EXPLORING SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN R. K. NARAYAN'S THE GUIDE AND BHABANI BHATTACHARYA'S HE WHO RIDES A TIGER

Naveen K. MEHTA[1]

Abstract

Spirituality is the drawing out and infusion of spirit in one's life. It is also realized as an active and passive process. Spirituality is also described as a capacity and tendency that is innate and unique to all persons. It moves the individual toward knowledge, love, meaning, peace, hope, transcendence, connectedness, comparison, wellness and wholeness. Spirituality is one's character or quality that makes one transcend the barriers of worldliness, caste, creed and sensuality and realize one's connection with the Truth. The present paper aims to explore the spiritual consciousness in R.K. Narayan's The Guide and Bhabani Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger.

Keywords: Spirituality, life, self-realization, non-attachment, sacrifice.

Introduction

Spirituality is the realization of universality of truth and the experience of bliss. Therefore, spirituality leads one to search for and discover meaning in life, a meaning that goes beyond a merely material experience, however successful. This is a deeply personal search, which can bring a person to inner peace even in the presence of adverse circumstances. Spirituality is a state of interconnectedness, an intangible reality and animating, integrating life-force that cannot be comprehended by human reason alone but is nonetheless as important as reason, intellect, and emotion in accounting for human behavior.

To Indians, spiritual enlightenment has always been represented as the ultimate goal of life, the one thing that gives it meaning and purpose. The average individual, however, would need many incarnations to become enlightened, to see God, to become one the Absolute, to merge one's mind with cosmic consciousness, to become spiritual. Those who follow the fast track, mostly men are *Sadhus* or *Swamis*[1], the "spiritual men" of India. They abstain from sex, cut all family tie-ups, no possessions, no house, wear little or no clothing and eat little and simple food. Usually they live by themselves, on the fringes of others and spend their days in devotion to their chosen deity. Some perform magical rituals to make contact with gods, practice intense forms of *yoga*[2]and meditation to increase their spiritual powers and acquire mystical knowledge.

According to the ***Bhagwad Gita***[3], "he, who performs all actions as his duties without a desire for their fruits, is the true *Sannyasi* and a *Yogi* as well, and not one who shrinks his duties like sacrifices, rites and social service."[1] They have no personal

[1] PhD., Reader & Head, Communication Skills Department, Mahakal Institute of Technology, Ujjain (MP), India

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attachment or private ambitions, but embody in their own spirit the freedom of the world. They are: "Solitary souls who have not any personal attachments or private ambitions but embody in their own spirit the freedom of the world. They take on the wideness of the whole earth, dwell in love and walk in righteousness. The social order regards the *Sannyasi* as a parasite since he does not contribute to it materially and does not care for its forms. The state looks on him with suspicion as he does not function in any industrial factory, social system or political machine. These *Sannyasis* do not serve our policies that make the world unsafe for human life, do not promote our industries the mechanize persons, and do not support our national egoisms that provoke wars. Patriotism is not enough for these fine souls life, and not India's life or England's life, demands their devotion. They look upon all men and all groups as equal."[2]

In the ***Bhagvad Gita***, it is said that fearlessness, purity of mind, steadiness in knowledge, concentration, charity, self-control, sacrifice, self-discipline, practice of austerity and simplicity, non-mischievousness, self-denial, composures of mind, truthfulness, spirit of accusation, compassion to all beings, absence of malice and too much pride, gentleness, un-covetousness, forgiveness, cleanliness, fortitude - all these are the assets of a man who is born with divine nature. These accomplish transformation, elevation and renunciation of mind and transmutation of self quickly and surely to achieve which otherwise needs many births and complicate processes of acquisition of knowledge from the *vedas*[4] and scriptures of through self-purification through meditation or observance of penances.

The concept of spirituality has been regarded as the prime source of 'self-realization'. This self-realization leads one to the path of salvation or renunciation. The process of renunciation has been recognized by all the great world religions as it helps one to subdue his sufferings, pains and troubles. The feelings of spiritualism liberate the human soul from the materialistic world. The teachings of spirituality convey the lessons of compassion, non-violence, truth, self-discipline and self-realization. It enlightens the inner spirit of human soul.

Raju as a Spiritual Guru[5]

In R.K. Narayan's The Guide, the concept of spirituality is represented by Raju. It is a story of penance and self-realization. Here the concept of spirituality is experienced through various ideologies. The Indian ideology of sacrifice and renunciation is the basic theme of the novel. Raju, as a spiritual figure influences other characters in the novel. His philosophy, his ideas and talks on spirituality affect the entire society. Raju has always been whimsical in his life. It is the general pattern of his life. His sudden drifting into the role of a spiritual person in the Mangala Temple, therefore the author remarks:"Raju soon realized that his spiritual status would be enhanced if he grew a beard and long hair to fall on his nape. A clean-shaven close-haired saint was an anomaly. He bore the various stages of his make-up with fortitude, not minding the prickly phase he had to pass through before a well-authenticated beard would cover his face and come down his chest. By the

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time he arrived at the stage of stroking his beard thoughtfully, his prestige had grown beyond his wildest dreams." (The Guide: 47)

After the expiry of his term of imprisonment, he takes refuge in an old temple by a river, while sitting on the steps of the temple one evening and reflecting on the future course of his life, he is taken for spiritual person by the village folks. The convict thus drifts into the role of a spiritual person. People come to seek his advice in domestic problems. When a draught hits the districts, the peasants turn to him for spiritual help and pray to him for performing a penance. Penance which is the symbol of Hinduism, paves the way for Raju to become a 'spiritual force'. In his role of Swami forced on him, reluctantly agrees to undertake a fast to end the draught which gets world wide publicity and finally offers him *Moksha*[6] which reflects the Buddhistic spirit.

During the early days of the fast he has thought of escaping from the whole matter. But he could not betray the simple faith of the villagers. "He felt moved by the recollection of the big crowd of women and children touching his feet. He felt moved by the thought of their gratitude." (The Guide: 97)

Raju felt that his role itself had a certain power. Raju's act of sacrifice transcends his self. This is a moment of illumination, a moment in which an individual acquires the spiritual power to go beyond the barriers of his self:

"For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort, for the first time he was earning the thrill of full application, outside money and loves; for the first time he was doing something in which he was not personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him a new strength through with the ordeal." (The Guide: 213)

Raju achieves the *Nirvana*[7]and turns into the saviour spiritual saint: "A minor Oedipus, Raju lives on to redeem himself; the bogus holy-man changes into a dying God sacrificing himself for the people." [3]

Thus, the Indian institution of *Sannyasa* or the renunciation from worldly goods and attachment for the sake of spiritual pursuits is an ideal that remains constant in the character of Raju. Therefore, Raju's death at the end is for the *Dharma*[8]that holds the suffering humanity and justifies the Hindu concept of spirituality. The story of Raju is a story of affirmation of the human possibilities for the self-recovery and self-transcendence rather than as a story of enforces sainthood.

Kalo as a Social Reformer

He who Rides a Tiger is based on the ancient saying, "He who rides the tiger cannot dismount". This novel is regarded as one of the masterpieces of Bhabani Bhattacharya. In He Who Rides a Tiger, the concept of spirituality is reflected through the character of Kalo. He represents the ideologies of self-realization, self-assertion and social-reformation. He is presented as a champion of social freedom. His sympathy as pseudo-*brahmin*[9], priest affects the lower class of society more than the upper class of society. He teaches the lessons of untouchability. He believes in equality, which is closely associated with Buddhism. Thus, one can find the touches of Buddhist spirituality in his

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speech. **Chandrasekharan** said that in this regard : "Kalo experiences a moral and spiritual conflict between love of ease, power and prestige on one side and desire to be true to himself, on the other."[4]

Meenakshi Mukherjee says about the masquerade of Kalo as a pseudo-Brahmin that "whereas Kalo at the end throws away the mask and goes back where he began, Raju finds it more and more difficult to tear off the mask until he finds the mask has become his face."[5] Thus, Kalo who at first sees himself as a social crusader exposing falsehood with falsehood finally attains spiritual redemption by dismounting the tiger.

The concept of freedom from all bonds has been observed in the characterization of Bhabani Bhattacharya's Kalo in He Who Rides a Tiger. The character of Kalo is not that of *Yogi* concerned with mystic experiences. It is a story of deception of an imposter. **K. Venkata Reddy** rightly points out that "Kalo masquerades as a Brahmin priest and encompasses a miracle - rising of a stone of God Shiva out of the earth. He builds up a temple of his adroitly contrived fact. Kalo, the blacksmith is metamorphosed into Mangal Adhikari, the Brahmin, just as Raju, the railway guide, is transformed into a 'spiritual guru."[6]

The present study also reveals that Kalo's character reflects the concepts of self-realization, social-reformation, freedom, love and non-violence boldly and elaborately. Kalo becomes spiritual after passing the deep ocean of suffering, sorrow and famine. He decides to take revenge on the society. The novel is an attack on both who profited on people's misery during the feminine and those who exploited them as a caste-tyrant. "It is a legend of freedom, a legend to inspire and awaken". [8] It is rightly stated the desire is the cause of suffering. So Kalo's whishes have no purposeful end. He has deceived not only his supposed enemies but his own inner-self. Thus, he has the necessary strength of character to face all the consequences of his honest confusion.

Therefore, Kalo who at first sees himself as a social crusader exposing falsehood with falsehood, finally achieves spiritual redemption by dismounting the tiger. He reveals to the big crowd that has gathered the bitter truth about himself: "Now listen well, priests and *pundits*[10] listen to the truth..... I have installed a false God, for there was no dream at all. I have made you commit sacrilege and blackened your faces. There is no expiation for you --- may be the writers of the holy books have not dreamed that such a thing could happen! ----- A downtrodden *Kamar*[11] has been in charge of your inmost souls, souls corrupt with caste and cash."(He Who Rides a Tiger: 227)

Conclusions

This study observes that just as Raju, the railway guide is transformed into a spiritual guru whereas Kalo rejoices in hood winking his followers mentally that comprises of unscrupulous tradesmen and black marketers for whom worship is atonement for all the sins committed. When Kalo's daughter Chandralekha becomes a prey to the society, he wanted to defy the social oppressiveness. But conscience overtakes him in the last phase of drama, which he has enacted and he burst out passionately with

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all vehemence. This reveals that fraud never triumphs over conscience. Kalo like Raju passes through the stages of a thief, a prisoner, a corpse-remover, a pimp, and finally a priest. His progression through these stages corresponds to the stages of his spiritual progress, climaxed by his spiritual triumph. It has been also revealed that Kalo has got all the courage and drive to dismount from the tiger in the hour of crisis. Unlike Raju who can not do so, Kalo has the strength and astuteness to face the situation and go back to his original state in order to identify himself with the society from which he has come up.

Notes

[1] ***Sadhu/Swami/ Sannyasi/Yogi*** is a saint or yogi or a great devotee of god.\

[2] ***Yoga*** is a state of Meditation.

[3] ***The Bhagavad Gita*** is a sacred Hindu scripture, considered among the most important texts in the history of literature and philosophy.

[4] ***The Vedas*** are the ancient scriptures or revelation (Shruti) of the Hindu teachings. They manifest the Divine Word in human speech. They reflect into human language the language of the Gods, the Divine powers that have created us and which rule over us. There are four Vedas, the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda.

[5] ***Guru:*** The word 'Guru' literally means the 'weighted one' i.e. the one who is profoundly endowed with spiritual knowledge or divine wisdom

[6] ***Moksha:*** 'Moksha' is the liberation of the soul from the materialistic world, the cycle of death and rebirth or reincarnation and all of the sufferings and limitations of the worldly existence. In Hinduism, self-realization is the key to attaining Moksha. In Buddhism, it is treated as Nirvana; it occurs when the self is extinguished from the cycle of rebirth.

[7] ***Nirvana*** is the state of being free from sufferings.

[8] ***Dharma*** is an Indian spiritual and religious term that means one's righteous duty or any virtuous path.

[9] ***Brahmin*** is the highest ranking of the four varnas or social classes in the ancient India.

[10] ***Pandit or pundit*** in India, a scholar or expert, especially of traditional Indian law, philosophy, or music

[11] ***Kamar*** is considered a downtrodden caste in the ancient India.

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