



Tracing the theme of eroticism versus asceticism in Bhagwaticharan Verma's Novel: *The Dancer, Her lover and the Yogi*

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Abstract

The Dancer, Her Lover, and The Yogi, originally written in Hindi as *Chitrlekha* by Bhagwaticharan Verma, explores the eternal conflict between sensuality and asceticism through its complex characters. Set during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya, the novel follows three primary figures: Beejgupta, a feudal lord who indulges in sensual pleasures; Kumargiri, a young and disciplined yogi committed to spiritual detachment; and Chitrlekha, a beautiful dancer who captivates both men with her allure. The novel begins with the philosophical question of what constitutes sin, prompting two disciples, Vishaldeva and Shwetank, to seek answers from Kumargiri and Beejgupta, respectively. As the story unfolds, the characters' lives intertwine, revealing their internal struggles between worldly desires and spiritual discipline. Beejgupta, though a pleasure-seeker, loves Chitrlekha deeply, while Kumargiri, initially resistant to worldly temptations, succumbs to the passion aroused by her beauty. In a dramatic turn, Kumargiri's strict asceticism ultimately leads to his fall from grace, while Beejgupta, after experiencing both the heights of pleasure and the depths of despair, renounces his material life. The novel offers a profound meditation on the tension between the body's desires and the soul's spiritual aspirations, depicting the transformative power of love and self-realization.

Bhagwaticharan verma's novel *The Dancer Her Lover and The Yogi*, originally written in Hindi as *Chitrlekha* (1934). It is translated in English by Pratibha Vinod Kumar and AK Kulshreshth. It is Bhagwaticharan Verma's second novel which enjoyed immense popularity with the Hindi-reading public for a long time. In fact, Bhagwaticharan Verma

became popular particularly as an author of this novel. It is among the earliest works of historical illusion as it has for its background the historical period of the reign of Chandragupta Maurya.

Novel opens with a question-"what is sin?"-being posed by one of the disciples of Mahaprabhu Ratnambar, ...for the answer. He

sends his one disciple, Vishaldeva to the ascetic Kumargiri. In the words of Mahaprabhu Ratnambar Here I quote from the text ...

“Kumargiri is a yogi; he claims to have conquered all the desires of the world. He is dispassionate and detached. He holds that he has realized true bliss. He has vigour and charisma, physical and mental strength. People say that he has mastered his emotions. He is young, but youth and celibacy have given him a divine aura. To him the world is a means to achieve his goal of heaven. This kumargiri will be your guru, Vishaldeva.”(p.7)

The other, disciple Shwetank is sent, to the feudal lord Beejgupta for the answer to this complex question which has baffled the greatest minds for ages. Mahaprabhu Ratnambar tells of him: here I quote from the text ...

Beejgupta revels in the senses. His heart is filled with the ardour of youth, and his eyes have the red tinge of intoxication. Sensual pleasures dance in his palatial mansion. He finds life's pleasures in bejeweled bowls of wine. He enjoys glamour and merriment, and has no dearth of wealth. He is handsome, and all the desires of the world dwell in his heart. Elephants sway at the entrance to his mansion; dancers intoxicated with their beauty pirouette inside. He does not believe in God—perhaps he has never thought about God. He is not bothered about heaven or hell. Entertainment and enjoyment are his means and end. (p.8)

The famous dancer. Chitrlekha, the beautiful companion of Beejgupta, is in the centre of the novel whose unique personality governs the lives of Kumargiri and Beejgupta. ...Verma describes her in the novel;

Chitrlekha was a dancer. She was not a prostitute....

So...The novel presents two divergent pictures of life-full blooded experience of the senses on one hand and denial of sensual pleasures on the other. The theme is eroticism versus asceticism has an eternal appeal. All the three principal characters are allured by the glamour of materialism and glory of spiritualism at one stage or other of their lives.

The aim is to show that allurements, whether secular or spiritual always attracts a person by its irresistible charm. Everyone has in him beastly as well as divine qualities. The senses automatically move towards the worldly pleasures while the spirit wants to soar high and experience the consciousness. Chitrlekha is allured by Kumargiri's spiritual powers and longs for a supersensuous experience with him, whereas Kumargiri becomes a slave of overriding passion by her bewitching beauty and behaves like a common man of the world.

Beejgupta stands for eroticism. The beautiful court dancer of Patliputra, Chitrlekha is Beejgupta's beloved and companion of pleasure-filled nights. He is deeply in love with her, and their intimacy has an almost matrimonial quality. He deals in amorous play of love with her in his palace where music, extraordinarily beautiful women dancing as if in intoxication, and wine make an environment ideal for their sensual indulgence. Though he is "thorough sensuous," as Vikil in his book *Hindi Upanyason Ka Manovagyanik Mulyankan*. says, "yet he hates debauchery." [1] That is why he loves Chitrlekha like a wife. He makes it clear to Mrityuanjay. "Sir, I told you I am not married according to the shastra, . . . In the eyes of people I am unmarried, ... in truth, I am married." Chitrlekha is my wife. Though I have not married her according to the shastra; and according to the social code. I cannot do so, yet my relationship with Chitrlekha is like that of husband wife. "I believe in love" (p.77). Vikil again says, "By loving Chitrlekha, Beejgupta is not a debauch but he is an attached one" [2]. It is to his palace that Shwetank is sent to know sin

by living in his company like a servant as well as a "gurubhai" (disciple of the same preceptor).

"Eros is the guiding principle of his life" [3]. He believes that:

"Love is related to soul, not to nature. The thing that is related to nature is lust because lust is, always related to the external. Lust aims at the body which nature has made beautiful. In love, one is attached to soul not to body. Change is the law of nature not of soul. The relation of soul is immortal." (p.66)

At the end, he decides to go on his journey to forget Chitrlekha. After giving his wealth and title in charity to Shwetank and uniting him with Yashodhara in marriage, Beejgupta decides to leave Patliputra for good. Life holds no more allurements and attractions for him. He has tasted wealth and pleasures and went through the sufferings and agonies of Hell. But Chitrlekha who accepted Kumargiri as her master and guru, is soon disillusioned by him when she finds him lusting for her and even though he manages to seduce her by treachery. She realizes the importance which Beejgupta holds in her life. She returns to Patliputra in time to join him and become a wandering couple who have renounced everything and they have found the fountain of true love in their hearts.

Kumargiri, is completely opposite to Beejgupta. He is a young Yogi (ascetic) of high degree. His life is based on extreme austerities. He is young but his youth and Vairagya (non-attachment) have produced a supernatural power in him. There is a unique radiance on his beautiful face. Intelligence and brilliance; mental and physical power are peculiar traits of his personality. He leaves in solitude in a hut in the outskirts of Patliputra and practices yoga and meditation there. Here his mind is at peace as he finds no worldly distractions tormenting him. And in this way he thinks that he has mastered his desires and so he lives in complete detachment. Moreover, he thinks that it is on account of the desires that a man commits sin.

He has based his life on complete restraint and discipline. He is held in awe and reverence by the people of Patliputra.

But despite all his claims of conquering the world and worldly desires, Kumargiri fears the very presence of a woman. He thinks that "woman is darkness, attachment, illusion and lust. There is no place of a woman in the enlightened world of knowledge" (p. 29). When Beejgupta and Chitrlekha arrive in his hut and ask shelter for the night, he is badly disturbed. He hesitates to allow them to stay in the ashrama. But when he engages himself in argument with Chitrlekha, he is attracted towards her on account of her philosophical arguments. Her knowledge influences him and her image is deeply imprinted in his unconscious. "His ego is so strong that after being attracted towards Chitrlekha once, he wants to have control over her in all circumstances" (p.22). Veena Agrawal in her book *Chitrlekha: Srijnatmak Anukriti* says, "Kumargiri's ego is hostile to power of nature. It is not his inborn trait of his character but is born out of his suppression of natural instincts." [4]

Kumargiri's untimely and unnatural suppression of human instinct now creates a conflict in his mind. Vikil averts, "Chitrlekha's presence awakens his prudence, . . . makes him aware of the fact that escaping the natural instincts is a self-deception. It is not an attempt to pacify the mind but control it forcibly." [5] So in his attempts to keep lust away from his life, he is unconsciously attracted towards it. He finds himself attracted towards the world. In the banquet at Mrityanjaya's palace he is not only allured by the bewitching beauty of Chitrlekha but also of Yashodhara's peaceful countenance. He starts comparing them.

Both were extraordinary beauties. In one intoxication was paramount and in the other peace, Chitrlekha's intoxication was horrible—her dance was the image of her vitality. But Yashodhara's peace was profound like a

deep ocean in which one can forget himself. Chitrlekha was the vitality of life whereas Yashodhara the peace of death. (p.74)

Later on Chitrlekha's presence in his hut once again disturbs Kumargiri badly. His unconscious mind wants to embrace her in passionate love, to possess her and re-establish his ego which she has hurt. But consciously he is aware that her very presence can lead him to his downfall. He does not make a quick and firm decision. He just refuses to initiate her: "Initiating you means – fall, a great fall. . . A limitless and profound downfall. I know you and also myself. To raise you is difficult; but to let me fall is easy" (p. 85). Obviously, Kumargiri is aware of the consequences of his falling in love with Chitrlekha. He sees in it a great fall from the path of his sadhana (spiritual discipline). But when Chitrlekha remains adamant in her decision and tells him that she has come to love him, he thinks about love and lust: here he questions "Is love possible by keeping lust aside?" (p.87). Finally, he is forced to accept her in order to initiate her. He tells Vishaldeva: "Life's greatness lies in fighting with lust, and i am going to do that. So i am going to give diksha to Chitrlekha" (p.88). Now he decides to get control over his weakness for a woman by keeping Chitrlekha in his own hut. He wants to gain a victory over lust. So he keeps her in his hut as a test on his way of sadhana.

Kumargiri is allured by the charm of Chitrlekha 's beauty. His mind is not absorbed in Samadhi. He longs for the carnal pleasures of flesh like normal human being. His dormant sexuality is aroused and he longs to copulate with Chitrlekha. He tells her: I Quote "So far I have worshipped neerakaar (the formless one), and now i want to embrace saakaar (the concrete). Understand! I am going to do an experiment – you will have to help me in that experiment. (p. 127).

This happened because Kumargiri has only spiritual experience. He does not have any

experience of the senses. Veena Agarwal also says that Kumargiri "becomes a yogi before experiencing the pleasures of a householder's life. He could not keep him away from worldly attachment despite considering the desires sinful and claiming that he has conquered them." [6] As such, his unnatural suppression of desires proves detrimental for him. He loses his peace of mind as well as falls before a dancer. Vikil also says, "It is only Kumargiri's conscious mind which considers itself free from lust; through his unconscious mind he is compelled to do all that which a common man would do." [7]

Ultimately Kumargiri resorts to falsehood and treachery in order to win Chitrlekha's love and heart. He thinks: "If Chitrlekha stops loving Beejgupta, it is possible, it is definite that she will surrender herself to me. So he devises a heinous plan to possess her. He tells her a fabricated story. He tells her that Beejgupta has married Yashodhara as Chitrlekha has deceived him in love. To Overcome with excessive grief and frustration, Chitrlekha does not resist his amorous advances. He seizes her hand and once again expresses his love; "Love! love is my dharma now.

"Kumargiri started speaking like a madman, You have come to degrade me; I'm also ready for that."

Veena Agarwal says, "In his effort to suppress his desires unnaturally he falls from the high throne of a yogi in such a way that he doesn't remain a common man but earns the titles of 'beast' and 'lecher'. But at the same time Kumargiri acknowledges his downfall and considers his sexual experience with Chitrlekha as an essential step in his spiritual rise" [8].

To conclude.... stands for eroticism and how his character in the due course of time changes from Bhogi (pleasure seeker) to Yogi (ascetic). On the contrary Kumargiri stands for asceticism, in his effort to suppress his desires

unnaturally he falls from the high throne of a yogi and turns into Bhogi. Between these two characters stands Chitrlekha, a court dancer and a beauty par excellence, who comes in contact with these men and opens new vistas of sensual experience for them. Ultimately Beejgupta becomes a natural renunciate after enjoying all the pleasures, and also experiences pain and dejection of life. He sacrifices his wealth and title for the sake of Shwetank whereas Kumargiri falls from the high plane of spiritual excellence and earns such degrading addresses as 'a wretch' and 'a lecher'.

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