



THE OTHER WORLD - TINY WORLD OF MALTI

By

Dr Laxman Kumar Jain

What inspired me to write this paper was the comment made by noted scholar Alok Rai who considered the world of city in Godan as utterly disjointed theme.¹ According to him the representation of the urban character by Premchand represents a crisis in Godan. To my mind without knowing one thing you can't understand the other. To know Hori's world better it is necessary to understand its corollary, i.e. the other world.

The other world is constituted by congeries of character, separated in time and space, provided a corollary to the first world – Hori and his surroundings. This emerges as a contrast and opposite, the limit to the first world, showing us what exactly the latter is. In unfolding the discursive discourse of the second, their ideal contradiction, paradoxes of their cultural, economic and emotional world, in short their being and thinking we come to know what is generally said as the emergence of professional middle classes, doctors, lawyers, brokers, financiers, industrialists, professors along with a group of declining and indebted landlords.² And finally we encounter the sad truth of a blighted path of social transformation in the whole gamut of happening. Malti too was the part of this other world. The every character of the city wanted to befriend her. But Malti had her other anxieties and responsibilities. She was misperceived by the actors of other world. This paper discusses about her struggle although there is no thematic unity. Malti in the end underwent a transformation partly because of Mehta and partly because of her empathy with villagers. What was the nature of her humanism would be discussed in a separate chapter.

Malti to all appearance a butterfly was really a bit frugal and diligent. Her father was one of those rare and uncommon person who earns lakhs out of a gift of the gab. Arranging loans for zamindars, helping to sell of their property, pulling them out of tight corners, with the help of high officials, these made up his life; resourceful in turning impossible into possible especially hobnobbing in the company of Raja and Princes, he was the broker, high above the ordinary genres – known as touts. In the illustrious tradition of Nonveau Riche, he was strongly inclined towards the belief that English education radically transforms the person.

Mr. Kaul realized only one third of his ambition with Malti's education, with a paralytic stroke, he was able to pull on only with loans from old friends on the demand, who helped him out for old times' sake. Malti's two sisters, Saroj and Wardha, were always nagging with each other, for the

¹ Alok Rai, "A Kind of Crisis: Godan and the Last Writings of Munshi Premchand", *Journal of School of Languages, JNU, Monsoon, 1974.*

² Ashok Sen: *Ishwar Chand Vidhya Sagar and Illusive Milestone, Anil Seal: Emergence of Indian Nationalism, competition and Collaboration in Later Nineteenth Century, Cambridge University Press, 1968; B.B Mishra: Indian Middle Classes, 1961; A. R. Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1976.*



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

former got better attention. Malti was to pacify and once when they were picking up, she tactfully changed the subject and enquired about Mehta's lectures in the woman's league.

Saroj, the younger sister summed up his position as erratic, among uproarious scene, he said, "Men and women had different spheres cut out for them, and that women interfering with men's sphere was the greatest sin of this century. Malti ridiculed the lady Hukku, on hearing from Saroj about her dribbling in philosophy and decided to invite Mr. Mehta to women's league. Mehta's aesthetics had a romantic touch and he felt proud with audience packed. Ladies turned up in finery including Malti who was in a brand new saree with blouse of latest cut, her face attentively made up like a bride. The ladies in their effort to vanquish Mehta were still feeling diffident as if one spark of truth would pulverize the mountain of incompetence. Among the audience also to its credit were Omkarnath, Rai Sahab and Mirza Khurshid. In his addressing the audience, Deviji, Mehta started to bring his logic forth, "Why the women don't call man God because he is not the pivot, he is the taker, he is sought to wrest his rights from others.....struggle and violence are the basic traits of his character." Omkarnath got flared up with Rai Sahab's appreciation of Mehta's acumen to get around women. He buttressed his argument in the scheme of evolution of human civilization, "I consider the position of women, superior to man in same way as love and sacrifice are always superior to discord and war. Out of pride man has attached greater importance to his destructive capacity. Malti's proposed rejoinder was receding far away. Omkarnath's furious interjection was thwarted by Mirza. Mehta explicated the difference between men and women lucidly in a full floated eulogy on the latter. Women were above the man as light above the darkness, sacrifice, non-violence and forgiveness are still distant ideas for men but woman breathes them naturally. Rai Sahab appreciated the ring of convictions in Mehta's voice and Mirza ridiculed Mr Khanna for his helplessness in captivating Malti. Mehta, in his full-blooded, logic chopping went to the extreme, dismissing all that men has created, philosophy, scientific discovery, warriors etc. There is no peace in man-made civilization and no sense of fellow-feeling. Mehta is driven to maddening logic in his shower of praises on women's life and virtues, and discouraging of women imitating men's instinct to violence and competitive wage. Asked curiously, "does it suit to swan to leave the eloquent loveliness of Mansarovar." and start killing sparrows... He continued, "Do you think that adult and universal franchise will lead to a better society. Why do you run after illusory pernicious and artificial rights and renounce those rights which nature has bestowed on you. Do you want to abandon this factory where man's destiny is fashioned and run to those factories where he is crushed and bled white....the women in the west wants to be independent so that she can enjoy life to the hilt....they have surrendered their modesty – their priceless trait – at the alter of pleasure. His castigation of western women was complete and adoring the virtues of Indian women was also full.

Mehta, after his thunderous speech went with Malti together but Mehta teased her, revealed his mind on Malti's intimacy with Khanna that he can shoot anyone coming between him and his wife. Finally Malti started sobbing and got into her house forgetting that she had invited Mehta for dinner. The relation between Khanna and his wife, Govindi, got strained overtime. Khanna was a filthy rich,



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

posh bungalow tastefully furnished, had a costly car and positively unbelievable bank account. But these things didn't fascinate Govindi. In the rolling delicious oceans she remained thirsty. If her husband did not have sense to appreciate her internal beauty and ran after their society girl that it was her misfortune. Mrs. Khanna found relief in her poetic outburst; every word was speaking the tale of her tragic life; her longing to live in utopia where peace and bliss pervaded. Khanna made fun of her poems and sometimes toned them up. The world of wealth rising higher daily threatened their conjugal life. Even after having fallen from grace, she was his slave; she couldn't see life without him.

Mr. Khanna had an ominous day. Shares had registered a sharp decline, the workers in the sugar mill had struck and the news from Lahore that somebody had filed a civil suit against his bank was the last straw. Bhisham, his baby son ever brought forth the necessity of sending for a doctor – Malti or Dr Nag. About Malti, Govindi said I don't think she is much of a doctor; she can only cure man's heart. Malti's name was dragged between the two, leaving Khanna fuming. Khanna's boasting about Malti's feelings about him, Govindi said to her, "You are a pony, she will give you grass, pat your mouth and stroke your flanks. She keeps you in trim for a ride. She carries a thousand senile specimens like you in her hand bag.." In an excited moment wild with rage, Khanna got up and slapped Govindi sharply signaling to her that they had now come to the parting of the ways and that Khanna had slammed the door of affection on her. She started developing an admiration for Malti. Good, there were few women like Malti in society, kept men in their proper places. She left Khanna's house, Govindi getting down from Tonga on a watery, grassy land started thinking wonderingly. She thought of death, her mind perturbed, she thought of earning a livelihood probably by things from Gandhi Ashram and hog them around, at the most people would point out there goes Khanna's wife. This is how her fallen condition and middle class upbringing clashed with each other.

Mehta came as an arbiter, and in course of his conversation he made his impression clear about Mrs. Govindi. "In florid expressiveness, there are very few women for whom I have serious regard, you are one of them. Your patience, sacrifice and love are unparalleled; you are the embodiment of my ideal womanhood. When Govindi sounded about Mehta's poeticism, he again went into the Rhapsodies. "What the world call sorrow is really joy for the poet, wealth and luxury, beauty and power, knowledge and intelligence allure the world, but they hold no attraction for the poet." The things which hold sway over his imagination are tears which flow from frustrated hopes, the lost memories broken hearts, philosophy tinkers with mysteries of life, poetry becomes one with them. Mehta appreciated her virtue but she said, "Of what worth is a woman if she can't keep her husband happy/ sometimes I think that I should learn this art from Malti. Where I have failed she has succeeded. While I cant win the hearts of my dear ones, she has won the hearts of others. I beg you, I beg you with folded hands, save me from Malti." She could speak no more. Her words were drowned in uncontrollable sobbing. Mehta had never risen so high in his own esteem, not even when the French Academy styled a piece by him as one of the best philosophical treatises of the century. The image which he worshiped in his heart of hearts stood before him as a suppliant. He felt he could pierce through mountains and swim oceans: like a child on a rocking horse who deludes himself into



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

thinking he is riding through the sky. He forgot for the moment that Govindi had set an impossible task before him; that he would to sacrifice his principles to accomplish it.

He said with assurance: "I never knew that she caused you such torment. A curse on my eyes, my imagination, my sense, that I could not see such plain facts. But remember, it's not easy to deprive a lioness of her prey."

"A woman's heart is like earth. You can grow fruits on it, or thistles: it depends on what seeds you use."

"You must be regretting having met me today."

"On the contrary, Deviji, today I have experienced the greatest joy of my life. You won't believe me when I say this."

"I have placed such a heavy responsibility on you."

"I am prepared to do anything for you. If I perish while carrying out your wishes I shall think myself lucky. No, no poetic exaggeration. This is the essence of truth as I see it. I can't overcome the temptation of telling you what the ideal of my life is. I am a devotee of nature and I want to see man in his true colors; man, who laughs when happy, weeps when in pain, and kills when angry. Those who try to subjugate pain and joy, those who think that tears are a sign of weakness, and laughter of sign of shallowness, I can't live in harmony with them. I look at life as a magnificent sport, where there is no place for censure, jealousy and bitterness. I don't brood over the past; I don't worry about the future. The present is the only thing which meaning for me. Why, we have so little strength of purpose that if we spread it over the past and the future, it will just dissipate. Where there is life, activity, joy and love, there is god. To make life happy is the true worship and right deliverance. The knowledge which kills the soul is not knowledge but a grinding stone." Mehta accompanied Govindi back towards home.

"This is not my home", Govindi said.

"No Deviji. That's your home and will remain your home. You have created it, you have given life to it. Motherhood enjoys the most exalted status in life. In such an exalted position, one is above insult or humiliation. A mother gives life", Mehta said. Govindi said with slight impatience: "I am not only a mother, I am a woman too." "A woman is mother first and last. All her other qualities flow from the cardinal virtue of her being a mother. Motherhood is the greatest worship, the highest sacrifice, and the brightest victory over life" was Mehta's reply. "As for Khanna, all I can say about him", Mehta continued, "is that you will again be enshrined in his heart." Three things were there on Raisahab's agenda : 1: Marriage of his daughter 2: Election 3: Raisahab had to institute a law suit which entailed fifty thousand rupees by way of court fees alone, apart from other expenses, on behalf of his son. But his brother in-law had taken the property in his own possession compromise with him failed. His legal adviser had suggested him in no uncertain terms that he would win. Marriage was finalized with Digvijay Singh whose first wife had died and he had participated in national movement in secret.



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

Government knew about it and yet governor visited him once or twice in the course of the year. Kanwer Sahab did not have any objection because Raisahab was a member of the legislative council. Election too was very important because Rajasurya Pratap Singh had decided to defeat him. Even if he had to incur many lakhs Raisahab could not ignore the challenge. The matrimonial alliance between Raisahab and Digvijay Singh made Raja Sahab annoyed. So Tankha's trick had failed. Raja Sahab wanted RaiSahab's prestige grind in the dust. Raisahab after having disappointed with Tankha had called on to Khanna. Khanna said gravely "If I were you I would not stand for election this year and would have concentrated instead on the civil suit as far marriage goes I would settle with Digvijay. It's not good to take along on that Digvijay is my friend and the question of dowry would not figure". " I am not a banker I am a Zamidar" said RaiSahab. It is a question of prestige too. Further she is my only daughter. I must spend lavishly my own property at the least computation is worth fifty lakhs. The value of my in-law's property is about the same. A burden of five or six lakhs on such a huge property is next to nothing said Raisahab. But Khanna disagreed. Raisahab was requesting for a loan. Landlords were losing to the bankers. "Is my prestige not worth even two lakhs so that I can fight election?" Khanna agreed on to finance but would take commission from Raisahab. Then he started talking about Malti, how she returned the French watch that Khanna had specially got for her. Raisahab was pleased internally showed sympathy with Khanna. Rai said even if one concedes that she is in love with Mehta, it is unbecoming of her to break off all relations with you. Khanna said that "I knew she was like a parrot to me. The pity is that I did not realize it earlier. I wasted thousand of rupees on her. Now she does not even show courtesy to me. As far doctor Mehta I'll have him packed off. I will make things too hot for him in the city." Mehta entered and wanted *Chanda* to be collected for women gymnasium. Mehta showed the list to the Raisahab. Raja Surya Pratap Singh has donated five thousand rupees. Raisahab was lost in thought name of SuryaPratapSingh's five thousand rupees had disheartened him. Then Raisahab gave five thousand rupees. Khanna did not give even a penny." These people are Rajas" Khanna said. " you are the Raja of Rajas" Mehta said. You rule over them. They mortgage their residence with you, shows, how Zamidar were indebted to bankers. Mehta told Khanna that our national movement is flourishing because of you and the foundation stone of gymnasium would be led by Govindi. Khanna picked up a quarrel with Govindi. Dak arrived. Khanna was happy. Sugar was up. He was happy also because Agnihotri committee's recommendation to determine the price of sugarcane was declined by the Government. This was a matter between the mill owners and the cultivators. Government had nothing to do with it. Malti came and rebuked Khanna. Khanna gave a cheque of rupees one thousand. Malti told him that it was she who accepted gracefully the gift Khanna sent to him. Otherwise she has turned down gift from many other persons. Raisahab's star was in the ascendancy. All three his wishes were realized:

1-The marriage of his daughter was celebrated with great joy.

2-He won the law-suit.

3-He not only was returned to the council but he also became the home member. By winning the civil case he stepped into the first rank of the Zamidars. He was conferred with the title



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

of Rajah. At the investiture ceremony (when the Governor formally conferred the title on him) his body thrilled to the core with the spirit of loyalty. This was the life! What a mistake to have got entangled in the National movement. The landlords' interest lay with colonial state. That only brought him a bad name, eroded his finances, landed him in jail and disgraced him in the eyes of the officials. The Deputy Superintendent of Police, who had arrested him at the time of Civil Disobedience Movement, today stood before him abjectly. The greatest triumph of his life came when his old vanquished antagonist, Raja Surya Pratap Singh, offered the hand of his daughter to the Raisahb's son, Rudrapal Singh.

Raisahab's son Rudrapal Singh was studying for his M.A. - He was full of youth, idealism and self confident.

Although Raisahab did not like to put pressure on his son, in matters of matrimony, he was confident that his son would abide by his decision. He put a long distance call to Rudrapal. Rudrapal refused. Raisahab got furious. The next day the Raisahab himself went down to Lucknow. Both were fully prepared for the situation: a tussle between experience and obduracy. Saroj was not to Raisahab's liking. She was after all the sister of Malti. Refused by Rudrapal was like a thunder bolt. He used threat and temptation; but it did not work. Raisahab said, "If they had offered us a penniless girl of that family, I would have thought myself lucky". Even the question of elevating prestige through this alliance did not work. He then thought of Mehta. He could convince Malti for not letting Saroj to marry with Rudrapal. He was even willing to pay money for this. But Rudrapal was determined to marry Saroj. To Raisahab, his minister ship, position, property was all like faded flowers. The son had rebelled against him when he revealed that he had already married Saroj. He reached to Mehta saying that it is a question of prestige. He asked him prevail on Malti and he would make Malti in charge of the lady Dufferin Hospital. Mehta said "if riches were the criterion of prestige, why, the Rajasahab would not have stood awed for hours in the presence of that naked Baba. I hear he even plays Salaams to his area's police inspector. Is that prestige"? And when Raisahab objected about the fact of Saroj being Malti's sister Mehta reminded of transformation in Malti's character. How she is serving Govindi and her children who were ill. But Raisahab had given a word to Suryapratap Singh. Problem was complicated. Tankha came to Raisahab, started criticising Suryapratap. But when Suryapratap came to meet Raisahab, Tankha's double game got exposed. He was a broker after all. When Suryapratap asked about the marriage of his daughter and Rudrapal, Raisahab apprised him of the latest developments. But Suryapratap had inkling of it, because Rudrapal had already written a letter to his daughter. Suryapratap revealed his feudal hangover saying that he would have the girl kidnapped. A persuasion does not work, force should be the order of the day. In Raisahab there was a tussle between old and new. He too thought of application of force but then dropped the idea. It is the twentieth century not the twelfth, he said. "I cannot tell how Rudrapal will react to it. But from the human point of view..." "Why dragged in human point of views?" The Rajasahab interrupted. "Don't you see that even today sensuality gets the better of man? Would there be wars otherwise? As long as man lives, he won't be able to curb the animal in him." Each stuck to his ground. But Rudrapal had a liberal attitude. The following day Rudrapal and Saroj sailed for England. The relationship between



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

father and son had broken. Rudrapal filed a suit through Tankha against Raisahab for rendition of accounts and obtained a decree for ten lakhs. The Raisahab was wounded because his prestige had gone that to by his own son. More troubles awaited him. He learned about his daughter Menakshi and her husband, Digvijaya Singh, did not get on too well. Digvijaya Singh was a debauch and a dipsomaniac. How could Menakshi have any respect for such a man? She joined the Women's Club. Acting on Miss Sultana's suggestion, Menakshi filed a suit against her husband for alimony. She wanted to blacken his name. Digvijaya filed a counter-case against her for adultery. Raisahab wanted to hush it all up. Menakshi would not listen to him. Finally Digvijaya lost and she had won. But the dream world of Raisahab had created for himself troubled before his eyes. The new estate (on the strength of which he had taken loans) had slipped out of his hands, but the loans were still intact. But his salary fell short in maintaining his luxurious life. And he was forced to extort money from his tenants on various pretexts.

CONCLUSION:

The other world was an arena of discourse of elite. The actor in this arena wanted to befriend a woman Malti. She was misperceived by most of the character operating in the city society of Lucknow. There was mutual jealousy among them, typical of the middle class milieu. Problem and tension here was in their understanding and ideological world, not in the actual life as it was there in the First World (Hori and His Surroundings).

The domain of knowledge and capacity of abstraction was instrumental in power relation. Diversified by their different professional activities, they were united on the one point, their distinction from common man. That the contrast was between a huge estate and a small plot of land and ambition of possessing a cow and not car and bank balance becomes clear. The relationship between banker and Zamidar, professor and doctor, a broker and council member was that of one and of all and one for of all was typical of this milieu. Their mutual struggle to be friend woman Malti also reveals to us the crucial barometer of niceties of their cultural world. Their participation in national movement was called for by the desire of self elevation rather than any altruistic desire to serve the nation. Their contradiction, paradoxes are clear to us in the narrative that we have followed in the text. And finally we are encounter blighted path of social transformation.