

A Multiple Living

P C K PREM

He was in search of a focal point from where he could start and finish. Whatever he did, it only began somewhere he did not know, and it ended and he failed to wrap up what it was. That was a huge dilemma of a man of action. A man, who believed in what he did and yet wanted to substantiate how it benefitted or hurt others irrespective of the initial intents he harbored. He did not recognize why unsteadiness overwhelmed when search of harmony triggered off a yearning to live dispassionately rather apathetically. He heard sermons many a time, sitting at the feet of many saints whenever an opportunity knocked at the silent door of mind.

“You know when a man looks out, he finds many cracks and disjoints and feels pity for men, who live in inconvenient times.”

“You disturb. I do not agree what you see and realize, Trinath.” Amin said tersely.

Tri looked at the void as if, and laughed ironically, “Amin, it is your problem. If you want to see life you ought to feel it and forget the self and enter into the psyche of another person you look at...”

Amin appeared baffled. A man, who thinks too much, is a burden. He restrained anger. Tri tried to adjust the sling bag and felt the stuff he had kept in the little bag. He took out a diary and a book, felt assured and pushed them back into the bag and kept it on the bed. Amin did not want to enter into an argument. Tri was always befuddled he thought and often talked of the wacky and untenable situations. Tri appeared unyielding and audacious. He was irrational. Despite foibles, he was a man of equanimity and looked quite apt and consistent. He just tried to make out but still was doubtful whether he was right. At times, he thought, Tri had some truth in what he often said.

“Don’t you think we always try to find meaning in evil designs we nurse but often overlook or throw out what appears fine, of good quality. Have you ever dissolved identity in another man? Man does it but does not realize.”

“It is debatable but it is not issue you raised.”

Amin was honest. Tri went to the kitchen and silently prepared tea. Amin stood on the threshold and watched without a word. Probably, Tri was singing in whispers.

“It is good to make tea.” He laughed and from the small plastic boxes, took out a few biscuits in a plate and fried peanuts. After five minutes, he poured tea into glasses kept in a tray, “Come. Let us take tea.”

The room was simple with a small table, two chairs in the centre and a bed in one corner of the room. It was neat and not a speck of dust one noticed. Near the bed, a small wooden shelf he had kept with nearly thirty books arranged in a perfect order. A little stool had newspapers and some old issues of a magazine. He placed the tray and the plate on the table and handed over a cup to Amin. He sat on the bed cross-legged, took a sip, looked at the bookstand and said, “I am a theorist you say. What I say you do not understand you say.” He did not stretch the point.

After a pause, he said in low voice, “I do not know if it happens with you or not but I cannot avoid what I churn within. It is awesome, painful and interminable. An academic exercise hints at futility. Thinkers do not produce anything concrete. Yes, ideas they give. Is it hard work?” He looked at the window. He appeared a bit stressed. He got up, straightened the crumples of the bed sheet, removed the curtains to one side, and gave a cynical smile.

“It is not very old. Just see the building and look at the synthetic chords in the balconies with many types of linen in the sun. It offers a disgusting look. People talk of quality life, of aesthetic values and morals and see...cannot they find a suitable place?”

“What is wrong with you? It is life of apartments. It is not village where you step out and find plants, trees, fields and...why did you come here if you are uneasy?” Amin was vague.

Amin was practical and never meandered in areas hazy. He lived each moment of life and wanted to make it meaningful. After a deep thought, she said, “They live each moment. I find nothing wrong if they wash and dry out linen in full view. You see obvious nakedness even when you are well dressed up.”

They had finished tea. Tri picked up the tray and the plate and went to the small kitchen. Without wasting time, he returned and sat on the bed as usual, “I often sit and prepare lessons.” He appeared not very happy. With an abrupt jerk, he got up and stood near the window and said, “You are correct. Let everyone live...it was just a thought. It is difficult to correct anyone. As teachers...what one does?” The questions lengthened out to touch empty walls. In one of the walls, hung a calendar that carried a smiling photograph of the chief minister.

“He must smile despite tension. He is not a happy man.”

Tri looked at the obligatory smile, looked at the palm and hand, and said, “I am a hawker and sell vegetables. At times, I carry readymade garments, go around the streets, cry loudly and sell products. I perspire, I go hungry and thirsty but I do not find rest. Selling roasted peanuts and grams is another experience. The entire body aches and I stretch arms and legs while I sit on the wayside bench, I chew up some grams and drink water from a public tap. I do not regret. I work. It happens with me. Amin, I cannot escape. To get up early in the morning, collect newspapers from the vendor and distribute is a tiresome exercise. Everyone wants paper at the door. You roll the paper and throw ...to earn livelihood is a difficult.” After a long pause, he said, “However, it is satisfying. I tell you it is good. You do not get much time to think. If you dream it is bread, you think of bread. It is day-to-day living. In work, you forget everything else.”

Amin was uncomfortable as irritation swept away sympathy for Tri. He did not understand a word Tri uttered. Suddenly, Tri said stridently, ‘Amin, not everyone does it. None thinks or perhaps, abhors reflecting over. If you sell vegetables, it is good or else it rots and you suffer loss. Women tire you out when you sell goods. When you sell nothing for some time, eyes go blank and you pray. Family at home waits for you. It asks you to work. When you reach home many smiles greet you and you forget the fatigue.’

“Why a man tries deliberately to maneuver and appears to rationalize where he fails? You do it quite often. You are a teacher. I know you think but here you relate unconnected simulations or possibly, you go berserk. Why do you try to find heroic qualities where you find nothing? ”

“Now, you fall into the trap. I wanted you to reveal what goes on inside. You know, many a time a man lives differently and he is not the self.”

“To intellectualize simple living is a disease.”

“No, it is not. It drives you to reality. You face facts. You know matters you never dream of. Amin, it is difficult to survive. As a teacher, what you think, you tell the truth. No, Sir, truth does not exist. Thinkers often buildup structure of lies and convert a chaste lie to truth ...”

“Tri, what is wrong with you.”

“I went to the great saint. He told it was wrong to presume that you live honestly. It is not possible. He confided. Even saints live with lies.”

“It is already late.” Amin got up.

“Just stay a little more. It was not out of joy that I prepared a cup of tea. I wanted it. You may not admit. It gave some freshness, some energy to think more. Zeal to understand what you do not perceive correctly exasperates. Do you think of a woman within, who washes clothes and the dirt you spill? Then, you hold out against the sneers and giggles of... I tell you what happens.” He went to the kitchen and cleaned a few utensils he had dumped in the hand basin. Amin just looked on impassively, and was bewildered.

He noticed each movement of Tri. He was a strange man he realized now. He was obscure and eccentric, confused and yet quite rational, forlorn and still appeared effervescent and held on to optimism even in a collapsed life. He was a simple teacher, the colleagues in the collage often held opinion discarding certain unfathomable but thoughtful remarks. However, when he was alone with the fellow, he appeared a devastating theorist, a man quite apart and apathetic. Today, he had almost defeated him and he did not know how to come out. The haphazard and idiotic depiction of work of vastly dissimilar men gave sufficient torture. He appeared a man of the world and a person, who cared for the social location of life of various classes. It was all cluttered and arcane.

“If you wish to understand, you ought to undergo the anguish of living another life. If you interpolate and juxtapose a different identity, substitute yourself, say, you think of me, and talk and act as Trinath. You will experience newness, a kick and a kind of transformed fortitude to live life differently.”

An inconvenient pause troubled Amin immensely. He wanted to go out but unique anxiety to stay kept feet glued to the ground. A man of uncanny thoughts had clasped his wrist and arm strongly with concealed hostility and aversion. He tried to analyze but failed. He did not know what to do.

“I wanted to live another life with apparent handicaps and seeming pleasure and consequent agony. It looked like a dream but it was not. I lived through a harrowing period of ambiguity, distrust and defeat. Hawker is a man, a hard worker. He only hopes but fails to realize hopes and dreams. A factory worker dreams of happy life but falls down when he looks at the fellow worker with an amputated arm and yet another, who is crushed. A visualize a village and farmers working in the fields. He sings a melancholic song and revisits past through a folk song of a distant past, of abortive love and caste conflict in love. I think of the beauty and of the ugliness but still, I experience faint consolation. It is living at many levels with or without motif. Still, you affirm you are nowhere. A weird situation haunts. The farmer thinks of failed crops and the spectre of hunger and death. It is dreadful. Amin, yes, you think, visit a different life, enter and feel the excitement of victory and failure, of opulence and scarcity and terminal shortage.”

Amin thought of a man suffering from mental disorder. Tri was a serious thinker, who did not take life lightly and invariably deliberated on the complexities of life. Life was a blessing he often said but today, he was flabbergasted and nearly perplexed at the understated turn in the phrase of feelings and thoughts. Trinath was a different man, who was not only a conscientious teacher but also a man of the world. He thought intensely of the poor, the defenseless and the people, who lived in unvarying scarceness and denial. Amin felt overstrained with something he failed to identify. Tri stood as a giant as if. If he were in politics, he would have made a huge

imprint he guessed but that way he undermines the stature of politicians, who thought of public. Perhaps, he was not right he corrected self-created thoughts.

“Amin, I know the dilemma. You may deny but a man is never vacant inside.” He looked at him and mopped the granite platform of kitchen, “Now, it is alright. To cook food in a clean kitchen gives you pleasure. I cannot tolerate dirt of waste of vegetable, potato and onion...greasy plates repulse. I can do the duty of a woman. What do you think?”

“You get married.”

“A good suggestion but how going about. Parents want but you know I am unsure.”

“...” Amin wanted to go but the suggestion he gave caused immense trouble because the idea persuaded him to justify. Why did he think of it? Tri was a difficult man. He was not a normal man. A few intuitive aberrations did not permit Tri to live in harmony with others. Was he right? Questions pestered and defied cogent answers.

“It is not possible to escape from the imagined area of darkness and light you create around. To experience life at different levels expands you, allows time to contemplate and digest what you hold. I told you it is difficult to interpret life in inconvenient times. I am a worldly man, who notices everything and realizes the predicament of living meaningfully. I am not a saint but sainthood teaches you the art of abstinence in plenty...” He laughed and laughed as echoes of laughter filled the air.

Amin stood wordless. Silence appeared comfortable.

“I just dramatized a trivial existence. Do not take it seriously.” Tri gave a hugely roaring laugh and then added, “Man lives in trivialities and thinks he is important. It is this area of disquiet and dim light I wish to dispel.”

Suddenly, he was forlorn fighting against the fake smiles.