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SATIRE IN “DELIQUENT CHACHA” : VED MEHTA

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with Ved Mehta’s first novel – Delinquent Chacha. It is a short satirical novel set in London and Oxford. Ved Mehta has proved to be a shrewd and observant commentator on Indian society. He has brilliantly satirized Indians who insanely ape the foreign and are still unable to cast away the cloak of Britishers. The touch of satire is turned as much on British as on Indian – because human nature everywhere is same. No nation is unaffected by self-deception, vanity, priggishness, and folly.

Ved Mehta, who is well known for his writings on the ideas and personalities of contemporary philosophers, historians and theological, has, in Delinquent Chacha given an enchanting introduction to the latest seeker of the Dream in the character of loquacious Indian, Delinquent Chacha. It is a story of a middle aged, copious, inventive, disastrously incompetent member of a distinguished Indian family. He is ultimately a captivating middle aged Indian- an Anglophile, a dreamer, a card player – who spent his early years under the British Raj. Now when India is independent, he is nostalgic and wants nothing so much as to turn himself into an English man. So as to accomplish his goal, he sets out for England with a view to become an undergraduate at Oxford and club man. His various experiences as a porter, which he considers to be a temporary job, his brush with the law for befuddling his tailors, his self-defense in the courtroom with an elegant mixture of Indian and British logic – all seem to be a first rate farce. Yet there is more than what appears on the surface. Ved Mehta has not only made fresh, witty comment on West and East but also created a large-scale comic character.

Key words: priggishness, folly, loquacious, copious, befuddling

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“Delinquent Chacha” by Ved Mehta is a short satirical novel, in which we perceive Ved Mehta as a shrewd and observant commentator on India society. He presents a joyous and hilarious view of the sunny side of colonial India and the delights of wily innocence. The reader is presented with an enchanting introduction to the latest seeker of the dream in the character of the protagonist of the novel. Delinquent Chacha is a middle aged, uninhibited, garrulous extrovert but highly incompetent member of a distinguished

Indian family. All his other brothers had successfully competed for government jobs and made their career. Whereas

"he worked for his living only once, as a carpenter, in a shop my father bought him"(Page No.2)

By the end of first week he mortgaged the shop and lost all the money in one hand of Five Card Draw. The narrator tells us that his uncle was the greatest failure in his whole family. The uncle "thought up the appellation 'Delinquent Chacha' for himself " as if he had the fore knowledge of his destiny. He is supported by all his brothers in one way or the other. Some gave him monthly contributions, some had him stay for long or short periods, others adopted some of his children as

"he farmed out babies with a benign smile....."(Page No.2)

Inspite of being incompetent and not earning his bread, he acquired a position for himself among the elders. He was a favourite of children because he was always there for them. He became their referee, their peace maker, their mentor in their troubled teens, their best friend and instructor.

The novel begins with a tete-a-tete between the Chacha and Mohan, the narrator who is all ready to set from India to study literature at Oxford. Mohan is just a channel through which we are made familiar with the black sheep of the family, the eponymous Delinquent Chacha. When he meets Mohan for brunch, he is dressed in festive attire" a long golden, tight white pajamas, and a starched muslin turban." Having spent his early years under the British Raj, he nurses nostalgia for the lost empire"and wants to turn himself into a English gentleman. He talks of the innate superiority of British and says to the extent that the sun set permanently on India the day the British left it. Therefore to accomplish his dream, he sets out for England to attend the Ruskin Delegacy for Adult Education: Oxford and to become a club man. He inveigles passage to England with a film company on a promise of a film part. This plan falls through and he winds up working as a porter at the All India TajMahal Curry, Chutney and soup restaurant in London, which he assumes to be a temporary job. He is greatly disappointed. Yet his unquenchable spirit finds something good in every situation. He extolls the joys of being in London.

" Oh Kaka, the climate here is as bracing as ours is torpid.....By escaping to London, your Delinquent Chacha has added at least twenty-five years to his present, wonderful avatar." (Page No.51)

Even in this direful situation he is full of schemes and wants to open his own Indian restaurant. He is above all a stylist, a constructor of elegancies. He loves to write his name daily with curlicues. He allows himself to be persuaded that he has been honored with the title companion of the order of St. Michael and St. George. He feels no qualms in placing the title C.M.G. after his name in one of London Club's guest book. This adopted title eventually leads to an invitation to be "one of the four speakers from the world at large at the opening session."

For the occasion, he gets himself opulently out fitted in Regent Streets without having penny to his name. As a result he gets into trouble for be fuddling his tailors which eventually leads to glorious orations in a courtroom where British law is put to the supreme test. The trial scene is hilarious. He defends himself with an eloquent mixture of Indian and British logic. He dismisses his lawyer and presents his own case. Although he has bought 578 pounds, three shillings and two pence worth of clothes which he can ill afford, he manages to get himself off scot free. Delinquent Chacha is a four-dimensional character who is not only himself, tragic and comic, poignant and farcical but is every one of us as others see us. He is a completely round character. He keeps surprising us at every step. The chacha can be considered in the league of great rare comic characters - Falstaff, Pick wick, Mr. Polly, etc. Like Falstaff Delinquent Chacha is not just a comic character. The reader not only laughs at him but also loves pities and admires him.

Thus Ved Mehta has created a large scale comic character with an indomitable spirit. He is far from realizing his sublime ideals. He plans much but achieves little. Yet he believes in living life to its fullest in elation and ecstasy for the moment. He has no room for doubts, failures and misgivings. He breathes each moment as though there is no room for regret. The character of chacha much reminds us of the lover in "The Last Ride together" by Robert Browning,who is an incurable optimist. He is in no mood to purchase misery and tears

from the sad past. He is not ready to fall into the bottomless pit of pain and suffering. He believes that he is not the first who has failed.

“Fall I alone in words and deeds.

Why all men strive and who succeed?”

Delinquent Chacha’s obsession with the British Raj finds echo in “The English Queens” by Chaman Nahal. The English Queens is another kind of a novel altogether. Delinquent Chacha is just a caricature of people whereas The English Queens is observant, satirical and a brilliantly engineered expose of the urban centred upper middle class Indians, who still ape the speech and moves of the ruling English class in India. It excels in humour and light hearted satire. The elements of fun, comicality, ribaldry and irreverence smoothen the edge of irony and make the satire soft and portable. On the other hand, Delinquent Chacha is a farcical novel on the surface, hiding a rustle of fresh, witty comment on East and West.

Delinquent Chacha is a fantastic tale, clever and rich with entertaining stories and anecdotes. The novel ends in an optimistic note. It echoes the “Carpe diem” motif of seizing the present. Delinquent Chacha writes a letter to Queen Elizabeth II of Britain and offers his services to help Britain to continue as a great power.

“I beseech you to make me a knight of the order of the garter (C.M.G. is not enough) in a hurry, so that I can help you ride out the storm.” (Page No.115)

The narrator was helpless and nothing he said could dissuade the chacha from posting the letter.

“Ever a fighter, So

One fight more”(Robert Browning)

Reference

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