



CHAMAN NAHAL'S : "MY TRUE FACES" AND "INTO ANOTHER DAWN"

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ABSTRACT

Chaman Nahal's, fictional work is truly Indian in spirit. His two novels, 'My true Faces' and 'Into Another Dawn', depicts the Indian ethos, 'My True Faces' is the embodiment of Nahal's understanding of spiritualism. In 'My True Faces' Nahal's main intention is to show how unsuitable the borrowed institution of democracy is for multi-racial India. However, the novel demonstrates the general cultural confusion and adds fresh insights to the theme of disintegration. Likewise 'Into Another Dawn' deals with theme of universal love, thematically speaking, this novel records the dichotomy of an Indian who finds himself hanging between the east and the west, between the Orientals. It is a theme which is portrayed by almost all the Indo-Anglian writers. 'Into Another Dawn' is basically an east-west love story with this novel, Nahal sets out to debunk such spiritual Orientalism.

Key Words : Occidentals, Orientals, Dichotomy, Multi-racial, Disintegration.

As we know, Indian English writing is a vast arena today, with new trends emerging, new talents making their mark, new creative and critical branches sprouting in various directions, as well as with the thematic varieties, technical experiments, and linguistic innovations- it is now 'God's plenty.' The extraordinary richness and variety of Indian writing today, indeed, pose a challenging task for any critic or anthologist in the area, since it has become next to impossible to give any comprehensive view or idea of this fast growing literature in its totality within the compass of a single volume.

Chaman Nahal's two novels, 'My True Faces' and 'Into Another Dawn' comprehensively depicts the Indian ethos in an other way. Quite alike from the 'Gandhi Quartets', Chaman Nahal here especially in these two novels 'the etching and dizzy raptures' of the Indians. The first novel 'My True Faces' is the embodiment of Nahal's understanding of spiritualism. His distinction lies, indeed, in writing about India and its people without the touch of exoticism, his scrupulously avoids the stereotyped 'east' of Maharaja's, tigers and snake-charmers. The actual town of Delhi and its surroundings are presented vividly in the first novel. We also get a good idea of middle class life in these two novels. 'My True Faces', the very title compels us to go to the world of spiritualism. Indian legends have been frequently used by Chaman Nahal in this novel. The title itself has linkage with 'Vibhuti Yoga' (the yoga of divine glories) that is enunciated in the tenth chapter of the Gita. In the light of the knowledge of the Gita, the novelist has tried to educate that man should try to be one of his true faces, i.e., true to him and true to Himself. The real Krishna of the Gita has been contrasted against the Krishna of popular imagination and myth.

Indeed, the novel has had the spiritual train of thought along with the mysticism which is quite unique among the novels of Chaman Nahal. Here it may be said that Nahal must have been inspired by Rabindranath Tagore and his greatest anthology of poems 'Gitanjali' where Tagore depicted the way to



spiritualism and to get the Almighty through surrender and devotion. In all the poems of Tagore the urge to meet the Almighty is there and Nahal followed the same trend of thought in this particular novel. He explored the Gita in the novel through authorial voice or commentaries. Through the fabric of spiritualism, Nahal adequately portrays the agony of a sensitive young man when he finds his wife and baby son missing. But the crisis seems to be too minor to warrant the heavy philosophical treatment, with the hero realizing at the end of the novel that all earthly manifestation are but faces of Krishna, and they are all his 'True Faces'. The involved language betrays the fact that it is the work of a scholarly professor of English.

Lord Krishna reveals that his 'vibhuti' or divine, transcendental opulence is 'sarganam' or creation. Creation is the total sun of all things in existence and the Supreme Lord Krishna is the beginning or origin of all, the middle or preservation of all and the end dissolution of all being the creator of everything. Of the three forms of debate and argument. His 'vibhuti' known as 'vadah' is the discriminating debate that results in knowledge of the absolute conclusive truth. This is in opposition to the other two forms being 'jalpa' which is an argument calculated to destroy the opposition at any cost even by deception and falsehood. The other is 'vintanda' whose aim is to criticize and undermine the oppositions position without ever establishing any position.

Lord Krishna further states that His 'vibhuti' or divine, transcendental opulence is 'sarganam' or creation as the beginning, middle and ending. In verse 20 of this chapter He revealed His 'vibhuti' beginning, middle and ending of all living entities by the word 'bhutanam'. But here He is referring to the insentient process that manifests as creation itself for the benefit and welfare for all sentient beings. Of all knowledge existing Lord Krishna's 'vibhuti' is 'adhyatma vidya' or the supreme knowledge of the eternal soul which includes the Supreme Lord who bestowed its eternality and how to attain His eternal association which is the paramount attainment.

Lord Krishna declares of the three methods of debate being 'vadah', 'jalpa' and 'vitanda' His 'vibhuti' is 'vadah' which is the absolute conclusive reality determined by the logical method discussion and debate regarding the pro and cons of things by those who are established in 'satya guna' or the mode of goodness in order to determine and ascertain the ultimate truth of any topic. Such beings are always free from passion and the duplicity of subterfuge and deception. 'Jalpa' is the method of argument which uses calculated criticism and superficial suppositions to invalidate the opposition in an underhanded manner and is like a hedge of sharp thorns purposely keeping out any chance for a conclusive truth. 'Vitanda' is the method of argument which uses false facts and absurd affirmations to destroy an opponents position without having ever established a position of their own. The fallacy of 'jalpa' an 'vitanda' is that they falsify facts, distort truth and misrepresent reality for the purpose of inserting their own deception hidden agenda.

'My True Faces' constantly, rather iteratively follows sayings of Krishna to know one self. The novel further reveals the significance of the 'song celestial'. Like the parables Jesus used to teach his followers, it has an outer and an inner meaning. Outwardly we see Arjuna and Krishna arrayed for a battle over land and family rights. Its setting is the field of the Kurus, or Kurukshetra, with two opposing armies, the Pandavas and Kurus. Many people have difficulty with this martial setting, and with Krishna urging Arjuna to fight. But all around us we see conflict, while within ourselves we struggle with decisions and battle between differing desires. War exemplifies physically this constant struggle of dualities in life to reach harmony through conflict and resolution. Gandhi answered criticisms that the Gita validated war by saying : "Just base your life on the Gita sincerely and systematically and see if you find killing or even hurting others compatible with its teachings."¹

On inward lines the Bhagavad-Gita concerns the internal war each human being must eventually



wage for self mastery. The Delphic oracle proclaimed "Know thyself!" To know our selves is not easy, for we are composite beings, made up of body, soul and spirit, as the apostle Paul wrote. The spirit portion of us is our higher self or atma. Self mastery is achieved when the personal, selfish portion of each of us is directed by our higher self. In this manner we would be directed by a force of selflessness towards all. Nahal further refers the Katha Upanishad which throws light on the inner meaning of this imagery; know the self (atma) as the master sitting within the chariot which is the body (Sarira), know again the understanding (buddhi) as the charioteer and the mind (manas) as the reins. The senses, they say, are the horses; the objects of sense, what they range over. He who is ever of unrestrained mind, devoid of true understanding, his sense-desires then become uncontrollable like the wild horses of a charioteer. But he who is ever of controlled mind, and has true understanding, his sense desires then are controllable like the good horses of a charioteer. The desires are superior to the senses, the mind is superior to the desires, the intuition (understanding) is superior to the mind, the great Self is superior to the intuition. Going further, the wheels of the chariot symbolize right effort; the destination is perfection; and the whole experience urges us to become an aspirant after truth by living life in the higher portions of ourselves. How can we go about achieving self-mastery? The second chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita speaks directly to this point. A man is said to be confirmed in spiritual knowledge when he forsake every desire which enter into his heart and of himself is happy and content in the Self through the Self. His mind is undisturbed in adversity; he is happy and contented in prosperity, and he is a stranger to anxiety, fear and anger. Such a man is called a Muni (wiseman). When in every condition he receives each event, whether favorable or unfavorable, with an equal mind which neither likes nor dislikes, his wisdom is established, and, having met good or evil, neither rejoice at the one nor is cast down by the other. He is confirmed in spiritual knowledge, when, like the tortoise, he can draw in all his senses and restrain them from their wonted purposes. The hungry man loses sight of every other object but the gratification of his appetite, and when he is become acquainted with the supreme, he loses all taste for objects of whatever kind. The tumultuous senses and organs hurry away by force the heart even of the wise man who strive after perfection. Let a man, restraining all these, remain in devotion at rest in me, his true self; for he who has his senses and organs in control possesses spiritual knowledge. We generate Karma, and eventually we reap those same causes as the effects ripple back to their origin. Thus, the causes of our unhappiness lie in our own mistaken ideas and acts, not in external conditions. To overcome these causes, we need a better grasp of who we are and what our purpose is in life. The Gita can help teach us who we are and lead us through the maze of life. Ultimately, with much thought, reflection, and effort, we can realize those truths which, if lived, will make our futures ever brighter, though they may not immediately transform our present circumstances.

In his translation of the Bhagavad-Gita, Radhakrishnan simplifies this thought into two parts, commenting that Plato meant that human perfection was a sort of marriage between high thought and just action. This, according to the Gita, must be, for ever, the aim of man. If our thoughts are universal, centered on true and pure things, it is easier to do just actions. We can sift our thoughts and acts by testing them against the touchstone of our inner self. Eventually we will find ourselves evaluating each thought before acting upon it; if it does not meet the criteria for a just act; it is forsaken for a higher thought and subsequent action.

William Q. Judge said, "Motive is all". We are not looking for a result, performing a just act so that a just result will occur. Such attachment is the opposite of the equal-mindedness the Gita advises us to attain. Moreover, we can never have complete control over the outcomes of our actions. They are the product of our present decisions plus the totality of karma, and this past accumulation of the actions of ourselves and others often determines the actual results in ways that are beyond our immediate control. But as we strive to choose correctly, right thought and right action will begin to become a habit, and we



will build up the right momentum for future effects to manifest as just outcomes. As James Long rightly asserted "Where there is one-pointed devotion to the highest law of one's being, there is protection-- the protection that comes from striving to the best of one's ability to live the inner life of the soul instead of the outer one. He who performs all acts with the Divine in view will not be concerned with their outcome, because the truest devotion or yoga is skill in action or the living of your daily karma. There is an ancient maxim that runs in proportion to our aspiration will be our difficulties. By the very intensity of our desire to do right and to progress we literally call upon the gods by calling upon our own inner god to cast down upon our shoulders burdens stronger than might otherwise be given us. For in direct proportion to the depth of our sincerity are we challenged to take a good straight look at ourselves."²

Nahal is also of opinion that we can not expect to gain self-mastery overnight, especially if "in proportion to our aspiration will be our difficulties!"³ Final victory is not to the swift, but to those who steadfastly refuse to be defeated. What if foes do return again and again, in this or that form? The very fact that we recognize them as such is a sign of progress. The more subtle they are, the more dangerous because harder to detect. They would not take that finer form, however, unless we had already conquered them on the more material plane; and that in itself is a victory. There can be no real failure as long as we never give up. This epic battle between the great duality, the forces of light and dark in every human heart, speaks to each of us. The rub is that it is all individual : individual study; individual reflection; individual thought, individual action; individual meeting of karma; individual struggle; individual triumph; individual self-mastery. And there are no formulas we can rely on to get us there as easy as 1-2-3. Individual will and right motive are all we have. Ultimately we must develop spiritual self-reliance by looking to ourselves and not to others.

Chaman Nahal further revealing traces the points that in self-mastery as in war, choice and action are inevitable. To accomplish our goal reconciliation and concessions must be made. This had another name in ancient writings, often masked heavily by exoteric ritual 'sacrifice'. Sacrifice means 'to make sacred'. An animal being sacrificed to a god symbolized our lower self being sacrificed to our higher self. We do not need the degenerate practices of ritual blood-letting or fire sacrifice of an animal to remind us of the task that lies before us: the arduous sacrifices of our own lower passions to the greater good of all humanity and all beings. We can make these sacrifice or sacred offerings in small ways each day. These small choices tend eventually to become routine, and finally are inculcated into our being as character, for we become our choices. Along this line the question arises, should we indulge our passions to the point of satiation and thus eliminate the passion for them; or should we strive to control them, using every ounce of our will and thus eliminate them from our desires? The Gita answers: "Aspirants abstain from sense pleasures, but they still crave for them. These cravings all disappear when they see the highest goal."⁴

Conflict, self-mastery, and sacrifice are indissolubly bound to our daily life. Not only is the Bhagavad-Gita an exotic story with intriguing descriptions, part of a larger epic venerated by millions of people throughout the world; it is the story of our own inner competing forces and their successful resolution by following our true inner light of divinity. James Long aptly remarked, "Let us close by remembering that the Gita's first word is Dharmakshetra which tells us at the outset that this discourse between Krishna and Arjuna is taking place not on a physical battlefield but truly on the "plain of Dharma or Duty."⁵ In other words, on the plain of the soul where each one of us, as Arjuna, must search out and follow the karmic duty that is his and no one else's.

Thus, Chaman Nahal shows in detail the actual faces of life that are true and benign. His experiences of life finds a detailed descriptions in the fiction 'My True Faces'. It is about controlling our life within our life-time. In a sense he followed the dictum of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishada "to give sympathy to control." As we find in T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' Nahal excelled in portraying the true faces of man, at least what it should be, in this very novel.



Likewise, 'Into Another Dawn' deals with theme of universal love, thematically speaking, this novel records the dichotomy of an Indian who finds himself hanging between the East and the West, between the orientals as we very much find in the novels of Kamala Markandanya, Anita Desai, Shashi Despande, Gita Mehta and even in the greatest novels of Salman Rushdie. It is a theme which is portrayed by almost all the Indian writers of English who wrote in the post Independent Indian ethos. The East-West encounter is not new in Indian English fiction but Nahal's treatment of this particular subject gives the novel a special dimension. Ravi, the hero of the novel, though marries an American woman named Irene in America but hardly finds himself settled there. When he suffers from terminal cancer he returns to his home Haridwar, the holy city of India to die. Into Another Dawn, is basically an East-West love story, set chiefly in the U.S.A. and shows the East-West and colonial encounter in its own way. Actually the occident's ideas about mystical India along with their sentimental implications, combined with the immanent exigencies of Western societies, have created such a web of chaotic misinterpretations that the ancient spiritual tradition of this country is being constantly reinvented and reified to Western liking. With this novel Nahal sets out to debunk such spiritual orientalism. His anti-romanticism is vigorous response of his being Hindu and Indian, or as he has lately defined himself, an "inert Indian",⁶ who is to witness a further episode of "appropriation" of his motherland by the voracious West. It can also stand for the last phase of those more cruel abuses his forefathers had fought with their lives and the firm contribution to the process of de-colonization that the illuminated minds of India have ignited from the time immemorial, now running the risk to be put out by the new intruders. But it is also an anti-romanticism meant to sweep away woolliness of thought and crankiness in which those "monstrous concepts"⁷ of Indian philosophy to use his words, stemming from her primeval Indian civilization, have been enveloped by the desperate enthusiasm of the West especially in the last decades of our history. Indeed, the anti-sentimental attack to the consumerist occident that struggles to gobble up Hinduism and chokes itself in the process remains highly amusing and ironic throughout his work, though never failing to disclose to the sensitive reader the often disguised sadness of our age. The entire view of the novel is the product of the writer's personal experience and not merely a fictional invention. The book becomes, therefore, a valuable contribution to the analysis of that interesting confrontation between East and West that runs across our centuries and millennia, without ever exhausting its attraction and vitality, forming indeed, a major theme in Indo-English Literature. At the same time, and at a deeper level, we feel that the same liveliness and topicality fill the book in our new millennium, which on the one hand is a confirmation of the author's validity as an artist, while on the other, having passed the test of time, it arouses the sensation that its subject matter should convey a truth, an impalpable reality that only the shrewdest minds are able to capture in words: the ability to perceive in anticipation those elements of sensitivity opening up a new epoch, and to define the kind of anxieties the new age will be carrying along.

But even when we come to knowledge, the occidental is not immune to easy traps of disorientation or, rather, false orientation dictated by his traditional modes of perceiving the world around him. The belief to getting to know what India mystically teaches turns itself into a further illusion for coating his indelible ego. Among the endless opportunities of narcissism provided by the Wisdom of the East, the occidental feels at ease. It is his perception of himself as a philosopher and not as the victim of philosophy that permits him to be so enthusiastic. In this way, the karmic law-the law of universal causality, which connects man with the cosmos and condemns him to transmigrate indefinitely becomes rather a guarantee of rebirth, an escape from the deeper meaning of death and nullity which so much scare the ever healthily advertised West.

Chaman Nahal is lavish in producing humorous evidence of this reified India in this novel. And naturally, not to betray the Western image of the East with the glamour of a splendid parade of camels and elephants, snake-charmers, jugglers, puppeteers, dancers and colourfully costumed Indian women.



An accidental dream blurring completely the contradictory and immensely rich reality of India that results as if obliterated by the occidental myopic vision unable to penetrate its surface. Nahal's 'Into Another Dawn' gives us the opportunity to improve our vision of India, cleansing the awkward diaphragm we commonly use to portray it. We should be grateful to those Indian writers like Chaman Nahal who, far from being didactic, never give a definite answer and leave the reader, especially the occidental reader, to test his beliefs and challenge his settled ideas. Nor should one wonder when "even Indian religiosity comes to be entrapped in the same vicious circle"⁸ and if some spiritual speculators end dealing with it as a commodity; "enterprising masters who thrive on the Westerners' spiritual malaise, and mesmerized by the appeal of the two globalised countries."⁹ His seemingly laic approach is never devoid of a profound sense of respect for the mythological, traditional aspects of his land, for its ancient customs and the sacred potentialities of human life. Nor does he wish to diminish or refute the significance of being an Indian.

The spiritual heart of India remains, intact, touched only by those few who struggle hard, with no guaranties of instant enlightenment and no escape from life. The same is also in the case of Ravi, the protagonist of 'Into Another Dawn.'

The reader concerned with Indian literature in English will be familiar with the so-called "theme of alienation" that seems to preoccupy authors so basically at various levels and degrees. Especially those Indian writers in English living and writing abroad the so-called expatriate writers feel the predicament even more urgent if only because, for different historical and personal reasons, they are dislocated and uprooted, sometimes since birth, thousands of miles away from their homeland and original roots. The influence of the West has also significantly contributed to the draining out of the sense of conscious belonging to the Indian soil, so that many modern characters from Indian literature, not only in English, appear deracinated, cut off from the traditional, cultural and philosophical saps of their land. Nor is it surprising that in comparison to occidental writing also presenting a long literary tradition in portraying different forms of alienation the protagonist of Indian English literature should show a more vivid and continuing trait of this malaise, due to the efforts of the profound and radical changes India is inevitably enduring in our time, and, not in the least, the import of its long colonial past.

Contrary to the traditional pattern of most Indian writers, Nahal appears on the literary scene to present Indian characters as the major victims of alienation in and out of India. India actually becomes a kaleidoscope, briefly and brightly reflecting the occidental modern anxieties, while we take a closer view, we will be confronted with a clearer reality of a deep-rooted Western despair. Their escapist drive, mingled with a peculiar sense of alienation, makes an explosive cocktail for Chaman Nahal's occidentals, who are often stranded and on the verge of insanity. The attempt to find oneself as Western imagination defines the effects of the supposed healing power of India, reverts itself to loosing oneself completely. Nor can the social and psychological uneasiness of these voices be solely attributed to the demands of an increasingly competitive Western society where status, profession and financial well being become synonyms with social identity and recognition.

The traditional occidental heritage is thus erased, cut off, escaped, variously hybridized and simplistically transcended into alien forms of oriental meditations. Consciously deracinated, our occidental characters ultimate hope lies in India's mysticism. And although they may be right to consider India as a land of ancient mystical traditions, they ought to at least learn. Their hazardous searches, devoid of any understanding of those traditions, are bound to meet only a saddening derision, if not by complacent Eastern masters, certainly on the part of the common Indian, and profusely in the pages of 'Into Another Dawn'. If it is true that the novelist's outlook on life is reflected in his themes and characters and that in most Indian writing in English one strongly suspects that the novelist himself, like his protagonist, feels alienated from values then we have to conclude that we are dealing with an Indian English author of a particular kind. Chaman Nahal appears to be immune to any sense of alienation from



his country, and seems to be distancing himself from the literary tradition of those Indo-English writers haunted by a sense of loss and estrangement; he wants to appear deeply rooted in his soil, determined to defend it from any incompetent definition or facile judgement that is too often blowing from the West.

With 'Into Another Dawn' Chaman Nahal has been acclaimed as an international cross cultural critic and his style gives him the privilege to look closely into different and distant cultures without losing her Indian identity. His reporting remains nevertheless "'imaginative' not because the author has distorted the fact, but because"10 he "has presented them in a full instead of a naked manner, brought out the sights, sounds and feelings surrounding those facts, and connected them by comparison with other facts of history, society, and literature in an artistic manner that does not diminish but gives greater depth and dimension to the facts."11

Though the main theme of the novel is the East-West encounter which Nahal discussed, at length, in the narrative, yet his dimensions of beauty and the explorations of the regions of sex in 'Into Another Dawn' startles us whenever we brows through the novel of Nahal. The character of Ravi is delineated wonderfully and with a definite purpose to show the gape in between the East and the West, between Occidentals and Orientals. Nothing is achieved ultimately, only 'the sound and fury' remains. In this context we may refer E.M. Forster's 'A passage to India' where the gape is never bridged up between Dr Aziz and Fielding, similarly the problem persists in Nahal. Ravi had to come to the holy city of Haridwar, renouncing all the affluences of the United States. Here the dictum "Character is Destiny" is very much befitting for the protagonist ultimately realises the essence of life at the core.

In both the novels Nahal finely managed his plots. Whereas in 'My True Faces' he deals with the quest for the true face and spritualism, 'Into Another Dawn' reflects the migrants sensibility and the dichotomy. In respect of themes, both the novels are wide apart. Yet it comes from the corpus of Nahal's own creativity and establishes the author as a distinguished thinker and philosopher.

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