horizon with slow and steady steps I moved towards the sensuous past. ‘Everything becomes a metaphor at night,’ I told myself. ‘Night is a metaphor itself.’ I further rationalized.

It is interesting to note that like “The Toss,” this narrative , “On the Railway Platform,” is also a pronounced revelation of the writer’s painterly imagination. Although a direct reference to any canvass, as in the previous narrative, is not there.

The climax of the story is another very promoninet quality of the craft of the writer. The action comes to an end and with the end there is a new continuity, and new form of perpetuity and the reader again becomes and prominent intellect to determins and meaning and experience of the narrative.

“Happy Birthday Papa” is an embodiment of an entirely new experience which is realized at an altogether different plane. The narrative is essentially a dream sequence with some intermittent interventions of the flash backs and flash forwards. The narrative is structured on the thin ambivalence between the actual present and the possible past and it is the antithesis of these two discordant realities that accounts for the gradual and systematic precipitation of the action. The prominence of the child protagonist Cheenu, the imaginary daughter of the protagonist, brings it close to a child story however there is more of an adult than a child. Although it can not be denied that the child protagonist leads to respect the influence of some of the masterpieces like Carrol’s *Alice in Wonderland* and Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.’ Despite these obvious influences, the fact can not be denied that the author, for the thematic magnificence of the narrative, owes undeniable debt to Charles Lamb’s “*Dream Children*.”

The title story of the collection- “Death Be Not Proud” which owes its title to the famous work of great Metaphysical Poet- John Donne, captures attention for a rich variety of reasons. The authror skill fully develops the primordial concept of death as a metaphor of cultural transition and portrays the society with avowed futuristic inclinations. The story offers a sharp and scintillating contrast to the refutation to death by Donne in a way that the poet refutes death in a heroic manner whereas the author perceives a very unheroic picture of the society which takes death to be a commonplace activity and denies even a formal participation. The narrator produces vivid picture of death in three different sequences in three different moods. The first death in the narrative, that of the protagonist’s mother is steeped in pathos with gush of tears from all corners of the surroundings. Indifference creeps in with the death of the protagonist’s wife when he is the lone sufferer of the loss with minimal participation even from his son and daughter in law. The third death, that of the protagonist himself, finally renders a corporate shade to the very idea of death where even the son and daughter of the deceased fail to ritualize death. The most outstanding aspect of the narrative is the experience of death in first person which indeed is a rare finding. The protagonist confides;

Memories mingled into one common existence (or inexistence) and began to blur. I tried to pick up the memories without selecting or editing them. That was the only thing I could do. Soon the memories merged into a vacuum and died. I tried to grab the memories without selecting or editing them but the memories merged into one common existence (or inexistence) and flew away from me. The congestion of the memories was replaced by a vacuum; the vacuum that might not be filled again. Memories flew away and made way for the vacuum and worked out the

replacement. I remembered the memories but I got nothing I was there with my palms open to nothing. I was gaping to chew the escaping memories but I had nothing between the teeth; nothing on the tongue and nothing sliding down the throat. I was gaping and gazing without an aim or object. I don't know whether it was the roof or the window; the departing stars above the sky or the young, invading sunrays. I don't know whether it was the grey landscape. I don't know if it was the drowse of the brown sodium light or the reawakening of the grey rocks towards my left spared in a local museum for history and entertainment. I don't know if it was the awakening of the slumbering mass with stink stored within much cared frame of the body or the death of hope and memories and all that makes one man. I don't know what it was; the congestion subsided and the vacuum survived. I know nothing further; nothing. I was afloat in the vacuum swimming across some nothing on some nowhere. I was afloat. I was in vapors. I was nowhere. There were no memories; no vacuum; no evaporation. I was afloat on some nothing in some nowhere.

It is indeed remarkable that numerous aspects of human relationship are touched upon with same futuristic overtones that are suggestive of the decay of the existing social order and the birth of new order definable in terms of new social and sexual ethos. The narrator leaves the story without any formal end which is suggestive of the continuity of the prevailing values.

'What is your plan for tomorrow?' She asked.

'Same as usual.' Abhi replied and hurried towards the bedroom.

The spirit of place is undisputedly the most conspicuous aspect of the aesthetic order of the author. The locale of action in all his stories is the City of Rock which draws a close parallel with the city where the author hails from- Jabalpur. Trivedi takes Jabalpur to be the embodiment of all that is culturally socially or politically and every ethnically Indian. Although there are particular details about the various landmarks that makes the fictional locale identifiable with the Jabalpur, it goes very high to the credit of the author that he succeeds in rendering a universal cosmopolitan identity to the City of Rocks that is Jabalpur. In delineation of the place with a well defined spirit, Trivedi reminds us of Malgudi of Narayan and Wessed of Hardy.

Rajesh Trivedi in his first collection of the short story seems to be extremely self conscious writer. He skilfully selects his narrators and presents to our scrutiny a perfect blend of first person and third person narrators. "Elegy of the Death of a Stray Dog" and "On the Railway Platform" employ a third person narrator. In both the stories, the narrator is dramatized. In "The Confession" we meet a third person impersonal narrator, whereas in the remaining three stories there is a perfect blend of first person and third person narrator.

In short it can be said that the advent of "Death Be Not Proud and Other Stories" will certainly pave way for the birth and growth of a new spirit of creative fiction writing in India.

Overall a must read collection.