

# A Critical Reading of Social Consciousness in K. V. Raghupathi's Orphan and other Poems

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*Abstract---Dr. Raghupathi is one of the leading voices in Indian English Poetry. Although by nature a mystic poet, three of his individual collections written and published over a decade are replete with themes dealing with various social realities. Through his poems the prudent poet enlightens and creates social awareness. The bard's elegant and vibrant verses instill tenacity and resilience in the minds of readers. He is a Pollyanna and enlightens us with the ray of sunshine. The present paper is an earnest endeavor to unearth the above mentioned virtues in the select poems of his tenth poetry collection Orphan and other Poems.*

**Keywords:** K. V. Raghupathi, Review Article, Virtues, Poems, Values, Principles, Righteous, Enlighten.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Raghupathi's poems are exploratory. It eliminates ignorance, brighten people's vision, sharpen their knowledge and instill values. The poem "Two Visitors" blazons the lofty virtue of sharing, of course the bygone word of the current materialistic world. The poet, a witty observer of worldly things pens this poem to spread the gospel of sharing. It is ridiculous to note that feelings which are innate and have to come from birth have become a part of education, insisted and taught. Team skills, team spirit are taught and trained to Gen Z as a part of curriculum. If they can flaunt their sharing tendency in group discussion or role play they have better chances of winning a job. The current cohorts are actually aware of 'share' only in computers which enables to see a document kept in share from other computers within a limited space.

The poet states the act of two hypersensitive squirrels that kick up a fuss on each other "over prized caught fruit." (Two Visitors 15) Due to the lack of smartness to share the possession they both have to forego the treasurable food to the third squirrel, who exploits the two by telling, "I shall settle the ownership to full justice." (Two Visitors 15)

The poem efficaciously inculcates the virtue of sharing. It also out speaks the dodgy mindset and fraudulent plots of a few that persecutes manifold. Thus the poet rubs up his reader's mind on the noble virtue of partaking if not one will fall a prey and allow the third person to intervene and ruin everything.

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In his another poetry collection *Between Me and the Babe* also Dr. Raghupathi hits a verbal nail and asserts the virtue of sharing in his poem "Hunger". His lines adjudicate man's uncouth behavior as he lacks the value of sharing.

"At least the animals are decent amidst scanty

Over the laws of sharing unconsciously and leaving nothing." (Hunger 65)

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam's poem "Are We Alone" appends to the aforesaid thought. The canto,

"You give and give till you are united

That's the mission of humanity." (Are We Alone 11)

makes it clear that sharing is a great virtue and entails to be worked on.

In the next poem "Drought", the poet's verbal artistry captures the shot of horrendous famine. The very word drought evokes the snap of deprivation, obscenity and nastiness. The poem differentiates different facets of time and the deterioration gobbling day by day. People of primordial days were blessed with trees and pollution free air. But as the days passed and due to man's avarice nature is severely put to loss. The poet laments that the bloom of flowers, proliferating leaves and widespread branches of a tree which was a treasure to the planet now has become barren.

There are no flowers falling

only leaves hanging like bats.

There are no leaves falling

only empty branches stretching in empty space like bony hands.

There are no branches spreading

only the trunk standing like an abandoned child in the desert.

There is no trunk standing

only the raw earth with no opening

staring at the sky for a drop. (Drought 11)

A drop is beyond price and treasured but it has become scarce. It is not only the tree but even human beings yearn for a drop that enables to sustain life on this planet. The condition is so aggressive and extreme that men and women are left, "with parched throats and dried eyes" (Drought 11). The poem makes us envision that if people have deprived nature of its wealth and riches then how it can quench and satiate humanity. Without the seed (contribution) there is no question of thinking on harvest or produce. Congruously, with scarce water sources like well, tanks, river, lake how can we expect downpour? This is minimum common sense and the poet's versatility makes the reader to contemplate beyond the lines. Hence drought is manmade and conserving nature is the only panacea to this human predicament. Thirst and hunger are inevitable to mankind. Akin to Raghupathi who has dealt with thirst and hunger in the poem "Drought", Bhattacharya has dealt with hunger in 1942-43 famine in Baruni, a remote village in Bengal in his first novel "So Many Hungers." The ugly reality of human beings being victims of hunger has been captured in the following lines:

Hunger like slow poison kills people around the city... makes human inhuman. The starving men quarrel fiercely for a little bit of food. The savages of hunger compel a mother to eat food, while her child is lying dead in her lap. Hunger also impels a young girl to show her naked to men for the sake of getting food for herself and her dear ones. The destitute debase themselves where they dig garbage in search of food. Garbage is considered to be food bowl. They beseech for food in vain. Their feeble state entraps and prey them to wild beasts. (Bhattacharya 137)

The portrayal is quite heart rending causing excruciating pain and correlates to the harsh realities in Raghupathi's poem on drought. Shujaat Hussain's poem "Save from Self Annihilation" rejoinders the aforementioned deprivation.

Importance of water has increased

Because level of water has decreased

Senseless misuse poses peril to survival

Modern man in the urbanity

Where has gone your sensibility? (Save from Self Annihilation 14)

Thus the poems underscore that we should redeem from the tribulation by conserving water resources and being sensible to nature.

"A Walk on the Ruins" is a picturesque word paint that unfastens the poet's intense inquietude on the dilapidated condition of Chandragiri fort. His portrayal brings back life to the prehistoric castle. The initial line, "It is a place where history stays old as well as young" (A Walk on the Ruins 25) connotes poet's notion in elevating the prominence of the fort. Though there are manifold historically rich places exhibiting the marvels of the bygone era the poet has extreme penchant for Chandragiri Fort. He personally feels that the fort is avant-garde, riveting and is on par with up-to-date construction. But due to lack of maintenance it is disintegrated wearing a shambled outlook. There are many instances to adduce poet's grief. The queen's pond constructed with granite steps is beauteous equitable to the latter day erection. But pathetically it is now

"descending into the womb

pointing to the empty sky." (A Walk on the Ruins 25)

The word 'empty sky' lays emphasis on its desolated and impoverished state. The swords and daggers that stand as an emblem of integrity, esteem and status symbol to any kingdom are now rusted and are in blackish brown colours, "resting eternally on the walls" (A Walk on the Ruins 25). Kudos to the poet's scintillating evocation. He also brings to notice the colours of the sword to announce its unused, uncared state. The adverb 'eternally' alludes that there is no hope for the swords to regain its lost vigour and ferocity. 'Old is gold' is an apt statement to fit the present context. The marvelous architectural beauty of the majestic mahal that stands aloft is a "mockery to the modern structures" (A Walk on the Ruins 25).

Despite the state of the art construction technology in the current era, one would feel reverential and lose their words by the prudence and sagacity applied in the constructions of the yore. It is startling to note that the historical

monument Golconda fort in Hyderabad city situated at Andhra Pradesh state of India has an Air Conditioned room without electricity during the primordial days. It is designed based on the air flow patterns. It enables the opulent monarchial to revel in the lap of luxury. Similarly, the monarch's room is constructed in such a way where he can immediately trace if the traitor tends to attack him. If the traitor throws any weapon on the king the arch obstructs and protects the king. On the other hand, the king is seated in such an angle where he can throw and attack the traitor. Contemporary architecture is only an 'old wine in a new bottle'.

Analogous to the aforesaid is Chandragiri fort's structure. The poet praises to the skies regarding the framework of the old fort at Chandragiri. He dips deep into the memories of the scene in the garden of the fort. Here children play pranks and squeal. Young couples make love and these make the place blithely and buzzing. The last lines put on the pedestal the poet's woe on the dilapidation and disintegration of the fort.

It is my history, my past  
I squat and ponder  
on the ruins preserved for the amnesiac man.  
I can neither swallow nor vomit the history  
that stays on the tip of my tongue. (A Walk on the Ruins 25)

In the same way, the poem "Thousand Pillars" from the poetry collection *The Broken Rhythms* by T. Vasudeva Reddy is an agonizing note on the ravaged state of the famous Ramappa temple near Warangal in Andhra Pradesh state, India. The poet agonizes that the temple is an, "Indelible blot on humanity" (Thousand Pillars 22). He mulls over that the thousand pillars of the temple, "cry in mute agony" (Thousand Pillars 22). The sculptures and the statues are "decayed into dust" (Thousand Pillars 22). Their intricate patterns cast a "pensive spell" (Thousand Pillars 22). Thus the verse writers Raghupathi and T. V. Reddy flare-up their fury on the defaced condition of the fort and temple at the same time it is a plea to uphold the treasures of the bygone era. It is these historical monuments that stand as a testimony to India's cultural heritage laying an unassailable and resilient foundation of the future.

The pathetic state of a mendicant in the Y. M Street of Kadapa city is reflected in the next poem "An Image." The proliferating adjectives like, 'faded', 'dusted', 'naked babe', 'bony chest', 'wobbling stick' in the poem drives home the penury and the betrayed state of the beggar woman. According to the adage "Rich is becoming richer and the poor is becoming poorer" the poet juxtaposes her faded and dusted sari to the "glistening grey silvery cheverlot" (An Image 24). This draws attention to the vast gap existing between the rich and the poor in a country like India.

"Greying sky and the faintly burning neon lights" picture the ambience of sunset.

"Naked babe in the pouch suckling  
The loosely hanging left breast" (An Image 24)

makes obvious the impecunious state of the woman who has been let down. The naked baby depending on its starving mother's 'bony chest' and the mother who beseeches for a coin to be flanged on her palm is the poignant image that the poet wishes to accentuate. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening in a country like India. The poem is a satire on the ongoing condition with a hope for amelioration. The image that the poet brings to our

mind's eye is omnipresent and a common sight. The impoverished state of the beggar woman represents the travail of the myriad. But no one is perturbed and has never made endeavor.

Gieve Patel's poem "Nargol" also refers to the starvation of a beggar woman. She beseeches for a coin and the poet feels annoyed. He doesn't want to give in to her importunity. He rejects her saying, "You meet me later

I'll give you later." (Nargol 7). But Raghupathi's poem is a clarion call to serve the destitute. It is an appeal for charity and magnanimity towards fellow human beings.

"It's Business as usual" unravels the fury of the storm that destroys the vast canvass of land and gulps down the lives of the manifold. The horrendous effect of the storm on the animate and the inanimate makes the poet ponder and reflect its ferocity. The storm carries the things and objects "as if in funeral procession". (It's Business as usual 37) The adjective 'funeral' hints at the sad and hapless state. Death is the ultimate. It is absolutely impossible to bring life after death. Alike to this the loss occurred due to wreck has no chances to redeem. Hence the poem cautions against the intensity of the fury. It depicts the pandemonium caused when Kurnool city in Andhra Pradesh state was attacked by the swollen waters of the river Thungabhadra in 2009. As many floods have devastated the lives of people since then.

"Houses and trees half merged  
Stand as pilgrims in prayers  
Drenched men and women stand on rooftops  
Clutching their children in fear." (It's Business as usual 37)

The middle class is more victimized due to the catastrophe. The condition is a witness to human failure. Though automation is ruling the roost and man is planning to live in Mars, he is powerless and has to surrender to the power of nature. That's why people

"wait long for succor and mercy in the sky" (It's Business as usual 37)

The poet brilliantly juxtaposes the wail of human beings to

"the cacophony of swirling waters," It is a "living agony in symphony" (It's Business as usual 37)

The situation is drastic; The pain is gruesome and is beyond human level of tolerance. The poet states the agonized state.

"It's gruesome losing oneself in the varied pain made by nature and man" (It's Business as usual 37)

The mundane flow of activities and peace of life is affected due to the storm. Its occurrence is not proportional to the loss it incurs.

"Temple bells do not toll  
No roosters morning call  
No crow's cawing and dog's barks." (It's Business as usual 37)

Amidst the poetic lines of tragedy and melancholy the poet beautifully describes the vivid picture of partial sunrise,

“through the partially loosened clouds like the palanquin woman” and thus brings lustre and aesthetic sense in the verse. It is absolutely silent similar to the silence in the burial ground. The only traffic there is the human traffic to trace the lost and displaced. Boat and helicopter

“Weave through the surging waves and currents”

“Loud warning of pending disaster and suffering” (It’s Business as usual 37) augments the existing suffering and doldrums. Air dropped food packets and sachets are the only source of food to the village that is immersed like an iceberg in the flooding waters. Towards the end of the poem the poet brings contrast between the upper and lower class in this poem too alike “An image.” People living in concrete structures are safe; they are not preyed by the fury and the man-made dams. Their ‘sophisticated dress’ and ‘sumptuous meal’, (It’s Business as usual 37) are set in contrast with those hankering for air dropped food packets. A grocer is selling his groceries and making business as usual amidst the carnage.

Chambial’s verse “Rains” also describes the dreadful wreckage caused due to the downpour.

It rained throughout the night

It rained cats and dogs

The horrendous song of obliteration

Plains feared flood

Human hearts meek

Birds and beasts ran for life

All chanted ...prayed for respite. (Rains 34)

The poem “Tsunami” by T. Vasudeva Reddy is higher in intensity than the present poem “It’s business as usual.”

A sudden traumatic shock, a terrifying wreck

An unprecedented nature’s callous calamity

Hundreds of fishing hamlets swept away in a bout,

Thousands marooned and thousands snatched away

Once an enchanting scene, now a yawning grave;....

People of all ages, men, women and children

Crushed and washed away...

Can devastation be so sudden, so cruel, so cryptic?

So we to Nature’s fury leaving a trail of hushed noise. (Tsunami 58)

Both the poems emphasize the tremendous power of nature and man’s handcuffed state. Human life is vulnerable. Technology can only detect but not stop its sway. No equipment could redeem man from the doom and the catastrophe caused by nature. The poems thus disseminate ecological neglect, mismanagement of dams and the pressing need to preserve nature. Besides it also professes not to commercialize on people’s helpless state.

“Chenchiah, the Weaver” is an emotional and stirring poem. Globalization has brought great transformation in the lives of manifold. It has almost flourished many sectors and upgraded man’s life. As the two sides of a coin the

effect of globalization has brought adverse effects in the weaver's life. It has made their survival a conundrum and precarious. The poem is a sad note on the jobless state of the multitudinous weavers of whom Chenchiah is the representative of the present poem. He has the skill and sophistication such that he has "woven a thousand saris to suit thousand minds". (Chenchiah, the Weaver 52) When there was a boom for woven saris he felt happy and placid, he was able to win bread for his four children. His loom gave him a source for survival. When the doors of globalization opened his weaving became weak and came to a standstill and collapsed, his survival became a question mark, and debts surmounted him. "His children fell ill, emaciated and succumbed like shriveled flowers." (Chenchiah, the Weaver 52) His wife got heart attack. Being lonely and penniless with rusted looms and unsold saris the weaver's condition is beyond redemption.

"Frustration hooted in his heart'

His dropping flesh stinks like sweat and dust

Firing sun and hunger burrowed his eyes and cheeks." (Chenchiah, the Weaver 52)

The weaver's withering heart, deprived state and nostalgia make him to lose his spirit and he becomes hopeless. His struggles for subsistence become perpetual. Chenchiahs like these are widespread and their wails and agonies are unheard to any authorities. The present poem bears witness to the adverse effects of globalization. Manifold lives have been gulped down due to the advancement and proliferation of industries. Like a mirror that reflects the image the poem bangs drum on the woebegone state of the weavers.

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The article "Weft and Warp of a Crisis" in The Hindu recounts the effect of globalization on the weavers. It belabours the hostile schemes and policies of the government that have put handloom weaving to a severe crunch. Due to the disastrous effects of globalization many weavers have lost their livelihood. The statistics that the article states on the death of the weavers is distressing to note.

Official estimates show that due to unbearable debt burdens, about a 1,000 weavers may have committed suicide in Andhra Pradesh alone since 2002. According to the National Handloom Census of 2009-10, close to 60 per cent of India's weavers today fall below the poverty line, and 80 per cent face high debts, being at the mercy of intermediaries who also double up as moneylenders, controlling access to both markets and raw materials. These key inputs have become increasingly more expensive since the advent of globalization in the 1980s. (The Hindu)

Chenchiah in the poem is not an individual but symbolize a community as a whole. The poem brings their pains for survival to the forefront and thereby wishes for their uplift.

## II. CONCLUSION

"Man becomes great exactly in the degree in which he works for the welfare of his fellow men" claims Mohandas K. Gandhi. The collection Orphan and other Poems is insightful and has touched the manifold by its elegant and salient verses. The poems are a masterpiece, a testament that validates the poet's social concern. It should be preserved and passed on to the generation's ahead. "Two Visitors" enlightens the morality of sharing. "Drought" and "Its Business as usual" aver poet's ecological concern and advocates not to capitalize on the victim's

impotence. "A walk on the Ruins" maintains that old is gold, the monuments are the emblem of our cultural heritage and need to be well-maintained. "An Image" pictures the impecuniousness and the gap between the opulent and the deprived. "Chenchaiyah, the Weaver" is a voice for weavers and their diminishing weaving industry. Naresh avows, "Each poem of Raghupathi ends with a morale, philosophy and wisdom" (109) to be inculcated in the thought process and strives for the rehabilitation of the people in the society. The verses are ardent such that it can obliterate the stoical and bleak thoughts of a cynic. Like a light house that scatters light and serves as a navigational aid the collection of poems instills social consciousness and benefits the society with noble qualities of uprightness.

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