

HISTORICAL/POLITICAL TIMEFRAMES AND NOVEL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HERMAN HESSE'S SIDDHARTHA AND MANUBHAI PANCHOLI'S SOCRATES

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Received : 05-06-2016

Accepted : 20-06-2016

ABSTRACT

In modern times, the purpose of writing a (literary) text has observed a sea change. In Aristotelian frame of criticism loosely extending up to late 19th century, it was believed that the writer writes to appease the emotional realm of one's audience. However, number of works surfacing after the advent of twentieth century has opened up a new frame of writing wherein an act of writing, could be a voice of resistance and a way to develop neo-liberal consciousness among the readers. There are texts that mainly converse with the historical blocks and address the issues of perennial significance for the development of democratic ideals for the generations to come. The texts under the inquiry are of these categories. Herman Hesse's Siddhartha and Manubhai Pancholi's Socrates are the texts that foreground the historical marvels in order to bring modern set of ideals into their respective time-frames. The present paper is an attempt to look at these changing trends within the domain of literary and cultural studies. Apart from that, the paper also tries to look at the loopholes which the very idea of post-modernist style of criticism brings in and briefly present a critique of Roland Barthes's claim prophesying the 'death of the author.'

Key-words: *Historical time frame, resistance, democratic zeal and post war period.*

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Hermann Hesse was a German-born Swiss poet and author, best known for writing the novels *Siddhartha* (1922), *Steppenwolf* (1927) and *The Glass Bead Game* (1943). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946. His themes focus on man's struggle to break away from the rigid structures of civilization and follow his essential and inner spirit. For this, Hesse became a literary cult figure. His widely read and the most popular *Siddhartha* is an allegorical novel which deals with the spiritual

journey of an Indian boy called Siddhartha during the time of the Buddha (Freeman:27).

The story of this novel revolves around a young man who leaves his home and family on a quest for the Truth and undertakes a journey that takes him from the austerities of renunciation to the profligacy of wealth. This journey for the self-realization leads him through the range of human experiences from hunger and want, to passion, pleasure, pain, greed, yearning, boredom, love, despair and hope. As the final

point of this metaphoric voyage it leads him to the river, where he gains peace and eventually wisdom. Written in a prose of almost biblical simplicity and beauty, it is the story of a protagonist's long quest in search of the ultimate answer to the enigma of man's role on this earth. As a young man, Siddhartha meets the Buddha but cannot be content with simply a discipleship: he must work out his own destiny and solve his own doubt—a tortuous road that carries him through the sensuality of a love affair with the beautiful courtesan Kamala, the temptation of success and riches, the heartache of struggle with his own son, to final renunciation and self-knowledge.

On the other hand, the novel of comparison is of late Manubhai Pancholi who is widely regarded as an eminent author, politician and educationist from the region of Gujarat, India. He is popularly known by his pen name, Darshak¹. He had participated in Indian freedom struggle and held several governmental offices following the Independence struggle. He is, especially, remembered for his widely read and translated novels *Zer to Pidha Che Jani Jani* (1952) and *Socrates* (1974). Out of these two, the latter was first published from Ambala in 1974. It is greatly viewed as an outstanding contribution to Gujarati literature for its characterization and portrayal of intellectual conflicts. The credibility of its marvel lies in the fact that it won the Sahitya Akademy Award for the year 1975, the same year, ironically, Darshak was sent to jail.

In this novel Darshak turns to ancient Greece in order to probe the inconsistencies which trouble the Indian society in its search for the democratic ideal. Though, it is widely regarded as a historical novel depicting the bygone ages

of some distant alien land, it, in fact, actualizes and reframes the then contemporary political turmoil. Darshak himself states, “My purpose here is to recreate Socrates in flesh and blood as a foil to the politically mutilated society of present times.” (Trivedi: 122) Socrates, hence, can be regarded as the novel of ideas rather than a historical fiction.

It ought to be noted that the comparison between these two classics cannot be possible on its thematic grounds since they both belong to two different time zones and were written for completely different geographically and culturally centered audiences. Adding to that, such comparison may delimit the covert voices of dissent implicitly lurking under the smooth façade of historical/spiritual themes. Both of these novels under the inquiry are unique in the sense that they were the reactions (more truly a literary response to the oppressive/destructive political culture) to their respective historical time frames. Hence, though, they don't have singular thematic or ideological spectra but their analysis is of vital importance to dilate the perennial significance which gets hardly visible in their critical appreciations till the date. And, this short research piece is an attempt to look at the historical and political time frames on which these novels are set and analyze their political and ideological significance with respect to the philosophical message they offer to their respective audiences. In order to undertake this endeavor, some historical and political understandings of the periods affecting the construction of these literary works require to be examined.

During World War I (1914-1918), Hesse joined the pacifist movement, and his anti-war sentiments gained him extremely strong

criticism. Previously a best-selling and popular author, he was branded as a virtual traitor. Then in 1916, his father died; his son Martin became seriously ill; and his wife suffered a severe nervous disorder and had to be put in a sanatorium. Deeply troubled, he moved to Switzerland, where he remained for the rest of his life. During this period of self-imposed exile, he studied the works of Sigmund Freud and underwent great deal of psychoanalytic treatment meted out by Carl Jung, a well-known analyst of his time. Hesse's profound interest in psychoanalysis and the workings of the subconscious mind has probably its roots in this internal turbulence. This is the time wherein his novel *Siddhartha* gets shaped in his mind. The shaken faith caused by the modern time, the catastrophic impact of Great War and psychological disturbance at personal front turned into a creative force for the creation of this novel. Hence, the understanding of religion that suits the disruptive time-frame caused by the first Great War remains visibly present in it. The protagonist who is in his quest of the meaning of life experiences both the layers of life comprising the religious rites and the worldly pleasure that at the later phase pave way to the attainment of *Buddhatva*².

On the other hand, a figure called Socrates has a unique position in the philosophical world of Western history. But, in his book, Darshak recreates this Western figure setting him into Eastern frame. The novel gets its nebulous formation during the time of national turmoil. On one hand the authoritative rule was knocking at the door of Indian democracy and every voice of dissent was curtailed by the then acting state machinery. The general sentiment of civil society was of the view that the autocratic rule

could not be challenged or turned down by. The reason was primarily because the Indian democracy was then one of the emerging ones and most of the parts of India were not properly trained into the Western frame of education to understand the modern democratic setup. On the other hand, the opposition wasn't believed to be stronger enough to counter the controlling regime. Those who dared raise their voice were sent to the bar and the press was coming down gradually under political surveillance. The literary circle of India including Gujarat was greatly offended and disturbed with such internal political incursion during this time of upheaval. At times, many voices emerged from the literary and political margins to awaken people against the totalitarian regime and the *Socrates* by Darshak follows this rebellious trail. But the novel looks at the matter with the perspective leading to its reader to a radical realization of what might have happened and not just what had happened.

The novel is written in the third person narration and it begins with the shocking event of death sentence to the rebellious Dayomid following the dialogue of Socrates and Dayomid's son. Darshak's art of narration is very unique as it unfolds every character in a very subtle and apt manner. The fictionalizing part of the novel is very significant since it has interwoven the grave concerns of the writer pertaining to his age. In order to understand it, the close analysis of its characters is required. The begins with a very cruel event of political killing of a rebellious character namely The novel creation of Medea and Apolodores are meant to address some of the important issues such as redefining the status of the slaves and poor and thereby challenging the existing status

quo. Moreover, Darshak transforms the character of Medea which has its reference in Euripides' play. The recasting of Medea as a positive force resembles the similar kind of metamorphose of Duryodhan to Suyodhan as takes place in Bhasa's *Urubhangam*. The presence of Medea represents the radical force of transgression though here as a positive embodiment of the author's mouthpiece. Hence there is a mark of inter-textuality in this novel which remains astonishingly invisible in almost all the seminal critical works attempted on this novel till the date. The core aim behind the writing of this novel is to raise a type of collective moral, philosophical and political sense that may help its reader to wrestle with the impending political tyranny being orchestrated by the then state establishments.

On the other hand, the separate creation of Siddhartha and Gotama has a mark of ambivalence that remains apparently visible in almost all the modernist writers. The shaken faith following the aftermath of the first Great War and the quest of reviving one's hope for life and humanity is at the centre of this novel. Hence, the prophetic words, "I can fast, I can think and I can wait", reveals the mood of the age itself (Freeman: 45).

Therefore, it's not proper to look at these texts as the sole creation of art and hence bereft of authorial purview because the anticipation of the author's visualization is of greater significance in the analysis of such texts. The literary marvel of Darshak opens up the

panorama of impending danger and remains prophetic in true sense while Hesse's creation is an attempt to re-affirm the lost faith. Hence the Barthean idea of text as barren of authorial meaning may limit the underlying significance of such texts. To restrict a text dealing with such critical political and historical time frame will diminish the value of its sensitive aspects. The political and historical understanding of its background will certainly help the reader learn its covert message in its entirety. This article is an attempt to open up this debate of having no authority is similar to have a rule-less society.

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(Endnotes)

1. Darshak: a Sanskrit term for the spectator
2. Salvation or Nirvan.