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Aju Mukhopadhyay's Short Stories: A Multicoloured World

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DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2020.5.2.04

Aju Mukhopadhyay is one of the brightest stars in the firmament of contemporary Indian English Literature. He is a magnificent literary artist, in fact a versatile genius. As a visionary poet he has enraptured the hearts and minds of millions of poetry lovers, both in India and abroad. He is a profound critic, and his insightful critical studies are highly valued in the literary world. His essays on various subjects have made a mark in every field. He is a great storyteller too, both in English and Bangla, and the range of his short stories has baffled the fiction lovers. Like his previous volumes of short stories, the present collection too offers a large variety of subjects and feeds the craving of every set of readers. Aju's world is so vast that you cross the national boundaries many times to peep into a new world. You open the window to a new story and step into a different world altogether. "In the Company of William, Samuel and Dorothy", Aju takes us to the Lake District of England to enjoy the company of the great Romantic poets, William Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge and Dorothy Wordsworth. His description is so vivid that you really feel you are watching everything happening before your 'fleshy eyes'. In the next story "They Came Down from the Roof of the World", the writer takes you indeed to the roof of the world, Tibet and the Tibetan Cause. Tibet and New York come alive before you and you partake in the stormy scenes, the rebellion, the persecution, the great Dalai Lama escape and the aftermath.

Keywords- Global Outlook, Human Relation, Environment, Galaxy, Nostalgia

Aju Mukhopadhyay's stories encompass the entire world, visible or invisible, worldly or ethereal, real or mystical. "Neither a Utopia Nor a Dystopia" apparently deals with the

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environmental issues, but at the same time it is a great social treatise on the parent-children relationship, and highlights the pathetic condition of the parents when their children emigrate to foreign countries in search of money. No holds barred. Terrorism too has been thoroughly analysed in “Chased in Turn” where violence is ingrained in the young minds: “Yes, you should have anger and hatred enough, even causelessly, if you wish to kill and go forward.”(17) The fate of the terrorist teenagers is pre-decided: “... that a suicide bomber is always destined to die in action or refusing to perform must he or she die” (18) What kind of a world, the writer is anguished to realize, we have created where the young people, instead of enjoying life, are trained to kill and die. This is a striking tale of the teenagers getting trapped into the fold of terrorist activities. By now it has been established beyond doubt that religious bigots and antinational mercenaries catch them young and tap their immaturity to train them as suicide bombers: “Kind of adventure, hope and don’t-care like idea was taking away their humanity.” (19)

“What’s there in a name?” Shakespeare declared it long back, and Aju Mukhopadhyay’s unnamed woman in the opening story, “Flood Changed the Flow of her Life” is an epitome of unnamed love. She doesn’t seek an identity, nor does she go back to her village when persuaded. Her identity, she feels, was taken away and deposited by chance, outside the gate of the writer’s joint family house. She was sixteen at the time, and the writer six, but even at that tender age he was impressed and enamoured by the girl’s beauty. Despite being married, he has been in love with her for the past sixty years, and she has wholeheartedly responded to it. It is stupid to ask about the nature of this love—like the lady, this love too is unnamed, outside the conformist’s comprehension. The writer rightly says: “... Relationships are so different, so varied that every relationship has its separate nuance, smell and colour; it cannot be easily defined. There’s a relationship within a relationship or relationships” (5). There are various shades of love, and this can be comprehended only by those who have ever known love.

“Suicide on a Moonlit Night” is a tragic tale of two sisters entangled in a relationship with the same man, Nabagopal. On the face of it, it is a love triangle where the younger sister, Shreyasi, more beautiful than the elder one, out of jealousy, snatches away the groom from

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Preyasi who is suffering from the congenital heart disease. Preyasi, in depression commits suicide. But it is not a simple story as the writer goes deep into the psyche of woman and brings out the selfishness and viciousness of modern age. Human relationships, even among siblings, have lost their emotional bondage and everybody is a grabber here. It is a complex world, this modern world, and nothing but self-interest motivates the heartless and soulless humans. Even Nabagopal who later admits in his letter that he was in love with Preyasi, decides to marry Shreyasi. Why? Sheer opportunism. After separation from her, his remorse and feeling of guilt don't look convincing at all. It is a masked world of pretenders and grabbers, and you change the mask as it suits your requirement. Nabagopal too admits in his letter: "Perhaps it is beyond our ken to explain how exactly one acts and reacts in a given situation" (50).

"Suicide on a Railway Track" is a story in an altogether different mode: mystery woven into the legendary tales that are so commonly heard in almost every rural society. No rationality. Nothing to do with science, nor reality. People go on narrating such tales—it feeds their hunger for curiosity and otherworldliness. The twist at the end, the death of the sad and gloomy nonagenarian neighbor of the writer, is remarkable and provokes the reader to think. "Empty House" is full of suspense, mystery, and the curiosity to know 'what happens next'. Aju Mukhopadhyay is a master craftsman and this story leaves the reader stroking his head. Well, such empty houses have been a great subject for the thrillers, particularly in films since the time of "Mahal".

Humour lends a unique charm to "Life Nostalgic" and the reader is bound to enjoy the cheery sense of humour of Aju Mukhopadhyay that he abundantly displays here. The way the huge body of Manmatha Roy Chowdhury with strong hands, "big face with bigger moustache" scares his young beloved, Shodashi, amuses the reader. And his son, Balaram, who goes on repeating the stories of his family to his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and of course to their wives over and over again, becomes a butt of ridicule. The world has changed from the colonial rule to the independent India, but his world has not changed. That makes him a funny character indeed. The stories within the story, bribing the sergeant or the guard bringing back the train on their bidding, would give peels of laughter to every reader.

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“Jungle Dream” once again portrays the environmental concerns of the writer who walks unafraid through the jungle in the middle of the night. Poachers working for the industrialists or big money have denuded the forests of India and played havoc with the lives of the tribals. The writer’s beautiful description of the jungle at the night time fascinates the reader and he becomes conscious that man’s greed has brought about terrible imbalances in nature.

“The Secret” the beautiful story that serves as the title for this fascinating collection, is indeed full of secrets and suspense and arouses the curiosity of the reader to know ‘what happens next’. When the writer meets Sony Dasgupta, his one-time flame, in Singapore, she refuses to recognize him, and claims she is Ami Tan, and has never known or visited India. But later on she visits them and tells the writer’s friend that she indeed is Sony and had run away from her husband who had maltreated and tortured her. She told that she had per chance “come in touch with a benevolent and well-to-do family of Singapore” which later on adopted her. When Sony’s mother, Promila, was left destitute, after being duped of all her wealth and properties by her own son, the writer narrated the whole story of her family to Sony. Though Sony never had good relations with her step-mother, yet she generously made an offer to the writer for her mother: he should make good arrangements for her stay and she would bear all the costs, but he should never divulge her name to anyone. The writer makes a very good, rather luxurious, arrangement for Sony’s mother and gets all the credit for taking care of a destitute. But Promila soon dies of a heart attack. All the formalities for the dead are completed by the writer. But the secret of her death is not revealed to Sony. Why? The secret of all secrets. Money continues to flow from Sony to the writer for the upkeep of her mother who no longer exists. The last story in the collection, “How Fast Man Adapts to Changes, How Fast He Forgets His Past” too bemoans the story of loss of forests, wildlife and the natural ways of living: “... the mine-mafias, coal and iron-mongers are exploring their chance of becoming billionaire at the cost of the common people, nature and animal world like hawks in modern India.” (130) He bluntly questions the concept of development: “Is it development, denuding all forest resources and uprooting native people, killing flora and fauna?” (130)

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The Secret is a very rich collection of racy, thoughtful and inspiring short stories. The reader is bound to get enlightened on various issues that confront him every day. The vastness of the canvas is simply baffling. Aju Mukhopadhyay is a great intellectual writer who not only entertains but also provokes you to think.

Work Cited

Mukhopadhyay, Aju. *The Secret*. Global Fraternity of Poets, 2019.