

**ANSUYA AS NEW WOMAN: A STUDY OF GURCHARAN DAS’
9 JAKHOO HILL**

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Abstract

The vast and variable gamut of Indian drama is a conglomeration of variegated tastes and tenor, subject and treatment, approach and application. Among the contemporary Indian dramatists who choose English as a medium for their literary articulation, Gurcharan Das, an Indian author and a public intellectual, is a conscious and competent one who is very candid and perfect in the fusion between plan and execution with a rare pithy expertise. Apart from *Three English Plays* (2001), *A Fine Family* (1990), *India Unbound* (2000), *The Elephant Paradigm* (2002), *India Grows at Night* also reservoirs of his condensed and concentrated perception, thought and sensibility. *9Jakhoo Hill* (from *Three English Plays*) though is criticized by *The Hindu* as the most disappointing one, is undoubtedly multidimensional. Although the formation of this play is rooted and structured in two great historical events: the Partition (1947) and Sino-Indian War (1962), it is less a literary manifestation of the day to day suffering and torture experienced by the puppet of political figures and insidious diplomats, and more a dramatic utterance of the drives, desires and dilemma of the ‘puppet’ of that time. Again besides its faithful documentation of the emergence of a new class in Indian society, it magnifies appearance of a new kind of woman who tries to scatter the hitherto ‘victimized’ and ‘stereotyped’ convictions attached to womanhood delineating them as meek, feeble, subordinate, inactive and tender. Focalizing on Ansuya, the protagonist who all through suffers and finally achieves recognition, he lets his camera in motion. Along with her poignant craving to exceed the male dominating society both culturally and economically, Ansuya seriously maintains her responsibilities and therefore stands as an Indianised New Woman whose ultimate emergence of identity and materialization of dream becomes a saga of satisfaction for the women who logically, passionately and righteously sought for independent march of feminist consciousness and their economic stability which has and will charge the world.

Keywords: New Woman, Patriarchy, Society, Culture, Economy, Identity.

INTRODUCTION

War structures not only the temporal design of this play but also acts as a metaphor. If the communal riot centering on breaking of India on the basis of religious disharmony compelled these two families to abandon their past relationship, affair and all types of attachment, India's miserable condition in the present Indo-China war can equally be configured with the whirlwind of tension, assurance, happiness, conflict, confrontation and frustration that rhythmically strike these two families. However, the whole spectrum assures emergence of a new kind of woman who tries to scatter the hitherto 'victimized' and 'stereotyped' convictions attached to womanhood delineating them as meek, feeble, subordinate, inactive and tender. This woman does not rebel but snatches her claim, does not confront but asserts her right, does not yield to emotional blackmailing and above all challenges the traditional control maintained by the male chauvinistic society which ambushes to belittle woman's sacrifice, dedication, honesty and also enjoys to strangulate their voice for independent existence. Woman subjugation is in fact an age old practice. They are deprived of desire, unattained in their claim and remain unheard in their plea for independent identity. Against this type of accepted male dominance and concretized convention, exploration of identity becomes a needful cry from the female. This quest for equal identity and tenacity for breaking the manacle have been heavily influenced by the praxis of 'New Woman' that flooded the late 19th century England in particular and Europe in general. This very term is coined by Sarah Grand in the essay 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question' published in *The North American Review* and she as C.C.Nelson in the book *The New Woman Reader* cites, 'In the essay she uses the phrase "the new woman" to denote the woman who has finally "solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is –the Woman's-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy"' (Nelson ix).

Though their way of living and certain mannerism prompted the critics to negative them as 'mannish', they actually constructed themselves as 'monolithic group' with a proclamation of "rejection of the culturally defined feminine role and a desire for increased educational and career opportunities..." (Nelson x). They for grounded the issues which later early feminists undertook and modified to sharpen their attack against the suffocating social system, strategically implemented by the opportunist patriarchy.

Analysis:

While contemplating on the changing dimension of 'place' and 'role' of a woman in Indian society S.C Dube pens:

"There are unmistakable signs that the traditional conceptions regarding the place and role of women are slowly changing in contemporary Indian society. Increasing opportunities in modern education, greater geographical mobility, and the emergence of new economic patterns are in the main responsible for this trend" (Kumar 23).

This observation simply supports that the idea of woman empowerment in Indian society is inevitable because of the long and effective social, cultural, economical and intellectual subservience under the British Empire, India's resurrection as an influential centre of cross cultural exchange with Western ideologies and concepts as well as her own internal issues like Partition, engagement with wars with China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, rapid establishment of educational centers, uprising of liberal Indian- so-called intellectuals et al. Importantly, unlike the western feminists, Indian females are first reminded and acknowledged of their importance, utility and impact mainly by the sensible and perceptive male social workers. *9 Jakhoo Hill*, a drama capturing the psychological landscape and contouring the behavioral diagram of two

families victimized by the aftermath of Partition is portrayed against the background of Indo – China war. It also subtly but positively catches this ‘change’ mainly manifested through its female protagonist, Ansuya. Although it presents two other women namely Amrita and Chitra-mothers of Ansuya and Deepak respectively, with ‘achievement’ in their bags- regarding the responsibility of maintaining the rhythm of their families; Ansuya undoubtedly epitomizes the change. The mothers though resolve ‘independently’ on their decision and discretion, Ansuya has to make her voice audibled through the heartless and airless medium as none can comprehend her need and her assertive mind which bides for convenient opportunity to demolish the façade of the ‘make believe world’ constructed to hegemonise her as feeble , tender, tangible , weak and soft hearted. Ansuya, however, ushers a new dimension of female empowerment and centrifugal female expression through her unbelievable calmness of mind and her undeniable positive attitude by dint of which she confronts furrow of institutionalized dominating powers.

In the order of character presentation catalogued by Karan Chand, Ansuya comes much later, “She was not born to lead a staid, conventional life. Lonely, withdrawn, but with an almost fierce vitality, she wants to live fully and passionately” (144). Interestingly, her jovial temperament and kinetic attitude are sketched but physic remains unmentioned. This almost from the beginning beckons exploration of our sensitive and practical credibility to dive deep into the construction and activity of Ansuya both as a character created for theatrical purpose and as an social individual hoped for rejuvenating female consciousness. She is a ‘caged bird’ rooming in an exquisite mansion which, however, is the only valuable hereditary they so far have managed to retain against their obligation to pay off the debts. Her mother, Amrita, is a pathetic creature suffering from delusion of nostalgia and avoids acknowledging her incompetence for their present wretched economic condition. Her inostensible desire for pompous and lofty life costs dignified antics. Ansuya vehemently protests, “Someone has to think of money, Amma” (151).

Ansuya also unveils the soft secret about the inevitable auction of their house plated with unforgettable golden memories, “Everyone seems to know about it except us” (152). When sentimental Amrita collapses, sensible Ansuya consoles. Though at times she gets displeased by Amrita’s needless expenditure, she compassionates for her sheer predicament. While filial affection prohibits her from rude behavior, acknowledgement of insuppressible economic crisis compels her to argue. This ‘holy quarrel’ besides radiating strength of the umbilical cord rudiments the opinion making and decision taking personality of Ansuya who though prioritizes affection is not taken away by mucus emotion.

In *English Feminism, 1780-1980*, Barbara Caine notes that “the ‘new woman’ emerged to state her case for change with the *fin-de-siècle* questioning of so many institutions, assumptions and beliefs, particularly those centering on sexuality, marriage, and family life” (Caine 134). Nelson in his book *The New Woman Reader* entries, “The marriage question was center to most discussion by and abo9ut the New Woman and was an important part of New Woman writings, both fiction and essays”(Nelson x).

Drama potentially a more pellucid mirror of human activity also encompasses this pervading issue and *9 Jakhoo Hill* capturing the psychological graphics reverberates such sentiment. Amrita’s anxious speculation about her daughter’s non marital state is sharply subsided by the later, stating their economical unworthiness:

Ansuya: These boys don’t want to marry me, Amma.

Amrita: How do you know?

Ansuya: Because no boy has the guts to marry without a dowry. Look at Dinky. We all thought that he would marry (151).

This surfaces the hidden innateness between marriage and money. The dominant patriarchal discourse designs a bride as a bundle of glazing coins. Even though the Indian Constitution has implemented verdict on dowry system – considering it as an inhumane practice and therefore a punishable offence, it has not been still stopped. Both consciousness and courage are lacked. Just like Tagore’s Nirupama in his short story ‘Profit and Loss’ here Ansuya thoughts against this evil practice. She is again a step further by delineating ‘failure’ of a so called ‘modern man’ in upgrading the moral standard and ethical standpoint of the persons around him, ‘Indian boys are spineless’ (149). This penetrative and outspoken argumentation is an exclusive trait of New Woman as, here, Ansuya accumulates self confidence not only to unveil cruelty – the fundamental feature of a sexist society but also to assert that if money is the only issue marriage as an institution is a paid prostitution.

Simon de Beauvoir, nightingale of French feminist consciousness locating her elemental uniqueness resulting unsurpassing hiatus between her individual identity and social formation once uttered, “I am too intelligent, too demanding, and resourceful for anyone to be able to take charge of me entirely. No one knows or loves me completely. I have only myself.”

Almost equally the infected, coarse, vulgar, vile, intra-personal and gossip loving and seeking attitude of Simla does not suit Ansuya for whom it is a place for “... two types of people—those who are bored and those who are bores”(145). She is thoroughly exhausted of the cynical double faced smile around her. Luxurious parties do not tempt her and she can discern artificiality behind every leap movement. The infertile exercise of voluptuous exchange of words, eavesdropping tendency and soulless movement of narrow minded persons heavily bothers her. Ansuya’s extreme eagerness to live beyond this claustrophobic existence, “I want to go far, far away, to a place where no one knows me. I want to work... and... work where everyone is busy and no one asks questions” (147) if encapsulates her nonconformity, her thorough avoidance of ‘male security’ for subjective emancipation ‘deglamourizes’ male benevolence, mercy and kindness.

When Chitra, mother of the person Ansuya loves, begins to introspect eroded economic condition of their family, though Amrita attempts to deviate the acuminate attention, Ansuya counters it. She possesses the strength and stability for trading on the thorny path of reality – a privilege conceptually preserved for the males:

Chitra: (Callously.) What happened to the big painting of this wall?

.....
Ansuta: Amma! Why don’t you tell her the truth?

(Pause.)

It was sold in an auction.

Chitra: Why?

Ansuya: (Glaring.) We needed the money (157).

The play in fact invites the reader in a dilemma regarding whose diagram of success to follow- Ansuya’s or Chitra’s – as they both ultimately got their respective dream recognition through a dialectical way of accomplishment. Chitra, whose family was a tenant of Ansuya’s grandfather, managed to secure a stable future as Deepak, her ‘puppet’ son got a bright job. Her dominating personality and opportunity seeking persuasion are crystallized through the critical note of Garima Sharma, “She is representative of mothers having hold of their sons. Her only objective is to raise her son to the heights. She has no moral qualms to fulfill her ambition”

(Sharma 43). When in the Truth and Dare game Deepak is asked by Ansuya, “Deepak, what is it that you want more than anything in the world?”(179), Chitra promptly reacts, “Wait, I know the answer, ji” (179). This promptness shows that the ‘self’ of Deepak is constantly captivated and monitored under the colossal pressure of his mother and it gets outpoured in his pathetic declaration, “ I’m your puppet, ma. Pull the string. Pull it harder. Choke me” (194). She demotes her husband into ‘vegetable’. For Deepak’s professional benefit (ironically more important to her than Deepak’s) she unhesitatingly beds with Rai Saheb. Actually Chitra is designated as a cynical, opportunist, money-hooker, diabolic woman who lacks essential human sensibility. Though she yields the ‘males’ her strategy is hilarious, contemptible and engulfing. In contrast Ansuya though suffocates occasionally never adopts trick and treachery. Ultimately her emergence of identity and materialization of dream becomes a saga of satisfaction for the woman who logically, passionately and righteously sought for independent march of feminist consciousness and their economic stability which charge the world.

In their essay ‘Woman in the Changing society’ S.V.Kumar and C.Chakrapani jointly opines “Along with the changes occurring in the society, role of women is also undergoing changes from time to time. However, in Indian situation the process of change is very slow” (Kumar18). The static Indian society is a bit rigid and traditional and takes non-cooperating stance on the woman’s articulation and legitimization of their right. Indian women fail to knot the string of sensibility and idealism required to snatch their licit claim. Depiction of figures like Bimla by Anita Desai, Nisha by Manju Kapur and Ansuya by Das are both for needful literary variation and raising social consciousness. In this play, Ansuya through her activity and decisionism quivers the hitherto patriarchal hierarchism and is aiming to disavow the concomitant evils of exclusion and marginalization. When Rai sahib, a man “...who is one of that breed which is more British than the British” (144) invites Ansuya in a revelry, she, smelling a carnal possibility disapproves. Her straight off reply on his ‘concern’ for her not going to the mall, “One never sees me on the Mall these days.”(150) accentuates her unyielding preference. While other woman in the society including her mother and Chitra cites subjugation to patriarchal socialization – a handy way for reviving, maintaining and securing ‘self independency’, she through her utter disposition proceeds to collapse this hierarchical architecture and proves it dysfunctional as well as detestable.

This play is also socked and shocked with the discovery of incestuous relationship between Ansuya and Mamu (Karan Chand). Though the affair remains shrouded under the superfluous and occasionally sentimental word-exchange between them, the cat gets out of the bag through ‘wounded’ Rai Sahib’s relentless pressure on Karan. The approval, however, disharmonizes the scenario and Karan leaves the house next morning. Sentimental attachment with Karan costs Ansuya’. She is psychologically devastated as in the dream finds herself physically naked, “There was. I was naked and I didn’t want anyone to see me. The blanket kept slipping” (188). In spite of the divulgence of Karan’s perversity, Ansuya gets stigmatized in the measuring tool of patriarchy. Rai Sahib revenges Karan and perhaps intentionally scandalizes Ansuya as she never welcomes his presence or permits his requirements. Karan to subsidize his unexpected and uncalculating incompetence is engaged in a ‘one-sided’ love relationship with Ansuya who also finding no alternative, does not protest and compromises. Stressed and strained stricken Karan finds in his stagnant life a soothing accompaniment in Ansuya’s dovish association. But her intense relationship with Deepak reminds him of theirs’ transistorizes. Furious and helpless Karan suffers from inferiority complex and his acceptance of acquisition can be decoded as revenge of a wounded and dissatisfied male against an ungraspable woman.

Karan's over dependency chokes Ansuya. Whenever she upholds her personal preference Karan debar. Although his pathetic tone sounds as 'need for help', here, too dominating patriarchy camouflages its operation through sophisticated sentimentality, "I...I... Ansuya, don't go to Bombay...don't leave me!" (184). En puissant Karan salutes independent individuality of Ansuya. But for his self gratification, he repudiates such vitality couched with passionate cry for living an unconventional life. However, this rhetoric of demanding persuasion has accurately been de coded by Ansuya and that's why in spite of her sympathetic recognition she does not procrastinates,

"This is different, Mamu. Only my mind is alive when I'm with you. With Deepak, my whole being is awake. And I can't control myself. It is as if I am being pulled."(165)

This typical assertion of personal feeling and craving for a dreamed life is characteristic of 'New Woman' and it also rejuvenates woman's 'uncompromising pledge'.

In his Introduction Das delineates "... the main theme is the betrayal of sexual love (19). Betrayal spaces for dissatisfaction, deceivty and desultoriness. Out of her optimistic undertaking, Ansuya gives herself to Deepak, a man of avid enthusiasm, positive thinking and electrifying personality. Though they meet after long ten years, proximity of souls whiffs the gap as they are always in each other's unseen presence. Deepak rescues Ansuya and Amrita from her mother's snobbish fusillade. He also consoles Ansuya by providing alternative way of preserving the house forever. But the romantic tune sounds cacophonous when Deepak unfolds his real intuition for visiting 9Jakhoo Hill, "... and I told Ma, why not combine business with pleasure" (160). However, the true nature of masculine 'affection and attraction' is exposed when it confronts feminine independent indulgence and economic freedom. As if for male profession is alter of achievement and love for woman is just a ticket of entertainment. In spite of Deepak's later renunciation to deprive Ansuya, his self absorbed nature fails to build up a proportionate relationship with Ansuya's honesty and integrity. He even remains unresponsive to Ansuya's dream of freedom, new life and reluctance to be contaminated by Simla's infectious and disgusting life, "I wait for your letters. You don't know what it is like here. I'm tired of Amma and Mamu...I feel like going to bed at eight o'clock in the evening" (160). After the physical intercourse when Ansuya madly wants to be with Deepak, the later is desperate to 'calm' the situation as early as possible. When Mamu confesses his incestuous attraction to Ansuya, Deepak's love and longing get vapid:

Deepak: I'm tired, Anu.

Ansuya: What's the matter?

.....

Ansuya: Let's go to Bombay.

Deepak: What's the hurry, yaar?

Ansuya: I don't want to lose you (189).

Ultimately, he is webbed to Chitra's emotional blackmailing and cuts bond with Ansuya. But, here, Ansuya's stoic observation is noteworthy, "The truth is, Amma, I think this is what Deepak really wanted. Don't blame his mother. For Depak, it was always his career above everything." (196)

Such equanimous understanding demonstrates that Ansuya repels to be manufactured by the constructed bereavement commonly shared by most 'deprived woman' in Indian and global scenario. The negligence, mistrust and avoidance practiced by Chitra and Deepak against her and the exposition of her cherished dream and desire actually prevent her from becoming debris. Her

undefeatable spirit resurrects her from a woman to a 'New woman'- both defensible and dependable, confident and active, foresighted and independent, "I am now taking charge. I shall prove to you that I can do it. I shall not rest until you are secure. I want you never to worry about money, ever again"(196).

Conclusion:

In the book *Feminine Psyche*, Neeru Tandon critically observes:

"The new woman of these post-feminist phases has begun to stir out of her cocoon to ask the patriarchal society a few important but awkward questions, which accelerate the process of subversion of the patriarchal order and decoding the colonization rule"(Tandon 97).

After Independence India's process and progress towards maturation invites a lot of changes. Woman's dream of independent voyage and subversion of the 'inflaming' patriarchal practices is therefore an expected and spontaneous hearing. Gender oriented cultural construction shrouds the innate vast possibility and penetrative potentiality inherent but 'prohibited' in every female. The search of 'true self' and craving for 'equal being' modifies, structures and sharpens Ansuya as a New Woman in the true sense of the term. Her shrill cry for individualistic ambition can well be detected in her acceptance and reluctance, crying and smiling, subjugation and vanquish. Her unyielding struggle for establishing identity is located in a society where female is defined in terms of male or rather 'she' is the negative prototype of 'he'. Ansuya's unsurpassable confrontation is directed precisely to all female dominating forces, captained both by male and female. Through her ultimate victorious orientation Das summons a much needed change in our outlook- a change which should happen much ago but better let it done than never.

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