

“From Innocence To Inner Sense”- In Nergis Dalal’s Fiction “*The Inner Door*”

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Abstract

Nergis Dalal, who has enriched Parsi writing in English is mainly a writer of prose and occasional periodical articles. She has contributed to esteemed journals like the Illustrated Weekly and Times of India etc. Besides “*The Nude*” which is a collection of brilliant short stories which explore the innermost recesses of the human soul, her major fiction includes *Minari*, *The sisters*, *The Inner Door* and *The Girls from overseas*. These four novels have earned a substantial place for her in the history of Indo-Anglican Literature. The novel ‘*The Inner Door*’ which has brought her into the limelight as a novelist can be called her master piece. The title of the novel, *The Inner Door* is quite apt in so far as the hero has opened the inner door for himself.

Keywords: substantial, limelight, innermost, master piece

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The theme of *Inner Door* is the importance of Yoga in human life and meditation. ‘Yoga’ Dalal says, “is essential for man’s physical and spiritual development”. Yoga is a Hindu system of meditation and it helps to build up self control and physical fitness. This system of meditation is practised in India from ancient times. Himalayas in particular is the well known place for yogis and saints who practice it. There are also many ashrams in Rishikesh, Haridwar, kashi, etc. where yoga practice is going on well. Many temples in India promote Yoga. The practice of yoga is scientific and when executed properly it definitely helps for the enlightenment of his body and soul.

Rishikesh provides ample opportunities for people who come from abroad for yoga studies. Chris Stuart and his wife Myra, the two Americans visit Rishikesh. Seeing the pomp, glory and the operations of various Ashrams and attracted by the materialistic allurements, the American couple wanted to make a profit out of it. They see Rahul, a poor and handsome, unemployed boy, of twenty years with an Undergraduate degree in arts. Being attracted by Rahul’s looks they plan to utilise him for commercial benefits. Chris Stuart, Myra and Rahul’s mother Iswarya Devi slowly poisons him with the possibility of living a luxurious life with good food, sophisticated rooms, cars, followers from many countries and visit other countries etc. Rahul is much concerned with the gratification of his senses that “the talk of inner life meditation made no sense to him”(p.9).

He is completely devoid of that “correct drishti” which discriminates between the spurious and the genuine, between truth and falsehood. He understands neither sex nor yoga and for him an Ashram is a dream world in miniature. Even though Rahul has his pretty, little

ways and angel face, he “has a devil inside him” (p. 37). When Rahul’s mother wants to keep the money in her name, Rahul denies the same and says “ I am grown up”.(p.62). For attaining mastery over yoga- a way of selfhood, the rishis advocate man simplicity, purity and celibacy. Since sex is the root cause of many unavoidable ills and diseases, Rahul’s uncle, Swami Jegadish, says that sex must be controlled. As a Yoga master, he acquires much wealth, but his knowledge of yoga is negligible.

Stuart and Myra financially assisted by some philanthropists’ sets up Sukhanand Ashram on the Rishikesh hills. Jed Allen, an Italian boy becomes the secretary of the Ashram and Rahul becomes the yogi of Sukhanandhashram. Panditji is another important yogi who runs Ramakrishnashram. He is a Yogi in the true sense of the world. He has earned much wealth and has built five-star buildings for the sake of the foreigners. He teaches Rahul the essential knowledge of Yoga, and he learns it and excels his own Guru Panditji. As Rahul becomes a handsome, scholarly and lovable figure, many ladies fall in love with him.

Yoga courses begin in the Sukhanandhashram and Rahul turned into Swami Sukhanand imparts Yoga education to the foreigners. He is a master of ‘Hath Yoga’ which helps for physical health and mental purification. Rahul’s excellent teaching, handsome personality and his innocent charm satisfied his disciples and the courses went on well in the Ashram. As years went on Chris Stuart and Myra plan to start ‘Yoga for Sex’, as another project as per the request of the Americans and Europeans to learn some measures for healthy sexual inter- course. Jed Allen, the Secretary of the Ashram, who is envious of Rahul joins the couple in their plan.

One day Allen asks Myra to seduce Swami who is unaware of sexuality, though it went on illicitly in the ashram. Myra tries to awaken Rahul sexually, thus:

Myra was the first to go in search of Rahul. Since he
had been more or less on her mind, ever since she
met him, her new assignment, was merely a projection
as it were her thoughts for him. The feeling that
she would be doing him a Favour as well, was

irresistible.

But Rahul frankly says he that he does not like to enjoy women. Then as Jed Allen proposed, Fran, a French woman, like Myra, goes to Rahul to seduce him directly which he is afraid of. So Fran's desire is thwarted. But Goldie who is very lovely and pleasing deals with him in a different way with lively words, stimulating approach and behaviour and brings in him a different taste about sex and she finally succeeds. After having sex with Goldie, he feels, "relaxed, drowsy and content" (p.101). Rahul's transformation in his attitude towards sex and women is remarkable:

Take your clothes off, she said softly, helping him,
He felt her wonderful smoothness, the skin so cool,
So delicate and then she was lying under him,
Welcoming him into her body and the stiffness, the
Tenseness drained out of him and left him limp and a
Little sad. She held him close, petting him, murmuring
Words that could hardly be distinguished till he was
Relaxed, drowsy, content.

This experience of Rahul shows that sex is uncontrollable. Rahul becomes a fallen man. As a disappointed Guru, he refuses to indulge in sexual activities further. As a consequence, he loses his desire for lust and wealth.

"This part of my life is over, and I have to go on from here" (p.118) says Rahul to Jed when the latter wants to talk about Goldie's love for Rahul. He advises him thus:

But Jed, too much sex is not good for you. In fact, in yoga they teach that sex should be avoided if one wants to learn higher practice. They believe that the semen when properly controlled, can climb up the spine and turn into power, in the brain. The most powerful force in the body is this sex force and this

can be controlled and turned into spiritual force,
lifted from the lowest to the highest.

So, according to the Rishis, yoga gives man power to strengthen his mind and body. It is an inner door for self-realization.

He seeks one more good and genuine Guru and from him he learns the higher knowledge. Under his guidance of touches and glances and by his silent lectures and his initiation through eyes elevated him to a higher level. The old Sadhu transfers the divine power. Rahul feels its impact, “the tremendous lightness and ecstasy, as though his body throbbed with powerful vibration, as the Kundalini rushed up through the Royal path to the brain” (p.131). Rahul becomes a master in his field. This brings immense respect and devotion for him.

Rahul says, “ I must go in to the world and teach the true yoga. Not Yoga for profit, nor for many disciples, but to develop the divine potentiality in all those who seek it.”(pp.142-43). He tells Goldie not to wait for him as he had gone beyond sex and he has no need of her or any woman. He has reached a state of a man without desires, and passions, blissfully happy, wise, pleasant and loving. He enjoys a higher level of bliss through detachment and inner calm. His spiritual power rapidly grows and spreads in all directions .His blessings become effective and the number of foreign as well as Indian disciples grows.

There is a great physical change also in Rahul. Instead of a beautiful boy, fresh and young, with shining eyes, he becomes a man with a hollowed face, enormous eyes, reflecting light, and a stern yet compassionate mouth. Even his voice had become deep, low and beautiful. Myra’s migraine is cured by his simple touches ad she realizes what others had felt before that Rahul is “a god with strange powers”(p.124).

Working of miracles has been a significant device to impress other people of one’s super sensory powers. The miracles of Rahul do establish him as a Swami even to such non-believers as Chris and Myra. Rahul’s guru – the old Sadhu had also shown such miracles, sweating without clothes in bitter cold, his passage of wordless message, while Rahul’s mind, like a highly sensitive radio – had picked up the messages. People in large number come to the Ashram for self-realization.

“There are two kinds of Gurus – the professional gurus or the commercial gurus, who exploit their abilities and want cars and palaces and planes and millions of followers, and there are the genuine ones, who are not interested in all this and do not care if they have one disciple or a million”. Rahul is asked to arouse in the disciples Kundalini, “the mystic serpent force that lies coiled at the base of every human being’s spine”, but he comes to arouse it in himself, and the result lies in his emancipation from the golden cage. In spite of his internal urge clubbed with external pressures Rahul renounces everything and goes for further spiritual attainment into the mountains. He is asked to act as a Guru but he finds a true Guru and resolves to teach the religious meaning of Yoga. The title of the novel, *The Inner Door* is quite apt in so far as the hero’s transcendence from innocent fake guru to real guru has arose his inner sense and opened the inner door for himself.

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