



"AMIT CHAUDHURI'S THE IMMORTALS: METAMORPHOSIS OF ART"

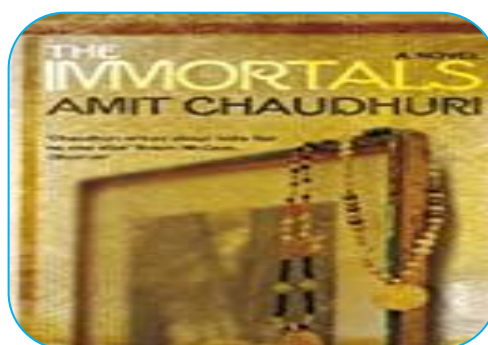
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ABSTRACT

Present paper offers art (Music) in its changed form. Today, music concert programs are organized to earn money and fame. Contrary to it, art in the past was considered sacred. Artists devoted their life for attaining the perfection. To them art was a responsibility and a commitment, not a means of earning and living a life of comfort. But in corporate era, art has also become a medium to earn money. Nobody, today, seems interested in learning classical music; it is the mix and the Western that is superseding. In the novel, The Immortals, the novel taken for study, Pandit ji represents pure art while Shyam ji is a mediocre and represents materialistic view.



KEYWORDS: Novel, Pandit ji, Shyam ji and Immortals.

INTRODUCTION

Modern man, by and large, has ceased to have a human heart throbbing with emotions and sentiments, joy and love, pity and peace. He has become a mere machine, an automation and his life mere mechanical, modern man is reduced to the state of robot and is functioning as a computer, a recording machine without discrimination.

Life has grown today "indefinitely vast" without any "inter linkage" (Karl Jaspers, 1956) to hold it together from falling down. There is a gap between what the individual professes and what he really practices, what he really is and what he would like to appear, and what he aspires for and what he really achieves. This gives rise to a split personality and utter moral confusion. Man, today, says Victor Anant, lives on "an adhoc basis" in "a no man's land of values". Duality in character has been observed as common phenomenon. Old values of life which cherished humanity have been replaced today "by opportunism, treachery, cowardice, hypocrisy and wit. This according to Anant, is due to his "moral inertia and flabbiness (Idem)." These absurd situations give rise to psychological disorders and loss of moral values. These negative attributes of human conduct compel man to commit blunders, sometimes deadly sins, that ultimately disturb his mental peace and harmony and produce discomfort, depression, and frustration. Paul Burnton in his book *Spiritual Crisis of Modern man* rightly remarks that the consequences of victory over material things and subtle forces have turned the world civilization into a tragedy. The more the modern man obtains, the more destitute he becomes.

DISCUSSIONS:

Here the case of Shyam ji who speaks frankly that no one can worship art with empty stomach (Bhuke pet bhajan hot na Gopala), is worth comparable here with Ratan Rator, protagonist in Arun Joshi's novel, *Apprentice*. Ratan Rathor comes from double heritage, his father was a freedom fighter who sacrificed everything, even his life for the cause of freedom while his mother is practical and considers money as supreme "What could one do without money? Man without money was a man without worth. Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money (Arun Joshi, 1974)." She insisted : "If I had everything and no money I would be little better than a beggar's shoe (Idem)." She tells him about the power of money: "It was not patriotism but money that brought respect and bought security. Money made friends. Money succeeds where all else failed. There were many laws... but money was law unto itself(Idem).

Amit Chaudhuri's fifth novel, *The Immortals* presents two worlds; first that of Pandit ji who was a great classical singer and an idealist and, second, that of Shyam ji who is practical and lured by money and its outcomes. Pandit ji maintained a strict protocol between student and teacher, organizer and the performer, musician and singer. If slighted or rebuffed, he sealed off that part of the world that rebuffed him. There goes a story that Lata Mangeshkar wanted a teacher, a guru to train her in the finer points of classical music and a well wisher suggested his name to her and asked him to call her as she was waiting but Pandit ji wanted that she should call him. Contrary to it, Shyam ji organises music concerts, treats his students as his equals and agrees to visit a foreign land (England) to earn money. Both Pandit ji and Shyam ji stand opposite to each other, if one is the east, another is west.

The lineage of Shyam ji that begins with Hanuman Prasad who was a good singer but he did not know how to earn money by it. After Hanuman Prasad's death, Trilok, his elder brother, brought him up and helped him to set his career as Panditji, the famous singer. To him music was a devotion and a responsibility. Against the idealistic view of his ancestors, Shyam ji is practical and does not want to live a life of deprivation. He is modern in his outlook towards life. He thinks like a corporate who is well versed in the art to sell his product in open market on high price. He, too, prepares a plan to organize a music concert to earn money. He is full of ambitions; he wants to have his own car, have his own flat to live. Soon, he finds complain with his second hand car and small flat; he craves for what is not, a new car and two-room flat. This is how that he continuously goes on; he always finds himself dissatisfied with what he had. Nirmalya, his student, raises questions and wants that he should not sing cheap songs (gajals). Instead, he should sing classical music that is superior and he is gifted with the talent for it. But Shyam ji shields himself under the garb of poverty. He assures Nirmalya that he will devote himself for classical music after overcoming it. Perhaps, Nirmalya is apt in asking question for its timing. Much to our dismay that this point of time only remains a possibility, a mirage.

Contrary to Shyamji, Nirmalya is grappled by the questions of existence; he wants to know about cosmos- God and universe. He feels at ease when thinking that "his calling was elsewhere" (p.261). Nirmalya has read all Indian philosophers and poets, the concept of godsetc. Both Nirmalya and his music teacher Shyam ji stand in juxtaposition to each other. Nirmalya serves the role of the preserver of tradition while Shyamji is the protestor who is inclined towards mobility and change of culture with changing times. He carries the flame of his culture in one hand and the change in another. "Shyamji fitted neither the model of the Eastern artist, nor that of the Western musician. The Eastern artist was part religious figure, the Western part rebel; and Shyamji seemed to be neither. (p.99).Too frequently, he moves in two cultural spaces, Indian and Western.

In modern times, this is equally true that young generation is least interested in classical music: "No one wanted to learn classical music from him (Shyamji); in fact he had no disciple in classical music. Shyam ji's son, Sanjay, also remains no exception to it: "His son (Sanjay)wants to learn the guitar; they were going to procure one from Fortado's. Shayamji's wife wanted Sanjay to be a music arranger: 'There is money in music arrangement.' (P.105)

Shyam ji is intelligent enough to read the sign; he clearly understands that new generation is not susceptible towards pure art. A sizeable majority of his clients wants to "learn ghazals; love songs in simple urdu...the older women, wives of diamond merchants and exporters, liked to sing bhajans, chanting

the names of Radha and Krishna, slipping in and out tune. And Shyamji had embraced these forms: not because they had paid the rent.... But because they opened an avenue into the sort of life he wanted—to taste, to partake of. We may live under the false impression for a long time that classical music is superior and people love it but one day we will encounter with the truth that it was only our faith and a make-belief, nothing beyond. Somewhere Shyam ji is apt in expressing: "These mildly touching songs were a form of currency; classical music-shastriya sangeet-a responsibility (P.106-7)."

Putting aside his weakness to money, Shyam ji was virtuous in many ways; he had no vice to speak of. People knew that he did not drink; he never smoked. His weakness was sweets; he loved eating jalebis with milk. His another weakness was "life itself—life and its material reward, its great material promise. He didn't want to go away from it (P.148).

Shyam ji lived in a world different from that of his father. To earn money and public respect he developed a plan to organize an annual function, 'Gandharva Sammelan in the memory of his father. His approach to organize it remains commercial: "...Shyam ji became peripatetic with a grey-white cyclostyled form for advertisements in his hand: one thousand rupees for a full page in the souvenir, one thousand five hundred for the first page and the back cover, etc. (P.158)." Moreover, he approached Mr. Sengupta and Apurva Sengupta as patron and honourary elder. Stage was set after the usual series of trials and errors; there were floral patterns around the piece of synthetic that said 3rd Gandharva Samelan.

Undoubtedly, the ambience that was created in the music concert was mesmerizing. It witnessed God's plenty. People belonging to all sections of society came to participate: "Shyam ji's disciples, from young struggling singers to businessmen's wives, hot but bright in their saris, naked ears dressed provocatively in gold, whose husband's has put a full page advertisement in the souvenir(P.197)." The way Shyam ji appeals to the people to be the part of the program indicates that he has an art to catch the psychology of the middle class people. In diagnosing the innate latent desire common in everyone, Shyam ji is superb. He provides a platform to all the aspirants to come forward and form a class with singer community: "Their relationship with music had begun embryonically in their prehistory as listeners; they had hummed in an undertone with the artist they loved best, or loudly, solitarily, to themselves; and then, at some point, they had asked themselves the unimaginable, something that have not occurred to them six months before, or which they didn't have the courage to admit: "Can't I be a singer? Can't it be me? Why should they only listen; why could not they be listened to? (P.197)." Once the question was posed so shatteringly, the answer was simple, and led to its own enjoy, liberation and trauma. And here Shyam ji, ironically was not so much teacher as mediator; not only to satisfy the middle class urge for music, but the relentless, childlike longing to become the musician (how simply the metamorphosis could be achieved); to move to centre stage, at least for fifteen minutes, where the traditional musician previously was. Shyam ji had "a shrewd and tender comprehension of the vanity that made people sing. This was the difference between the age in which he lived and the one Ram Lal had inhabited and taught in; (P.197).

Shyam ji understands his age and the taste of the people in a perfect way. It is democratic set up in which we are living today; it prohibits discrimination of any sort on any basis. Shyam ji treats his "students as equals; that he was their guru, but also in this age, their coeval; and the patron had merged into the rights and irreducible power of the common man, not only the right to honour and even own the artist that the person had, in a sense, reserved for himself, but to do away with the very line that separated artist and ordinary human being. Shyam ji subsisted and thrived on this equality; he mingled among his students as if he was one among them (P. 167-168).

Truly speaking Shyam ji has come from a poor background and financial insecurity dominates his mind: "Baba, Let me establish myself so that I have not to think of money any more. Then I can devote myself completely to art. You cannot sing classical empty stomach(P. 192)." Nirmalya is very pointed in raising the straightway question that bewilder Shyamji: "How did you know that you have arrived at that point, when you were safe enough exclusively and fearlessly to arts? How, and for when, did you set the cut off date? (P. 192).

Most of Shyam ji's students were emigrants. Mainly women. Mrs. Lakhani, an emigrant, comes from England and insists on Shyamji to accompany her to England: "Come and stay with us,. Come and stay with us over there. I will arrange some concerts, I will arrange everything. My friends are dying to listen to you (P.230)." This seemed to both Shyam ji and his family, a great opportunity to fulfill the old desires. Along with all the family members, mother of Shyam ji is over happy and wants that he should go to England to earn money: "Why does he waste his time with the likes of her.....England meant pounds, and pounds were a windfall; they had the power to heal, to renew. Jao, jao, do not think so much...." In England he feels more efficient: ".....Shyam ji had never encountered such a silence before, so much composure; so many things everywhere,.... (P.234)."

Psychology of hunger and deprivation has been explained through Shyam ji in a realistic way. Living in England, Shyam ji realizes that his family members in India are not waiting for him but for the money that he will offer to them: ".....they had been preparing these months to swallow him up; wanting things from him, wanting things, wanting things. It was hot, but he froze inside; he had nothing of himself to give (P.237). He finds England a comfortable place that offered him money and respect: "After his third trip abroad, he had cleared most of his outstanding debts. And he had enough money left over to sell his own flat in Boriveli, and with that money and some what he had recently earned... he bought a two-room bedroom apartment in Versova, facing the sea (P.240).

Shyam ji makes a comparison between Western and Indian instruments and concludes in favour of the Western: "A man who could play a Western instrument would always have a livelihood in today's world; so it seemed to the old music families. The tanpura, with its strings lost its magic, but it became more and more difficult to make time for it, its sound shocked you every time you heard it-like a god humming to himself, its vibrations difficult to describe or report on, the solipsism of heavens (P.242). His son Sanjay toys with Synthesizer: "The synthesizer dazzled Sanjay...there seemed to be no sound he could not extract from it. It was as if an orchestra....constantly changing shape, obedient to his finger tips. It was portable; like a wand, he carried it from location to location, room to room (P.242). New generation does not bother to the classical music (gharana).

Nirmalya's frequent awkward questions to Shyam Ji including , "Why do not you sing more classical? (P.356). "Why are bhajans and gajals sung in this cheap way(P.356)." "Why don't you sing more Classical (P.359)" bewilders his mind and he answers meekly, "Baba you cannot practice art on an empty stomach. Let me make enough money from these lighter forms; and then I shall be able to devote myself entirely to classical, a perfectly workable blueprint (P.360)." Perhaps Nirmalya was correct in stating that "that moment will never come. The moment to give yourself to your art is now (P.360)."

To Shyam ji life is a continuous longing for betterment. He had sold the second hand fiat to the new one that would not stop and start in bursts. In the long run, Shyam ji's love to eat traditional Indian sweets e.g gajar ka halwa, jalebi with milk etc. makes him comorbid patient (P.197). After two strokes, in Jaslok Hospital, he passes away.

It is evident from the very beginning that both 'guru' (Shyamji) and 'chela' (Nirmalya) are two different poles: if Nirmalya is east, Shyam ji is west and both can never meet: "...the disciple wants nothing of the guru but knowledge; but Shyamji was not a teacher in the mythological sense. He lived in a world of transactions. He expected his students to promote him; his students expected him to promote them; it was a relationship of independence at once less calculating, less final, and more human-with all the oscillations of judgement and misunderstandings that humans are prone to-that one might be led to believe (P.373).

CONCLUSION:

However, Nimalya values his teacher, Shyamji as one among the best but he was disappointed by his pursuit of material well being. He believes that : "An artist must devote himself to the highest expression of his art and reject success; he was going to be the seventeen, and these ideas have come to him from books he had read recently, but he has always felt he had always known them and they were true for all times (P. 191)." He plainly asks to his guruji, " why don't you sing classical more often? Why don't you sing fewer ghazals and sing more at classical music (P. 192)."

No one can assess Shyam ji in an accurate way as Nirmalya who saw him committing a series of errors in judgment in the last few years: "choosing glamour over art, light music over classical, death over life. It was not diabetes or even heart disease that had killed him; it was not drink, or not the hidden self-destructive impulse that finished other artists-Shyam ji was a calm, reasonable man, who had no vices. It was his wanting too much from life. 'Why was he in such a hurry?' (P.380).

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