



JAYANTI DALAL'S THE DARKNESS DESCENDS (JAGMOHANE SHU JOVU?): A DISTRESS OF BLINDNESS AND COMPROMISING THE SELF

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Abstract

*Jayanti Dalal was an eminent playwright, critic and prose writer of Gujarati literature. His sense of employing experiments with form and techniques made him somewhat distinct writer. All his literary works are thought-provoking manifesting unique characteristics through analysis of human perspective. The story *The Darkness Descends (Jagmohane Shu Jovu?)* focuses on the feelings of Jagmohan, the hero of the story who loses his eyesight. The writer seems to reveal the truth that one should live with rational honesty. He aims at understating the human mind. The writer constructs a story through psychological truth, which doesn't seem mere a fancy tale. The writer has conducted an experiment of a 'story within story' by using comparable Japanese story. The writer applies here his sense of experimentation with a view to comparing and analyzing the self with the others.*

Keywords: *psychological truth, human perspective, transformation, happiness, distress, life-spirit*



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Jayanti Dalal was an eminent playwright, critic and prose writer of Gujarati literature. His sense of employing experiments with form and techniques made him somewhat distinct writer. All his literary works are thought-provoking manifesting unique characteristics through analysis of human perspective. The facets of rational evaluation of human mind and its situation have remained essential in his creativity. He has analyzed the life and feelings of middle class as well as intellectuals in majority of his literary works rationally. His love for humanity and impartiality and sensitivity towards all human being are evident in his writings. He emerged as a versatile genius in literature. He was one of the foremost leaders of *Magujarat* Movement which took place in the year 1956 to set Gujarat free from Mumbai bilingual state. He was an active political figure and remained true *Satyagrahi* during the Quit India Movement. Besides, he also translated Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Charles Dickens' *Great Expectation* into Gujarati. He had a number of collections of short stories to his credit. His collection of short stories are: *Uttara* (1944), *Kathrotman Ganga* (1950), *Jujava* (1950), *Mukam Karoti* (1953), *Ishat* (1963), *Udhisthir*

(1968). He also earned bright fame as a playwright through his plays like: *Zabukiyan* (1939), *Avataran* (1949) in Gujarati literature.

Aniruddha Brahmabhatt is of the view that Jayanti Dalal is the product of Gandhian era, but he doesn't prefer to be confined under any single ideology (Shastri 207), hence his stories do not seem restricted to particular time and philosophy. Sarla Jagmohan has translated one of his stories *Jagmohane Shu Jovu?* entitled *The Darkness Descends* into English. The translator has tried to retain the essential simplicity and the spirit of the original story as closely as possible. The narrative focuses on the feelings of Jagmohan, the hero of the story who loses his eyesight. The writer describes the wretched plight of Jagmohan in a pragmatic manner: 'in every word that he reads, he finds some letter missing. If he settles his eyes on the lines, he feels a number of them are mixing up and tie in a knot at the end'(35). Along with Jagmohan's pitiful situation, Dalal visualizes a variety of things like window bars, swinging parrot on the window frame, lines like railway track of a small station becoming a streak of light in the blazing heat of the afternoon, the lines in the book like the middle parting of the sparse almost sticy hair of a middle aged woman tied in a tight knot of the back, etc. The descriptions of such similes characterize writer's sagacity since they remain touching part at the initial stage in the story. The writer adds one more simile for 'line' as the carefully constructed wall of mason in order to emphasis the importance of eyesight and existing state of Jagmohan. The writer has employed the Japanese tale of Tatsuzo Ishikawas's *Thoughts in Darkness* which represents its sightless hero 'eating like a child'. The writer seems to compare and contrast the miserable plight of these two blind people correspondingly.

While consulting the doctor, the doubt of Jagmohan proves true that he has lost eyesight completely as he was not fully convinced about his blindness in the beginning. Jagmohan seems confused 'how could he suffer'. His feeble state of mind seems to move towards the background of its end; hence such phase of Jagmohan remains significant and decisive in his later phase. Jagmohan experiences that his eyes are gradually dimming. The writer very minutely represents the physical structure of doctor. Jagmohan sees that 'doctor has hair in his nostrils, ears and on his hands. The doctor tests the strength of his vision and declares that it is 'the thrombosis of retinal vein' – the ultimate diagnosis and advises Jagmohan that he should live his life philosophically as preached through the sacred writings like *Bhagvad Geeta* and *Bible*: 'such patient should take their lives philosophically' (36). When he receives such advice from doctor, Jagmohan speaks to himself 'what I have been

doing all these years?' The satirical tone towards the self makes him realize that he couldn't live his life well during what went before. Thereafter, the story vividly depicts the doctor's behavior and the reaction of other patients in the hospital.

In the third phase of the narrative, Jagmohan's suspicions have already been cleared, and he seems to acknowledge completely that 'his eyesight has been lost' completely. The protest of Jagmohan utterly changes his personality. Jagmohan, while returning from hospital experiences the movement of his mind along with his feet. The contradiction or irony of his life has been noticeable in the story. As he reminds certain lines from Milton's poem: "And that one talent which is death to hide lodged with me useless..... Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?" This discouraging exclamation comes out of his pathetic state. When one loses the sights of one's eyes, darkness, and only darkness surrounds one's life. One's life becomes dependent. Beauty becomes the subject of somebody else's description... and yet, one has but to carry on the burden of one's existence (39).

Jagmohan ponders over his future life after losing eyesight. The writer shows his frame of mind shifting into another reality gradually. Raghuvveer Chaudhari, an eminent writer of Gujarati literature observes that the writer has employed Japanese story as a 'stimulus' (Shastri 259). He further examines that 'The writer could skillfully describe the transformation in mental situation by using the small phase of time. The time bears the form of life-spirit in the story (Shastri 261). The story makes one realize the state of transformation and space between situations. Jagmohan's situation seems to match many things of Japanese story. To that sense, it seems natural. He says: 'What a coincidence! Even the title of the story happened to be 'Thoughts in Darkness'. The darkness which was to surround him- had it not already cast its shadow? (39) The Japanese story introduces the characters of husband and his wife. The answer to husband's helplessness against blindness is 'suicide' as suggested by his wife. Jagmohan thinks over the same situation: 'how would he be able to reveal his situation to wife? Placed in a pitiful situation, Jagmohan while walking, suddenly dashes with a gentleman and smiles even under the railway track. Likewise Japanese story wherein the wife seems teased when sees her husband eating like a small child. Jagmohan thinks over his 'would be situation' and comes over the conclusion that his wife would never get angry with him and feels that in such situation she herself will feed him.

Hence, Jagmohan's approach of thinking somewhat like Japanese couple gradually places him in a healthy position. To that extent this incident in the story, plays its significant part. It not only prevents Jagmohan from thinking further on 'death' but also leads him

towards optimistic way of life. Jagmohan reminds the Japanese tale repeatedly wherein the differences between husband and wife reach to its climax over the issue of fish-bones in the plate. Japanese story lacks the agreement between husband and wife. Though, Jagmohan doesn't have to face such situations. Suddenly, an idea flashes into his mind and moves him by heart as 'they both were thinking of committing suicide', while it seems quite impossible in his case because his wife would never complain nor get angry over his blindness.

The writer has conducted an experiment of a 'story within story' by using comparable Japanese story. The writer applies here his sense of experimentation with a view to comparing and analyzing the self with the others. The philosophy of life also suggests that man alone cannot solve his individual life-puzzles and confusions every time through his own vision. One has to seek inspiration from others as well. Similarly one also comes to know through this narrative that the harmonious domestic life where the family refinement called *Sanskar* shaped under the frame of civilization, survives the ideal relationship in family life. The mere materialistic vision leads one towards fall whereas true love offers the strength for endurance and life-spirit.

The complex life of Japanese couple, the adverse consequences due to unkind nature of wife and their approach towards facing the blindness, etc. stand in contrast with the happy married life of Jagmohan and his affectionate wife. The decision of Jagmohan over the idea of committing suicide seems to cancel in absence of his wife. He thinks now what to do further for better living when he has accepted life and rejected death. At this stage, he plans to carry out certain things inconsistently: 'what would he do even when the darkness descends'. He thinks to go to Kashmir, visit Taj Mahal and Ajanta Ellora Caves. Though the state of his mind doesn't seem steady yet as the philosophy he learns to survive anyhow hasn't reached to its climax. Slowly and gradually he comes out of that painful phase. Hence, prompt recovery is not possible in his case. A variety of things come to his mind and he behaves like 'a child in a toy shop'. He is placed in an awkward and indecisive situation. The writer very skillfully introduce the answer to the issue before he comes to further conclusion, he reaches home wherein he finds warmth and love of his dear wife.

The reader, along with Jagmohan witnesses the mental state of Jagmohan, the couple's attitude towards each other and can experience the loving and kind nature of his wife while on his way to home. In comparison to his wife, the beauty of Kashmir and Taj Mahal seems discolored, and proves useless to him. He wishes to see only his wife's face and says afterward: Mad, Have I ever seen that face at all? (45) While communicating such

expression, the writer shows that he is quite happy and has no pain of any kind in his life. The recognition of his wife's true love becomes possible only after his blindness. Jagmohan anyhow accepts the blindness- the retinal thrombosis. To some extent Jagmohan's changing attitude towards life shows its relevance to Shakespearean philosophy as expressed through one of his characters named Duke: "sweet are the uses of adversity, which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in his head (*As You Like It* -Act-2)". Adversity symbolizes here misfortune. Though, such misfortune has many advantages because it offers one a life-spirit and strengthens his courage, tolerance and wisdom.

The question raised in the beginning is answered in a sweet manner by Jagmohan himself. The writer manifests the dignity of love in domestic life in an artistic manner. The sense of compromising against the pangs of life indirectly suggests writer's auspicious attitude towards the harsh realities of life.

The writer seems to reveal the truth that one should live with rational honesty. He aims at understating the human mind. The writer constructs a story through psychological truth, which doesn't seem mere a fancy tale. Hence, Jayanti Dalal's art of writing very honestly judge the theoretical truth of art and its treatment as stated by Rene Wellek in *Theory of Literature*: "Psychological truth is an artistic value if it enhances coherence and complexity- if in short, it is art" (93).

The story also reveals certain norms of happy life as cited in *Bhagvad Geeta*: Happiness is a state of mind and has nothing to do with the external world. Jagmohan learns this truth of life as he was advised by doctors to live his life philosophically.

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