



theology

Utterances of Ramakrishna Parahamsa

Translated by Dr Shawkat Hussain

"From Sri Ramakrishna Parahamsa I learned the sweetness of God in the aspect of Mother, or Divine Mercy. The childlike saint found little appeal in the Father aspect, or Divine Justice. Stern, exacting, mathematical judgment was alien to his gentle manner.

"He can serve as an earthly prototype for the very angels of heaven!" I thought fondly,

A big ship pulls a lot of smaller boats in tow, so, know this: When a great man arrives, He carries with him a lot of thoughtless men.

Just as the dying embers must be stoked from time to time to make the fire blaze, so too must one seek spiritual company to liven up the heart. When one sees a doctor one thinks of disease, when one sees a lawyer one thinks of litigation; and when one sees a devotee one thinks of God.

It is true that there is God inside a tiger, but you should not go and stand in front of one. There is God inside evil people as well, but you should not seek their company.

What if the mustard seed with which you would expel the ghost contains a ghost inside it? How would you then exorcise the ghost? How can you pray if the head with which you pray itself becomes covetous?

When a child is not born to a couple, they cry two pitcher-full of tears. When they do not have wealth, they beat their breasts in despair. But how many go out of their senses for a glimpse of God? He who wants to see God can see Him!

A man who can make money his salve is a true man. One who makes himself a slave of money does not know its use. He is not truly human. He only assumes human form but behaves like a beast.

One disciple chanted his Guru's name: 'Guru, Guru' and crossed the river. The Guru himself was impressed by the power of his name. The next day, the Guru started calling to himself: 'Guru Guru' He began to cross the river, fell into deep water, and lost his life.

Two friends went out for a stroll: one went to listen to a recitation of the Bhavagad Gita; another went to seek pleasure in a brothel. The one who went to listen to the songs of the Gita, thought: 'My friend in the brothel is having so much fun. I should have gone with him.' And the friend in the brothel thought:

watching him one day at his prayers. Without a breath of censure of criticism, he surveyed the world with eyes long familiar with Primal Purity. His body, mind, speech and actions were effortlessly harmonized with his soul's simplicity." (From Autobiography of a Yogi, by Parahamsa Yogananda)



Sri Ramakrishna (Feb 18, 1836 — Aug 15, 1886)

What am I doing here? What is the point of this pleasure?

What was the result? The one who went to listen to the Bhavagad Gita reaped the rewards of going to a brothel. And the one who went to the brothel enjoyed the rewards of listening to the Bhavagad Gita.

Listen, do you know what a thoughtless householder is like? A poor man went begging to one house; the master of the house pretended to be a carefree householder; he had left his wife in charge of all the money. The man said, 'I do not touch money.' But the poor man would not give up. Then the master of the house went in and narrated all to his wife. She flared up and said, 'Do you think money is like vegetables?'

The master asked her to give one rupee, but she gave him two annas, and said, 'Go take this.' The carefree householder felt helpless; he took it and gave it to the beggar.

Do you understand?

An unfaithful woman lives with her husband, her family, her parents, but her heart is with her lover.

Oh, you householder! your soul is with God but you too live with your family and parents.

Pure knowledge and pure devotion are the same things. When a boy demands money from his mother, sometimes he cries for it, sometimes he beats his mother for it.

Even when you know that God is dearer than the dearest, the heart cries desperately for a glimpse of Him. God cannot but reveal Himself to he who loves Him so much.

The Yogi tries to still the mind When the mind is still, the air too becomes breathless.

Someone is sweeping the floor and another person comes in and says: 'Do you know so-and-so just died.' If the person who died is not a close relative, the sweeper says: 'Ah, it's a pity so-and-so died' and keeps on sweeping. But if the person who died is a close relative, the broom falls from the hand, and the sweeper falls to the ground saying: 'What!'

Then the air becomes still: the sweeper cannot work or think.

With one hand the peasant woman separates the dried rice in the *dheki*, with another, she nurses the baby at her breast; at the same time, she bargains with a customer — but her eyes and mind are always on the *dheki*.

So, do your work in *samsara*, but take care that you do not stray from His path.

A big ship pulls a lot of smaller boats in tow, so, know this: When a great man arrives, He carries with him a lot of thoughtless men.

book review

Serajul Islam Choudhury's Women of Shakespeare: Is this a step towards Cultural Studies?

by Fazlul Alam

LITERATURE and Cultural Studies seem to be two different subjects or may be two different topics within a broad discipline though I cannot figure out what the name of this broad discipline could be.

Literature being a powerful vehicle of people's culture and modifier of the same at the same time, it seems, despite apparent difference in approach and methodology of studies, it actually should fulfil the goals of the Cultural Studies. Most of the literary studies fail to recognise this, and take no notice of cultural studies. The major reason for this neglect is that Cultural Studies as such has not yet been well formulated, and even in many of the First World's universities, the faculties to which the department of cultural studies belong are not the same ones. In the Third World countries, cultural studies as part of the university curriculum is almost non-existent. Nevertheless, I have discovered many courses and studies which do fulfil some requirements on which cultural studies is dependent. Professor Serajul Islam Choudhury's Women of Shakespeare just published may be described as a study which can be ascribed more a part of cultural studies than literary appreciation.

This is not to say that students or readers of literature will not have anything to do with this book. On the contrary, if a book can guide the readers and students from a well trodden path to a new one without losing the touch of nostalgia, this is most certainly the book. The book is full of literary flavour and it takes us to uncharted terrains where we have never even stepped on.

Professor Choudhury has entitled his book as Women of Shakespeare, but



I feel that it could better be called Women in Shakespeare. That difference itself is not a major issue. In one viewpoint, all characters portrayed by Shakespeare are his brainchildren, even if they existed either in real life, or in fictions. The author of the book, Professor Serajul Islam Choudhury has put this argument stating.

That the dramatist [Shakespeare] is so universally praised and has become so well known is not because of the story part of the dramas, but because of the characters in them (my translation).

Shakespeare borrowed the structure of many stories, altered them in many instances, and according to the author of the book, his own input was the inner

life. This inner life is the element that maintains the liveliness of Shakespeare's dramas. In that logic, the characters are his, not mere elements in his plays.

Another viewpoint may be that Shakespeare, a brilliant playwright plagiarised at random, and being a half-read (comparing him other playwrights of his time, viz. Marlowe, Ben Jonson potboiler in his time, produced plays that could be staged and liked by the aristocrats and the commoners. In order to achieve the objectives, Shakespeare remodelled the characters, retouched them in many colours and styles not knowing the truth about them. In this analysis the characters are in his plays, and, therefore, they should be described as in Shakespeare.

Whichever viewpoint we may subscribe to, what remains is that Shakespeare's is rather an impossible feat for any other playwright of any time. There could be better writers than him, but none has so far transcended the cultural, political, economic and social evolution and revolutions in the bygone four centuries. Only Shakespeare has remained 'not just a widely known dramatist, but may be the most widely read author of any time. The reasons cannot be ascribed to one element of his genius, such as the dramatic presentation, but must take note of all his other attributes, such as choice of the subject, the story element, and characters.

Professor Choudhury argues that the characters should decidedly top the list of Shakespeare's excellence, and of all the characters, Shakespeare excelled most in creating the women characters. He chooses eighteen women characters of Shakespeare and analyses them from his own and original viewpoint. There are other eminent British scholars who wrote on Women in Shakespeare, but it

seems Professor Choudhury has little to borrow from them.

In this review, I would leave it with the readers of the book to enjoy the analysis of Professor Choudhury by themselves. I would though like to add that even if the readers have not read all the plays or have forgotten some of it, Professor Choudhury has his ways of depicting the major theme of the plays in which the characters are. In this way, he has achieved a fine balance of general readability with possible in-depth reading.

I would propose here in brief why this book should be classified as one on which some cultural studies may begin. Professor Choudhury's Introduction to the book establishes this. In this part, he talks about certain non-literary issues. These are non-literary only because they emerge from socio-economic studies. Women's position in the society is one, from which discussion of the subjugation of women follows. Lack of a strong middle-class and therefore, almost non-existence of middle class values is another. In these two issues, Professor Choudhury has written in some details and has come to the conclusion that marriage is the ultimate objective of all activities in all the plays of Shakespeare. In comedies, intelligent women reign and they dominate the scene, but in the end their intelligence and supreme command on all actions are centralised in capturing the men they loved and whom they wanted to marry. And by that final action, women would succumb to the domination of men. This is a happy ending both to the aristocrats and the commoners. In the tragedies, women are driven by the sheer lust for power but only through their men. This is possibly an unacceptable situation today, but Choudhury states that Shakespeare's sense of reali-

ties made him draw such pictures.

In the same vein, he refers to the economic systems of the day. Common men and women were both 'victims of rising capitalist plunder' (Choudhury's words), and women suffered disproportionately both at the hand of the society and of men. It is generally believed that the awareness to this double sufferings of women did not exist in Shakespeare time, but the actions of the plays reflect the manoeuvre of women in society. It may be argued that despite lack of articulation, women's awareness of their subjugated roles in the society was known but accepted. That Portia and many women characters had to disguise as a man confirms this view.

These references to the socio-economic situation of the day and an attempt to unfold possible cultural themes underlying Shakespeare's women characters are the unique and original aspects of Professor Choudhury's studies. Choudhury, as most readers of this paper must know, is a Professor of English Literature, and it may be expected that he would value the literary qualities of Shakespeare more than anything else. Yet his Marxist stance is all too clear in the Introduction.

Choudhury did not find enough scope to elucidate the above, nor devote enough on the contradiction of 'individuation' and 'public face'. Women as individual, and what was expected of them in the society carry utmost contradictions. Shakespeare's women all went down to the latter, but only after establishing their equality with men. In Gramsci, Shakespeare was a model of national-popular literature, and literary aestheticism drove him to please the audience. Like all other national-popular writers, Shakespeare could be

labelled as ideological. But was he really? Did he not demonstrate in many of his characters, both men and women (viz. Hamlet and Lady Macbeth), that the self-contradictory, disintegrating 'persons' will not last forever despite such expectations of the dominant bourgeoisie elements in society? This and many other cultural questions need to be answered to understand Shakespeare further. Professor Choudhury's present book may be a prelude to a true cultural studies of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's Women [in Bengali], by Serajul Islam Choudhury is just published by Prachya Vidya Prokashani, Dhaka at 85/-taka.

Seminar on Faulkner

The Department of English, in conjunction with the Bangladesh Association of American Studies and the American Chamber of Commerce, is holding a Centennial Seminar on William Faulkner on 1st March '98. Visiting Fulbright Professor Michael True will also speak in the Seminar which will be held in the Planning and Development Academy, Nilkhet from 9:15 - 1 pm.

Later that afternoon, from 3:00-4:00 pm, there will be a lecture-discussion on modern American poetry. Professor True will speak on "Poetry and Survival in Contemporary American Poetry."

Professor Azad Chowdhury will be inaugurating the seminar. The USIS representative as well as representatives from the American Chamber of Commerce will attend the inaugural session.