



Na Tathiba Ahal Ama (An Old Man who is Hard of Hearing) As an Instantiation Two Mentally handicapped interlocutors

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Handicapped characters as aberrant instantiations either by physical or mental dimensions have been encountered every now and then as a vintage interface or aesthetic impulse and human artifacts. This is because the handicapped characters also bound by the total network of social psychological factors as they constitute one of the discrete social categories on the sheer basis of being handicapped. For example, in the case of mentally handicapped persons like schizophrenics, aphasics or mentally retarded one, where communication slippage and interpersonal disjunction from its mere symptoms to severe forms may be referred to as the licensing conditions for the social category they belong to. It is also true in other categories like ageism in which its factors for licensing may be referred to as a set of behavioral stigma. A variety of subterfuges and various ploys for concealing and disguising one's age signifies its license as a kind of stigma. So, the category thus constituted are often assigned with such attributes as mental deficits, grumpy, senile, obnoxious, rambling, decrepit so on and so forth. How a writer depicts such antagonistic feelings and sentiments by relying on some other variables which facilitates the working of his cognitive frame of reference is our main interest. His conceptual systems may be totally different from those that underlie the function of more general domain of social behaviour in some instances. Let us see how the writer of the novel **Na Tathiba Ahal Ama** depicts it in his own right.

Paachaa (1943-1990) the writes of this novel had a very strange life. During his short span of about 47 years, he could expose himself to the society as a renowned drunkard. His family members took him to be a good-for-nothing fellow. To his children he was no more than an unfit father. Such a worthless fellow had an interesting inner life also. He was a man of romance by birth. No Manipuri writer could excel him in the stormy nature of his romantic life He could even observe fasting when he learnt the demise of Film Star Meena Kumari. Likewise he had an extreme patriotic feeling also. He expressed once **my motherland is extremely sweet. I am still unable to walk throughout Manipur. I am still unable to walk on the grasses growing on the surface of Manipur.** His

life showed a lot of patience, frustration and sophistication. The present novel looks like the inner seriousness and sophistication of his life.

Na Tathiba Ahal Ama (1969) "An old man who is hard of hearing" his second novel which completely differs from his first novel "Hayaad Begun" (1966) in outlook, style, technique and also in its literary seriousness and sophistication. Here he emerged as a pioneering writer who could shake, blast, and overturn the paradigm of traditional well-made model. This is an important breakthrough in the history of Manipuri novel, a milestone in the seminal change of model and a watershed in search of the reality of life. It could provoke the feelings of the readers to that effect and could see the new reality of life where the centrality of human mind was exclusively focussed. There they found a world of fantasy and reverie, a voyage and pilgrimage of the mind through consciousness. An effort of the marginalization of the external world, a withdrawal from it into the flickering half-shades of the mind became a wealth of the novel. In other words, the present novel is an evidence that; literature can grow in the mind. Under such considerations of literature as a mental property, let us see the novel as it proceeds.

The novel is not of a large canvass spreading only into 100 pages. It is a novel of only two interlocutors. One is the first person deictic pronominal "I" or the narrator and the other is a man, Angou by name, characterized as having a mental deficit, who overwhelmingly violates one or the other sub-maxims of the co-operative activity of conversation. The whole novel is a depiction of a single discourse involving the narrator and Angou in the duration of a single night. The novel has been divided into four parts, namely:-

1. Mou Nahaagi Saajat (The character of a young woman)
2. Thamoï Pandabagi Paandaba (The heartlessness of the heartless)
3. Amamba (Darkness) and
4. Na Taathiba Ahal Ama (An old man who is hard of hearing)

In the first part of the book, i.e. Mou Nahagi Saajat, the human feelings and sensations of the two interlocutors almost in a constant state of flux are depicted and shows that human minds are not merely written upon by the external phenomena. It operates on a basic hunger for the defragmentation of the human psyche. The whole-hearted intention is focused on the gestalt nature of the human mind. Thus their thoughts buried deep in different layers of the sub-conscious and unconscious keep coming to their conscious through memory and recollection.

When the narrator was in the midst of crowd, who he thought to be spiritless, his mind kept on thinking seriously and pathetically for the specific courage of the people in the past. Further, he met his friend, Angou in the same market and sat together in a hotel at a particular night. The layers within layers underneath the human consciousness are exposed in a unidirectional continuum to catch the sense of time as it works in the awareness.

Thus pastness in definitely in the present. When the narrator finds Angou, his longtime intimate friend in his abnormal condition profusely reminds him of the past life of Angou as a victim of the society with a powerful pathetic appeal. Suddenly, a surprised flash of the mind of Angou was depicted as he remembered incompetent and visionless city fathers and the politicians of Manipur, the bad orators in the midst of the fluid political situations and he laughed and laughed. When they met a beautiful young woman in her youthful luster standing by the bus parking their minds were suddenly struck with another incident where a similar young lady was carried away by four men beyond a lane before their eyes long back. Suddenly, they felt that there was no need for sympathy with such a beautiful lady. Then a particular problem of Angou for his pang of separation came on his mind in a serious manner.

After this they experienced a lot of strong and unthinkable things in a hotel. These they heard a conversation of two young men expressing their sexual relationship of one of them with a married woman who was quite young. In the meantime, Angou continued his talking of the past and present expressing his view on life with a tone of frustration and patriotic feeling. The time was very dangerous for such talking because of the terrorist activities. But Angou continued his protest. Strangely enough, a woman of about 35 years and a man of about 40 years entered the hotel and showed their extra-ordinary sexual relationship of non-marital affairs. Then they left the hotel leaving a bright small bag containing the following items :-

- a. 2 talismans of copper
- b. 3 folded ten rupee notes
- c. 1 small photograph
- d. 2 small pieces of paper and some changes.

The photograph contained that young woman, her gentle husband with bald headed serving as a distributor of visiting cards at Manipur Secretariat.

The first place of paper contained their proposed secret interview and future plan for separating her from the husband with the help of a witch doctor. The second paper contained a rhythmic piece of mantra and its prescriptions in order to make the husband impotent. The narrator grasped the pieces of paper into severe distortion. In the radio, it was announced by an army officer that the situation of the state was coming normal and it would be possible to control the miscreants and the terrorists contain within a week's time.

Angou was laughing loudly and reacting sharply to the army officer's announcement. Then in the midst of a loud laughing, Angou spelled out a loud monologue about the future repentance of the army officer.

"He would have his cot. He will certainly lie down on it. By that time, he will shed tears in his eye because he has done it for his life's security and he has earned money by telling a lie" (P-23).

Then he showed his one of the most violent fits of protest by flashing very many different aspects of past and present elements that were active and alive on the screen of his mind by standing in the midst of the crowded hotel room. Then they were slowly proceeding out of the room.

Next comes the second part of the book "The heartlessness of the heartless." The frustration of Angou, his separation from his beloved, his courage and defeat in life that was entangled by poverty and political grip were reflected as a series as they were proceeding along the road towards their home in a beautiful full-moon night of the month of November. Then they confronted with some wordings on a signboard.

We are all Indians, let none divide us Angou, started protest without any relent. This led him a further thinking for his motherland to such an extent that he suddenly stopped walking and remain silent. Then a fearful thought came to the mind of the narrator.

The third part of the book entitled **darkness** is a further reflection of the two minds. They were still proceeding along a road in that moonlit night. As they approached a small area known as Bapupara, the night became late and solitary. The narrator's mind was under a great pressure of thinking for the life, the unreliable life. He was carried away by a deep thinking of the various unreliable aspects of life. Then more and more speculations were coming into play. The difference between conscious and subconscious was so tenuous that he even did not know whether he murmured or not. He was intervened by Angou. But he did not express his deep thinking to Angou.

He stored the thought against in his memory. Angou showed his different mental notions intermixing with short monologues. Angou mentioned a word darkness in the process, which suddenly attract deeply in the mind of the narrator and started thinking on it. At first, he thought that there could be no house in the world which was not lighted. But in the process, he remembered one that was also in the heart of the market. There he found two bachelors acting as pimps with five militaries asking them for prostitutes. There was a bargaining at the initial but later on the pimps explained the freshness of the woman and the deal was struck. The militaries entered the dark room of the house by lowering their heads one after another.

Another incident was also coming up. From a dark house, a woman of middle age carrying a small baby on her back and leading a small boy of about 4 years hurried on the road so that she could evade the sight of other people. Then she went to the fully lighted area of the market with a great pleasure and had a pleasing look at the sales area feeling free from any constraints.

His recollection sustained profusely. One day also, he happened to witness the arrest of some prohibited intoxicant items like liquor in a fully lighted hotel. The Police told that the items were found from a dark place. But when asked by an old man about the owner of the hotel, the police evaded saying to move away, it was too crowded. Next day, in the paper it was found that the proprietor of the hotel was a prestigious and affluent administrator who spoke to the people at the time of his election to elect him for serving the people. The only thing was that the old man could not see the proprietor on that day (of arresting the items) because he might also be hiding in the dark like the prohibited items.

Another thought of darkness also kept coming to his mind in that a Manipuri woman who was a weaver by profession was caught red-handed by her husband from a dark room of a fat **Kania** who sold yarn.

Then through his recollection the area of darkness spreads considerably. The number of unlighted dark houses multiplied that gave rise to the multiplication of such loose behaviour.

After that, the images of Roma Mukherjee and particularly Nungsitombi (the early beloved of Angou) came up reflecting the uselessness of love to such an extent that even the Marco Polo ran away in the midst of a huge Chinese crowd when he was about to kiss a girl suffering from leprosy, who was also in a state of readiness.

This continued again and again by flashing various prices of the early 110 of Angou full of sorrows not sufferings and his pain of sexual inhibition in a technique which looked like pressing the key of his memory retrieval system.

It was followed by a monologue of Angou maintaining a changed situation of the twentieth century thought which requires a completely new direction and impulse to save the life from being completely bankrupt.

The fourth part of the book **An old man who is hard of hearing** may be described as the culmination the narrator's intense mental projection. Here in this final part of the novel, he projected himself in his mental screen as an individual who belongs to two discreet social categories by transforming himself into (1) a handicapped person and (2) an old man of 76 years. By this time, the narrator was proceeding alone to his alone home at the death of night. There were no family members at his home-neither his wife nor his kid. While entering the room, he heard some noises of his neighbours babies and sounds of their eating. This led him thinking of the newly promoted brother of his wife.

He remembered that his wife and kid went to the house of her brother that day for helping his brother-in-laws party for some friends. In that solitary night, during the absence of his wife, he was further engaged in a severely painful thought of the unchastity of his wife. He thought that there is no certainty for his wife's coming back home. He gave four examples for it :-

(1) Did the planter know that from a seed of pumpkin, much smaller than the pupil of a baby, a big pumpkin so big that it surprised thousands and thousands of thoughtful visitors who came to see the Gandhi Exhibition would come out of it (seed) and would have a distinction of its own?

(2) A group of traders turned the Indian sub-continent into their commercial commodity.

(3) Who knows that a lot of people will bow down before such a thin baby of a maternity ward born out of a mother who was worried in the thought that he would be a good-for-nothing fellow?

(4) And, what about the Meities to-day, who fought against the mighty British soldiers at the cost of their lives?

There is not an iota of reliability in this world looking at all these things in a wife of a man like me does not come back along with my kid there is nothing to wonder. No question of it."(P. 92-95)

By this time, he sat on a chair silently. He was deeply depressed in the thought such that his mental reality was more governed by the subconscious as well as the unconscious. His wife was again projected as a concubine who was engaging in a hectic love-making with a stranger over a distance. He heard a sound of a heart-felt laugh of a woman from that direction. The effect of it was so penetrating and for reaching that he tumbled, lost his reasoning, his throat became dry, and he lost his visibility. He was so biased with the thought that ultimately he could find that the woman was no other than his wife:

"My wife, my wife, my wife," confirmed." He also heard that his wife had agreed to come out and meet her paramour around 12 at night near a fence and this constitutes the sentimental intensity of the novel.

At this point, he was no longer in a position to see his wife. He had no desire for seeing her any more. So, before her arrival, he pierced his two eyes with the nib of his fountain pen of black ink again and again. There was a profuse bleeding of the red blood and thus he lost his eyesight and became a blind. Being a handicapped, he was in a sorry state of affairs. Nobody came to his side except his old friend Angou, the schizophrenic who alone ensured his food by begging.

In the meantime, his wife came back from her brother's house and entered the room with a loud bang. He looked at her by raising his neck. When his wife talked to him, he was completely surprised. He remembered that he lost his eyesight and had the experience of a blind man, he heard a lot of unreliable virulent and appalling words from his wife, his food was ensured by his friend only. He was still confined to those thoughts when his wife opens the channel of a short dialogue and he entered into it. Finally, he concluded that a new dangerous wind started blowing in this world.

The fearful thoughts of that night lingered on for the subsequent moments. So he asked himself why he was carried away by thus extremely inhuman thought as an outsider of the reality. He did not know the cognitive mechanisms of it. But what he knew was the following points :-

"The fierce and violent thought of the unreliability of my wife came to me because my thought exist amidst immoral people.

The thought of starvation came to me, because my thought is constantly wondering amidst the weeping lives stricken by starvation.

A thought of self-relegation and a subdued feeling to me at that night because I am existing in a land where people are subdued till to-day and being unable to die."

I look at my wife strangely (in that thought) because I am existing as a challenge that I will continue a harmonious life with my wife in a land which is full of those men who earn their livelihood by selling the house-wives like inanimate pictures and of those women who think their husband as mere marionettes." (P 97,98).

After this, the final intense impression of the novel followed as a direct quotation of the mind. Here he had been transformed into an old man of 76 years as his last part of his life cycle. During the last 76 years of his life he could do nothing worthy for his country. As he did nothing during that long period, he was like a man who turned a deaf ear to the serious situations of his country. This evoked a feeling of repentance and patriotism. He found nobody coming to him to utter a single word of his country.

Further, nobody knew that his feeling of the patriotism for which he has been languishing an appalling life. Then a sense of exclusion and isolation made him so traumatic that he again projected himself as another handicapped who had hearing impairments. After this, the idea of death came in. He expressed his strong wish to die in the thought of his country. He also wanted his descendants to erect a small tomb on his graveyard. He did not like anything to be written upon it. If they were willing to do so, the only thing he wanted them to write was the following words-

"An old man who is hard of hearing"

Thus the novel ended as an exploration of the pre-speech level of the consciousness by projecting the narrator as a full blown handicapped. Here the handicapped is depicted as a part of the sun of the memories of the individual as a psychic being. If we don't give the due weights to such fragments of human psyche, the human personality will remain incomplete and unsatisfactory. By taking into account such emphasis on human personality, the present instantiation of the handicapped constitutes a fine component of the entire psychic gestalt.

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