

A LONG INFLUENCE

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'Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock' (1915) is a landmark modern poem written by T.S. Eliot in the sense that it broke all traditional textures of Romantic poetry and influenced subsequent literature in general. In the poem, Prufrock, the protagonist is unable to propose and finds it utterly impossible to open up his heart in a society that stands totally against his divided-mind. Prufrock is an urban man dared not to confront the modern world and face his courting lady with 'overwhelming question.' Instead, he asks himself a series of questions that do reflect his deepening anxiety: 'Do I dare / Disturb the universe?'

Too much consciousness and fastidious nature along with inner-questioning is an impediment that thwarts modern people to communicate with world he lives in. Doubt, futility and fear incapacitate his deep desire. Unlike the setting of a romantic poem in a wide open beautiful and vast land the poem takes place in small room, dirty roads and cheap hotels. The character is not in bliss rather in 'restless nights in one-night cheap hotels'. Tedious journey of the protagonist is obvious, when in monologue he utters, 'There will be time, there will be time'. The mere proposal is so heavily burdened with Prufrock that it seems to disturb the whole universe. Furthermore in the poem the triviality of modern life is exposed: 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.' The ever questioning mind and procrastination of Prufrock is a stamp of a modern man:

And should I then presume?

And how should I begin?

Modernism has introduced a number of influential concepts to the twentieth century literary world some of which are superficial pseudo-intellect inquiry, doubt, individualism, despair, hopelessness, paralysis, anxiety, a sense of meaninglessness, chaos, search for meaning and answer, the crisis of belief, loss of faith etc. All these concepts can be found fully in this poem. In 'The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock', Eliot sets his speakers to journeys for meaning and answer, reveals their fragmented visions, and analyses the modern man's perception of life, norms and faith. In this sense, Eliot's powerful poetry, characterised by fragmentation, questioning and hopelessness constitute various successful examples of the implications of modernism that brings about a new way of looking and appreciating life and its components.

The inner thinking and re-thinking and endless procrastination make Prufrock a peculiar character. Over-educated, neurotic, and sensitively stilted Prufrock is a mentally divided personality. The fear of modern man is, in a large scale, is present in him. His timidity and inactivity and to face the reality boldly make a pathetic juncture. Though he claims he is 'not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be', he is quite similar to Hamlet in the sense that Hamlet is also characteristically unable to control or accept his doubts or take any proper action.

Prufrock's continual return to the 'women who come and go / Talking of Michelangelo' and his recurrent questionings 'how should I presume?' and pessimistic appraisals 'That is not it, at all.' All of these describe the consciousness of a modern neurotic individual.

Stream of consciousness and blank verse technique and symbolism also present a new treatment in literature. Chaos, mental disorder, neurotic behavior of Prufrock is noteworthy because it showcases a senseless condition where every man is caught. The symbolic presentation of the evening as curling cat is Prufrock's inactivity from which every man suffers. The numbness that the great line focuses 'patient etherized upon a table' also shows the morbidity and alienation of modern time. Prufrock lives, indeed, in a corrupted sense of reality where hollowness of intelligence and superficiality of modern life is blatantly obvious. The women who are even ignorant of their own selves talk of 'Michael Angelo' thereby demonstrating their pseudo-intelligence. Prufrock being a victim of the time in his aimless journey suffers from self-identity. Question of identity is also found in Tagore when he says 'Amar Hiyar Majhe Lukia Sile Dekhte Ami Paini' or in Lalon 'Aponare Chinte Parle Jabe Ochanere Chena' and in Socrates thousands years back when he said 'know thyself' likewise modern people are suffering acutely from self-effacement.

Eliot modernizes the form by removing the implied listeners and focusing on Prufrock's interiority and isolation. Prufrock has to live in an unsympathetic world where nobody would care for his problem so he keeps silent but recurrent questionings 'how should I presume?' goes on in his psyche. Temporizing the matter just kills his volition: 'And indeed there will be time.' His anxiety over lack of being proper with a bald head is nothing but a sign that he is excommunicated. His anguish becomes grave when he knows that he has limitations and he is caged in a dimensional world like a picture from where there is no way out. His inner voice in anguish laments 'When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall / Then how shall I begin.' From indecisiveness and anxiety over future and his aging, which results in a kind of psychological paranoia, a state of passivity, Prufrock is haunted by his fear of making decisions that may not have a tangible result at all.

The mental struggle of Prufrock is symbolic of every modern man who is much conscious of his ill fate in a world that counts more on reasoning than that of emotional value. So his mind is full with unanswered questions. Although he knows that there is no answer for 'the overwhelming question' or at least no point in answering it at all, he still cannot help asking and pursuing it as the modern man's search for meaning and answer is nearly instinctive and compulsive, which is evident in these lines: 'Streets that follow like a tedious argument/Of insidious intent/To lead you and overwhelming question/Oh, do not ask, 'what is it?' / Let us go and make our visit.' Thus, the subjects of the speaker undergo frequent fragmentations as a result of his self-interrogation and self-consciousness, which is a reflection of modernist perception in literature.

MEGHMALLAR

BIBHUTIBHUSHAN BANDOPADHAYA

Translated from the Bengali: SOHANA MANZOOR

(Continued from the last issue)
Prodyumna gaped at the elderly man in surprise. What secret might he want to share with someone he had known only for a day?

So he replied, 'How can I promise without knowing...?'

Suradasa said, 'Don't worry; I wouldn't propose anything harmful.'

Prodyumna was really curious to learn the secret; hence he promised not to talk to anyone about it.

Suradasa lowered his voice and said, 'You have seen the huge mound where the river bends? The one with a big meadow at the front? In ancient days there used to be a temple of the Devi Swaraswati; heard that after completing their lessons all the renowned musicians of the land paid homage to the goddess.

Only after that they would begin their careers in art. It was a long, long time ago. Then the temple went in ruins, and now, as you can see, there's nothing there. But still, if anyone plays the

Meghmaller in its finest tune sitting on that mound on the nights of full moon during the rainy seasons, the Devi

would appear. Nobody knows about it here. She can be summoned only

during the months of Ashara, Sravan, and Bhadra, and her blessings would

make the performer the finest in his

profession. The other requirement is

that the player must be unmarried.

What I was saying, why don't you and I make an attempt to do it? What do you say?'

Prodyumna was so surprised that he

did not know what to say. The Acharya Basubrata, their art master, had said on

many occasions that the form that the

Hindus portray of Swaraswati, the

goddess of art and music, is a merely a

feat of imagination. It has no

connection to reality. To be actually able

to see her? Was it really possible?

Suradasa asked somewhat anxiously, 'Don't you agree with me?'

Prodyumna said, 'It's not that. I was

wondering how, or if it's possible.'

Suradasa said, 'Don't you worry

about it. You'll see it with your own

eyes. If you have no objection, we'll do

it on the night of the next full moon. I

will take all the necessary preparations.'

Prodyumna had been feeling strange

after hearing all this, and just he nodded

and said, 'Please do; I will be here.'

Suradasa was relieved, 'That's good, I

am really pleased with you. But even

before that, do come to visit me, I'll

have to get you prepared as well. You've

to do certain things—I'll guide you.'

Prodyumna nodded again and went

on his way to the bihar. He was

thoughtful—the Devi Swaraswati?

Really? He had heard that her

complexion was like the white lotus,

and how beautiful she must be! Even

though the Acharya Basubrata said....

That year it rained heavily on the shaal-piyal-tomal forests by the river Bhadrabati. The sky looked as if some love-lorn woman waited with all her long hair streaming from her chignon, the darkness of the night reflecting the pain she felt for her missing beloved, her sighs were in the blustery winds from the distant wilderness, her very tears fell in the form of heavy rain, and the streaks of lightning in the clouds were flashes of her hope.

On the night of the full moon in Ashara, Prodyumna went to the river bank with Suradasa. The sky was clouded when they reached the place, the liquid darkness had engulfed everything around them.

Prodyumna took a bath in the river and changed his clothes. He understood from the activities of his companion that he was a tantrika. There was a monk at the bihar, who used to be a

disciple of the yogi Padmashambhar. Prodyumna had heard about some of the rituals that tantrikas practiced.

Suradasa had brought with him a load of garlands of red hibiscus. He wore some of them and made Prodyumna wear some too. He lighted a lamp in a small human skull. Prodyumna became exhausted in helping with the arrangements of his *pooja*. But he was so curious as to see to the end of the matter, that he did not even think about the dangers of participating in a strange ritual with an almost unknown tantrika at night. It was late at night when the ritual ended.

Suradasa said, 'All right, Prodyumna, you can start your work. I am done. Be careful though, it all depends on you now.'

There was a sharp, hungry look in his eyes which Prodyumna did not like. But still he sat with his flute and started playing the Meghmaller.

It was absolutely silent. The open space at the front was so dark that nothing was visible. The wind played in

he saw some kind of light. At first he thought it was moonshine, but as he looked carefully, he realized it was different from moonlight. Out of curiosity he went to investigate, and what he saw made him speechless.

It was the same woman! He had just seen her in the meadow. It was the same gloriously beautiful woman with a glowing halo like a glow worm. Prodyumna went closer and saw that her large eyes were half-closed, and she walked around as if in a trance. She was trying to find her way and her face had a perplexed expression.

Suddenly, Prodyumna was terrified. He realized that the entire episode beginning with seeing the Devi at the meadow and everything was unnatural. What the hell was going on! He turned and almost ran off. By the time he reached the bihar, the moon was about to set behind the hills of Kumarsree.

He barely slept and dreamt that in the dark waters of Bhadryavati a goddess had lost her way. However much she tried to find her way up, she was

actually Suradasa. He is not even from Avanti. He is the infamous kapalika Gunadhy. He lied to you to meet his own evil ends."

Prodyumna said hastily, 'But you said...'

'I am coming to that. Listen. The ruins of the Swaraswati temple by the river is an ancient and famous pilgrimage site for the Hindus. Almost two hundred years ago a young singer used to reside there. The temple was not in good shape then, but the myth runs that the singer was such an expert in *Meghmaller* that the Devi Swaraswati would appear before him on the nights of the full moon during rainy seasons. The temple grew to be a site for the pilgrims again. It was said that even after the flutist's death she would appear if any professional played the *Meghmaller*. That Gunadhy was present with Suradasa once at that spot. Suradasa was proficient in *Meghmaller*. The Devi had appeared before him and asked him to request for a boon.

Suradasa prayed to take his place among the greatest of the musicians in the land. And Swaraswati blessed him. Then she asked Gunadhy what he wanted. He was so taken in by the beauty of the goddess that he asked for her very own self. But the Devi said it was not for him to have her. His name might be Gunadhy, full of virtue, but he had no virtue at all. To possess her, one would have to work diligently and spiritually toward it for eons. He had done nothing. After the Devi's departure the fool Gunadhy became all the more enamored of the Devi. At the same time he also got very angry with her and he started looking for a powerful tantrika to imprison her. I know that he took lessons from an old hermit regarding this. But soon realizing what he was after, the hermit sent him away. The older sages of this country know about all these. I did not hear anything of Gunadhy in quite a while. Thought perhaps he had left the land. But after hearing what you said, I am afraid he has succeeded in his mission. He had been working toward this heinous act somewhere. Anyway, now go to the temple and see if you can find him, and if he is still there, inform me.'

Prodyumna did not wait a second, but ran out into the garden where the other students were saying their morning prayers. While walking he saw the artist monk Basubrata sitting under a mango tree on his deer skin seat working on something. But a disgruntled frown was etched on his brows.

Prodyumna did not find Gunadhy at the temple. Even the hermit who had taken refuge there, had disappeared. All he could see were a few earthen pots and some dried fire sticks.

Late that night, Prodyumna left the bihar without informing anybody anything.

A year had passed since then.

After leaving the bihar he went to meet Shunanda to tell her that he was going on a tour and that he would return in a while. Within this one year he had been to Kanchi, North Koshol and Magadha, but had failed to trace Gunadhy.

But while roaming he did hear some interesting rumors.

The famed architect Mihir Gupta of Magadha was directed by the King to sculpt a figure of *BhagwanTathagata*. He took an entire year in finishing his piece, but the face of his Buddha turned out so crude and expressionless that the people of the land could not be sure if it was Buddha's, or Damanak's, the fierce raider of Magadha.

(To be concluded in the next issue)



My mind floats gently on the romance
For falling in love with you
I applaud when the sun rises
The birds sing their little heart out
The panorama fades away and the horizon becomes darkened
But my vivacity does not cease to exist

My love for you grows
Along with flowers bloom, the buds rip open
You're a mantle around me; I bask in your tenderness
Like in a winter morning when the thick mist is all around.
Also in the summer night if no light wind blows
In solemn silence I can endure the intense heat
Your camaraderie can cool my soul
That adds charm to the moon-lit hours

At any roadside cafe
I enjoy coffee with you
It is more refreshing, calming and fortifying
Than any five star luxury hotel warmly offers
For I am not born to walk on my own
As the stars do to the unclouded sky
I try to lay my love on you
And make every effort to bring smile in your face.
(Rubab Abdullah writes from Ohio, USA)