

Religion and Peace: A Critical Study of Sunanda Sikdar's Dayamoyeer Katha.

MUNMUN GIRI

Assistant Professor The Department of English
Dum Dum Motijheel College India

ABSTRACT:

India's pursuit of peace is not determined by her self-interest, but by the idealism which has ever remained a substantive inspiration for a 'common good'. India believes in the concept of 'Brahma' as the Supreme Creator of the universe, and also believes in 'prem' or love to be the only connecting force among all in this earth. Consequently, India has developed a pluralistic culture as a mark of this belief system. All Indian religions, sects and philosophical schools admit that as all human beings are the part of the same source, there should not be any discrimination in human society. From ancient to modern, Indian message of 'equality' or treating everyone as part of God is widely acclaimed across the globe. But the historical Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 seems to disapprove this composite tradition of love and peace among people of different religious background in India. It is significant to note that all the major works in the category of the Indian Partition Fiction have fictionalized not only the face of violence as a direct consequence of the partition but also focused on the humanistic values of love and mutual respect as the basic framework of the Indian traditional culture and religion. The academic objective of this paper is to present a detailed textual analysis of Sunanda Sikdar's Dayamoyeer Katha. Such a study is bound to be interdisciplinary and it will borrow from history, ethics, philosophy, culture studies and sociology as the overall theoretical base.

KEY WORDS: Human values, composite tradition of peace, Religion, violence, equality, mutual respect.

I. INTRODUCTION:

...it was the very heterogeneity of religions in the Indian subcontinent which had made it historically possible for all of them to survive and to enrich their own particular religious heritage.

(Bhalla:11)

The above observation by Alok Bhalla in his article, "Memories of a Lost Home" published in *Partition Dialogues* (2006) reflects India's unparalleled sincerity, tolerance and respect towards various religious thoughts and practices for the better cause of peace in human society. Moreover, an ingrained belief system of love and peace is so deep rooted in Indian culture that it never even thought of armed resistance against the foreign invaders who destroyed and looted important centers of knowledge, precious monuments and temples in India at different times of history. Instead, the door of welcome was kept open for all other thoughts and philosophies for cultural amalgamation. However, it is unfortunate that India had to suffer political unrests and riots many times because of these pluralistic, peaceful and 'soft' cultural aspects.

Religion became the root cause of the disruption of peace many times in India. The context of the Partition of India in 1947, more particularly, brings a broad spectrum of experiment repeatedly to different scholars and writers to reach out its realities. Which is why, while the historians in India have remained overwhelmingly concerned with the causes and its consequences, it were the creative writers who tried to establish the triumph of human nobility and values as the spontaneous outcome of its long tradition of faith in the religion of man. They have the same message as Priya Kumar observed in the Introduction of her book, *Limiting Secularism*, "...fictions through their return to a painful past open up possibilities of living together in the present" (xxv).

True spirit of Hinduism, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita:

The *Upanishads* are the revelation of the subtlest essence of our being and prove that human life is nothing but a continuous movement towards peace. By peace, the *Upanishads* reflects, the absolute protection of self. In Siksa Valli, Section 12, Chapter 1, it is noted, "Salutation to Brahman, Salutation to Vayu; Thou indeed art the perceptible Brahman. I have spoken of the right, I have spoken of the true. ...Aye, that has protected me. That has protected the speaker. Aum, Peace, Peace, Peace." (trans. Radhakrishnan, 527). Religion, therefore, according to the Upanishads, is the consciousness of a mysterious spirit of unity that manifests through Man's moral activities in his society. Man may have symbolized religion in the imaginary structures of Gods and Goddesses, but his essential 'human' qualities ultimately lead him to a sense of universal unity.

Rabindranath, a follower of the Upanishads rightly observed in his book, *The Religion of Man*, "With the extension of the consciousness of human unity his God became revealed to him as one and universal..." (129). The ultimate goal of Religion is to gain peace because religion can reconcile all contradictions in human mind. So 'Dharma' (in more delicate sense of religion indicating man's consciousness of morality) represents the truth of the Supreme Man with whom man constantly and consciously cooperates all the time in his mind. For this, man does not hesitate to willingly sacrifice his vital needs and court suffering unto death to express his reverential loyalty to his 'dharma'. Thus, religion in Indian context is not merely power and possession but the means of spreading love and peace.

Peace has always been taken as an inseparable part of the wholeness of the human entity in Indian philosophical thought and therefore, all branches of the Indian philosophy spoke of spiritual uplift of human life. Sankhya, probably the earliest of Indian philosophy attempted to discover the mystery of harmony in this world which is supposed to be a sum total of 'Purusa' (pure conscious) and 'Prakriti' (three gunas). The world creates only when Prakriti and Purusa, two opposite in nature unite by reflecting one another. This shows that peace lies in unity in diversity. This philosophy analysed the true nature of the human mind, the reason of his suffering and also the way of emancipation. The Yoga appeared more humanist in its clarification of 'avidya' or ignorance which controls the Karma of a man. The followers of Yoga were, therefore, expected to practise a definite system of moral and religious restraints such as non-injury, truthfulness, purity, sincerity, sex-control and mental peace.

Consciousness is knowledge and knowledge is liberation. Bhagvad-gita, the religious book of the Hindus shows that the very consciousness of Lord Krishna is the supreme knowledge which makes man free from suffering. Non-violence, the prime condition of peace, according to the Bhagvad-gita, Text 4-5, Chapter 10, means that "one should not do anything which will put others into misery or confusion" (trans. Swami Prabhupada, 452). Thus, non-violence ensures the future spiritual happiness of the people in general. The ethical philosophy of the Bhagvad-gita shows that the abode of peace lies in the performance of the moral duties that are allotted to man in society. He should tie himself in the bond of love with fellow beings and thereby worship the God.

Peace in Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism-

In the sixth century BC, Goutam Buddha in Tripitak, spoke of Humanism and peace. It was the sorrow of the human beings that compelled him to reject the royal happiness of the palace and search for peace in human life. We learn from some of the earliest Pali Buddhist Suttas that after his renunciation, the Sakya monk Sidhartha went to Uruvela, near Gaya to practise 'Dhyana Yoga'. Here, he expressed the purpose of his journey which was of absolute reading of peace, "Still in search of the right, and in quest of the excellent road to peace beyond compare, I came in the course of an alms-pilgrimage through Magadha to the camp township of Uruvela and there took up my abode" (trans. D.Chattapadhyaya, 8). In his ultimate realization, Lord Buddha, therefore, designates sorrow as opposite to peace. Sorrows have their source in the earthly cravings while peace liberates human beings from such earthly bonding.

The true spirit of Buddhism in practical life was vivified in the life and reign of Samrat Asoka (c 272-232BC). Asoka aimed at creating an attitude of mind among his subjects in which social behaviour on the basis of humanism had the highest priority. The ideology of 'Dhamma' and 'Shanti' reflect his stress on tolerance, non-violence and mutual respect for each other in human society. He denied war as a power of human civilization and therefore, after the war of Kalinga, all his efforts were dedicated to the spread of Shantih.

Mahavira, the spokesman of Jainism proves to be a seminal Humanist philosopher who thinks that each creature on this earth has the right to live. The sanctity of life in all its forms constituted the basis of his moral values. The object of the Jaina religion is to free the soul from karma. The five 'anuvratas' (vows for the layman) and 'Mahavratas' (vows for monks) not to kill, not to lie, not steal, to abstain from sex and to renounce property – all are to reduce conflict and settle universal peace in human society. Thus, Ahimsa or non-violence is like a rain cloud in the forest fire of suffering.

Sikhism is generally held to derive from the teaching of the first Guru, Nanak (1469-1539) who taught a doctrine of salvation through Divine Name. His oral musical messages in Punjabi attracted a larger section of people in India, because simple 'Bhakti' or devotion does not need any external arrangements for God worship. He proved that God is present everywhere, immanent in all creation, both within and without everyone. On the way of Bhakti, Kabir, actually, showed the way of internal peace which is very important for building up an automatic atmosphere of peace processing in a society.

The Bhakti Cult and the message of human unity-

During the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, an emotional and passionate 'Bhakti' (ecstatic devotional religion associated with the singing of humanist hymns in common tongue) replaced the old approaches of sacrificial rites and monastic meditation. Their pure devotional songs often acted as social

reformation and maintaining peace and brotherhood among the human beings and also had the message of serving the human is serving the God. We can take names of Jnaneswara (1271- 96), Tukaram (1598-1650), Ramdas (1608-81), Joydeva, Sree Chaityanya, Ramananda, Kabir, Tulsidas, Mira Bai, Surdas and others.

Concept of Peace and religion in Modern India-

Religion in modern India in the nineteenth century, marked a continuous process of social reformation, embedded with the nationalist movement on the one hand and also a spiritual development on the other. Ramakrishna (1834-86) and Vivekananda (1863-1902) evolved a new definition of religion which was not confined in supernatural concepts, rather, found its fulfilment in the service of common life. Vivekananda showed that we can serve God by serving the needy and the wretched ones living within this 'samsar' if we take the whole universe as a big family. He had a firm belief that God is not invisible, but visible through every creature, because each creature is a part of God. Accordingly, peace comes there, when one feels satisfaction in serving others as he gets the rare opportunity to serve the God through him. Moreover, he reiterated the word, 'faith'- 'faith in ourselves', 'faith in God' to show that faith is the prime source of peace in human life. Faith is exclusively an Indian concept of religion, which teaches us that a human should not be satisfied by performing only the role of a 'nara' (a human being), but he should become the 'narayana', the divine power which is already in man. Arabinda Ghosh (1872-1950) was a worshiper of humanity throughout his blessed life and activities.

He showed that India is that exclusive country, where culture is valued not from the perspective of power and politics, but to the extent that it encourages a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body with a mission of divining human nature towards peace. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the first Nobel Laureate in India had a great contribution in promoting the message of peace and harmony among common people.

The man who fought for peace in modern India is Mahatma Gandhi (1896-1948). His whole life was a freedom struggle against violence. Inspired by the Bhagvad-gita and the Bible, M. K. Gandhi dedicated his life to selfless Karma which was to follow Ahimsa and establish peace in the world. Critics say that he was a saint who became a politician. Nevertheless, it is a fact that he was more a saint, a Humanist, a philosopher than a politician. He was truly a 'Mahatma' who wanted to save his country not only from the clutches of the foreign rule but also from all darkness of ignorance. He showed that Ahimsa is not just personal ethics, but a politically effective commitment because if there is no ethics in politics, the concept of the nation will have no meaning. Gandhiji proved Ahimsa as a 'truth force', an expression of loyalty toward his 'dharma' before which falsehood and violence must bow down.

When each individual in a society loves peace, the maintenance of peaceable relations with the groups appears very natural and long lasting. John Ferguson in the article, "Religion and Peace" published in *World Encyclopedia of Peace*, rightly observed, "War has been a major human activity through history. It is not surprising that many of these "prophetic" challenges have been for the limitation or control of war, or the assertion of peace as the will or way of God, or the establishment of values such as social justice within the structures of a peaceful society" (328). Indian partition literature revives this assertion of peace as an inevitable part of all Indian religions. The present researcher, therefore, has the aim to explore the Indian partition fiction to prove that Indian literature on partition, particularly fiction is a triumph of the spirit of unity and not a conduit for escalation of the religion of hatred and separateness. In all the major works of fiction, both in Indian languages as well as in Indian English, the focus is not on revenge, bloodshed, rape or massacre, but in recognition of the truth that human civilization can prosper only on the wings of peace, tolerance, mutual respect and love.

Partition of Bengal in Dayamoyeer Katha-

The winner of 'Ananda Puruskar' 2010, Sunanda Sikdar's *Dayamoyeer Katha* (translated in English by Anchita Ghatak) is a representative text on the partition of India. Although, partition only paves a plot for the novel, it is actually a narration of the writer's own face-to-face experiences of how their village Dighpait (now in Bangladesh), a peaceful place for people of all communities was quickly turning empty and a tension of the riot was devouring the 'spirit of unity' among the villagers. The history of partition shows Bengal in the limelight, because the most important political development in the history of Bengal is its partition for two times within a short span of fifty years in the Twentieth century. So, the writers, while writing on the partition of India, had the tendency to avoid hard description of violence, because they thought, as Sunil Gangopadhyaya had pointed out in an interview in *Anandabazar Patrika*, dated 13th August, 1988, that such description may fuel another riot. Description of violence is itself a game of politics and often increases the degree of violence and consequently, decreases the scope of peace and prosperity. The writers on partition literature in Bengal, therefore, mostly focused on how a human mind is divided, fractured and destroyed silently when their social bonding gets torn apart all of a sudden and also how a man still struggles in search of peace by restoring the

humanist values amidst unfathomable violence, horror and loss.

Majam and Daya- a bond of 'human dharma'-

The novel begins with a description of an unusual kinship between the narrator, Daya, a little girl of a Hindu Kayastha family and Majam, a Muslim employee of their house. Majam, whom the narrator lovingly calls 'Dada' is the person, who teaches her the core of human religion and the secrets of peace in human life. Although, her foster mother (Pisi) always warns her not to get close to Majam, a Muslim employee, Daya in her childhood feels a strong invisible bond with him. She narrates, "As a child it was my greatest delight to stroll by the river Bansa perched on Dada's shoulders" (5; ch. 2). Majam is a landless peasant, with no other possession except two oxen and his plough. He works hard and believes in honesty and peace. He prays every day to the God. Daya has learnt religion of love and peace from her Majam Dada when he sits for 'Namaj' and begs the Almighty's mercy for all creatures on this earth. He is not cruel by nature and, therefore, finds difficult to kill even an ant. He begs food and water for all creatures. When Daya asks, "Dada, what did you ask Allah for", he says, "Do keep everyone happy and well- people, animals, plants, insects. And please forgive thieves and murderers, and show them the right way" (4; ch.1). Accordingly, Daya has learnt from him that there is no confusion or conflict in the world of God. The differences are all man made. She has learnt from him how to love even a plant and how to grow peace of mind through a continuous process of learning, working and loving. Majam Dada is an angel of peace, love and pure affection. He does not know the strategies of politics across the nation. When Daya's family settles in India after the partition of the country, Majam feels anxiety of separation and a hope of meeting moves him forward every single day. He struggles four years to organize his travel money for India, selling his favourite cows. When he actually meets Daya, other members of her family suspect of his evil intention behind that visit. Daya lovingly buys a 'lungi' (lower part dress for male) for him and gives forty rupees for his return journey. The exchange of hearts of two human beings of very unequal age and social status and religious affiliation, defeats the atmosphere of distrust and hatred that prevailed in Bengal on the eve of the partition of India.

Paradox of Religion, Peace and Poverty-

Life is endless, full of joy and aimed at peace. Humanism is the elixir of that life. Human life can not be imagined without the bond of humanity. It is because of this bond that man stands by another man in distress, builds up a new kind of kinship with a stranger, fight with famine, death, disease and suffering, yet can sing songs to his heart's content. In *Dayamoyeer Katha*, the narrator presents few characters who are poor by 'class' but great of heart. They are the messengers of peace and the bearer of the highest truths of life. They continually struggle with poverty day-in and day-out, yet, cannot forget the call of humanity. Ajar chacha and his family are refugees from Coochbehar and settle in Dighpait. Their livelihood draws the readers' attention with a great sense of humanity that life has a greater purpose than only surrendering to hunger. It is the essential philosophy of India that true life conjoins materialism and spiritualism in a harmony. Ajar chacha's wife Manirabibi uses to earn food for her three children by pounding rice house to house. She cooks rice with some greens, arums, jackfruit seeds, and somehow manages to feed them while she had to defeat her hunger with a 'pan' (a herbal leaf for chewing) in her mouth. She needs a 'saree' (a long unstitched cloth for women) and a 'pan' (beetle leaf) to keep her going. She represents all mothers in Indian society, who can sacrifice their own comfort smilingly for the wellbeing of their children. Old Fakir Ajar chacha begs alms from house to house in Mirjapur. In spite of being starved and tired, he still can sing with a holy mind on his dearest Hilsa fish. Samcher Chacha too has exchanged his property and comes from the banks of Torsa. He has the spirit of exchanging a few words of wisdom with Daya after returning from hard work in the fields, Civilized and polite Samcher Chacha never raises his hand to his wife. Daya cordially remembers Manish dada of Jamalpur who bravely marries a widow, and therefore, remains cut off from other relatives for many years. She and her foster mother go to his house as per her father's instruction and meet him and bless the couple since they did really a good exemplary work. All these minor characters from different religious backgrounds together build up the message of reconciling all contradictions in human society for the greater mission of unity as the mark of one's 'karma' and 'dharma' in life.

II. CONCLUSION

Since the beginning of human civilization, a continuous conflict of good and evil has been a part of it. Human has to struggle between two types of forces, the forces of mutual hatred, violence and disunity on the one hand and those of peaceful co-existence, mutual respect, love and unity on the other. In *Dayamoyeer Katha*, we find, partition brings cleavages among the villagers and an atmosphere of distrust and hatred dominates over their familiar bond of humanity and brotherhood. Yet, people like Majam Dada, Ajar Chacha and Samcher Chacha still sing the song of humanity and shed tears for those who are compelled to leave their home. The bond of humanity among the villagers is the source of peace in their simple innocent lives. This very spirit of

moral unity actually wins over the violence, politics and brutality of the riot. This paper, thus, bears the torch of our noble responsibility of maintaining the tradition of 'dharma' and peace for the growth of a universal civilization and world peace.

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