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### PATHOS OF THE POOR AND THE WEAK IN A. PARTHASARATHY'S 'THE RIVER OF BLOOD' TRANSLATED BY KA. NAA. SUBRAMANYAN

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**ABSTRACT:** *The River of Blood* by A. Parthasarathy is a replica of the then society where rich politicians implement their draconian law by setting fire to the houses of down trodden people who are neither supported by law nor safe guarders of law and order (police force). This pathetic situation is picturesquely portrayed in the novel. It is the case of suppression of the oppressed where domination leads on to dehumanization and takes its ruthless stance when the well to do leader Naidu turned antagonistic towards the people of the weaker sections. He plotted against all people who are in one way or the other related to the communist group.

Down trodden people and widows of low caste people are the ones who suffered a lot and have become the scapegoats for no fault of theirs. It is a satire on existing law and order which seem to be supporting the whims and fancies of rich people like Naidu. It is an example of how uncouth are the ways of rich in dismantling and dismembering the poor and helpless. Thus, it is the demonstration of the dominance of the rich and destruction of the weak.

Parthasarathy was born in 1930 in Chennai. He published about thirty-five novels, plays, short stories and essays. He received the Sahitya Akademi prize for *Kurudhippunal* (Blood Stream, 1977), the Saraswati Sammam Prize (1999), and the Sangeeth Natak Academy Award (2004) for his play *Ramanujar* (*Ramanujar: The Life and Times of Ramanujan*). Parthasarathy is one of the most eminent and critically acclaimed playwrights in Tamil and his work resonates with contemporary world trends: he has infused modern Tamil drama with vitality and sensibility drawn from both the Native and outside sources. In *Nandan Kathai* (The Story of Nandan) Parthasarathy depicts the stigmatized world of the Scheduled Caste Dalit communities and it not only challenges existing forms of Tamil theater, but also questions the socio-political situation in Tamil Nadu. In *Kongai Thee* (Kongai Fire) he portrays two female protagonists of the Tamil epic, Kannagai and Madhavi, and attempts a psychological study of characters. *Eruthi Attam* (The Last Dance), on the other hand, is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in the fashion of Beckett's *Endgame* as done by Peter Brooks in the London RSC production, based on Antonin Artaud's theater of cruelty.

*The River of Blood* (Kuruthitppunal) was first published in Tamil in 1975. The novel is based on keezhavenmani carnage of 1967 in which 42 Harijans were burnt to death in a land lord-peasant clash. The translator Ka. Naa. Subramanayan is a versatile and gifted writer. He received the Sahitya Academy award in 1986 for his collection of critical essays on literary criticism *lyakkam*. He tried to present the flavor of the land and language in the best possible way.

*The River of Blood* is the story of revolt against oppression meted out to the down trodden people of the society. The story begins with a number of questions which try to seek the information. The first of its kind is inquiry by a shop- keeper, when Shiva one of the leading characters of this tragic episode was standing before him with a bedroll and a suitcase in his hands:

Shop-keeper: "what did you want to know?"

Shiva: Where will the bus to Tiruvarur stop?

Shop-k: Oh, it stops there at that corner; you can go there. Do you want to buy any fruit?

Shiva: Give me two plantains....?

After this flurry of questions Shiva reached a place where he could buy a ticket to Tiruvarur. There, Pandya Maharajah "a fellow with a "red and black" bordered towel thrown over his shoulders approached him and asked,

Pandya Maharajah "What do you want sir?" Shiva said: "I want to buy a ticket to Tiruvarur."

P M: "Give me the money. I shall get you the ticket."

Shiva: "How much do you need for it?"

P.M: "Give me eight annas – it is enough. Haven't you change- you give me a five rupee note; he will say he has no change".

Shiva: "I have no change".

P.M: "All right. Give the fiver" he took the fiver, broke into the crowd...A ticket to Tiruvarur... I don't want to hear you saying 'no change'..." he gave shiva the ticket and the change and bid him fare well. (*The River of Blood* 2-3). The conversation between Shiva and other people at the bus stand give clear evidence to the attitude of vendors and people at ticket counter of that place. Thus, giving a feel of the land and its culture. Shiva knew that it would be dark by the he would reach the place and so he started his search for his friend Gopal, who was a great friend at Delhi. As the story unfolds itself we come to understand that Gopal and shiva's family has a sort of bond to this place. During the journey to Thiruvaruru the buzz and buzzle of various voices make us understand the current issues and practices of the place. The conversation among the driver, conductor and the passengers give us a glimpse of the social customs, practices, political principles, antagonisms, prejudices and predilections. Finally the passengers began to stretch their limbs giving an indication that journey's end was near. "The bus came to a stop". Shiva got down the bus with his bedroll and suitcase and with the help of two young boys he was able to find a place for him to stay that night in a lodge. Before he was given a room in that lodge he was asked several questions to understand his whereabouts. When Shiva came out of the lodge to eat he noticed two or three pandals which made him understand that the day was an auspicious one for wedding. He went about the place and noticed a meadow filled with a crowd listening to a public lecture delivered by a political leader and as the high sounding and incoherent sounds trammed the ears of the people over there. Suddenly, a stone was thrown into the crowd. The stones began to rain on the crowd. Then the police as if waiting for the chance to give some work to their lathis began swirling their lathis. After this incident Shiva somehow moved away from the confused and noisy crowd. He entered a hotel ordered Idily but as soon as he entered the hotel a group of people entered the hotel enquiring about any new entrant to the hotel somehow the hotel man was able to calm down the situation. A man in the hotel started enquiring the whereabouts of Shiva and asked him whether he could bear the witness to the event. Shiva readily agreed to that and gave his details to the CID personnel who told that he would come tomorrow. The entire episode gives a clear picture of the land and its people where the people are unrest and the situation is so chaotic.

Another important incident in this saga is Gopal's interaction with Kannaiah which revealed several facts about his parents and also about Ramaiya. Krishnaswamy Naidu the most educated man of the village suffered a setback after Gopal who is highly educated person came to the village. Gopal and Krishnaswamy reached Vadivelu's eating shop. Vadivelu the owner of the eating shop started serving food to Gopal and started a conversation with Gopal. In his conversation Vadivelu revealed that Kannaiah's rowdies headed by Poonkavanam told him that he should move. Gopal in his conversation with Vadivelu came to know the reason for the greatness of Naidu "He belongs to no party in Particular. He is always with the party in power. That is how he managed to be the Raja of the place for thirty years now." (R.B: 47) As they have completed their discussion a boy came and told Gopal *saar* someone has come searching for you. Gopal was surprised to see Shiva. Shiva Took Gopal to Vadivelu's hotel to eat. After that both of them went to Ramaiya's house. In their conversation with Ramaiya they came to understand that this Kisan movement is only a rumour spread in order that they can stop it when it actually begins. They also revealed that Naidu sent his rowdies to scare Vadivelu if he does not support his organization. That Evening Gopal set out to meet Kannaiah about Vadivelu's affair. When Gopal started his conversation with Naidu he got so wild and started low talk about communists and Vadivelu. "Naidu's eyes burned red. He suddenly took hold of Gopal's Kurta and said: You dog when you speak be careful about what you say. If you don't go away from this village I will break your bones, and skin you alive..." (72) As he tried to escape he was caught hold by a person and was pressed down, down into the earth and he fell down unconscious. Ramaiya woke up suddenly from deep sleep and found the absence of Gopal in the house and started to Naidu's house in search of Gopal along with Shiva. Ramaiya gathered some people to support him and to meet any type of eventuality. They searched inside the house but of no avail. After sometime someone came panting to Ramaiya and said "Just beside Papathi's house, behind it, Gopal *saar* is lying beaten up and unconscious." (84) One among the group Palani fetched doctor who brought unconscious Gopal to consciousness. To the surprise of everyone present there Papathi was not found in the place. They thought of lodging a complaint in the police station knowing fully well that they would not get the justice. A police jeep came towards Gopal enquiring about the incident. The police made an enquiry and came to a conclusion that all what Gopal said about Naidu was false and the police even warned Ramaiya for spreading this kind of canard. Meanwhile there was breaking news by Palani that Vadivelu's shop was being pulled down by Naidu's men and still worst news was that missing of Vadivelu. Adding fuel to the fire Naidu employed the people of other village in his field making things difficult for the Harijan peasants of his village with the police force. "A few of the helpless harijans looking on were women. They were weeping and cursing aloud their fate ..." (108) Gopal and Ramaiya caught hold of Naidu and police came and rescued him. As the tirade went on Naidu in his anger said "If I am a man I Shall see to it that all these pariahs are starved and meet their death, hungry and thirsty... I shall have them killed like pigs, beware," he bawled out and retired to his fields." (113)

A fellow came gasping and informed the news that both Vadivelu and Papathi were kept in Thirumalai's house. Gopal, Shiva and Ramaiya went there to find them. Finally they found them alive as they approached the room. Kattayyan and Tirumalai the supporters of Naidu were there with the sickles to attack but as fate would not spare anybody Tirumalai's raised sickle fell on the neck of Kattayyan with all the force and blood gushed out scattered on all those who stood there. A few days later a police jeep came to Ramaiya's house. The sub inspector told him to get into the jeep pushing him in. (146) Police arrested Palani for putting his hands on Naidu's throat to throttle him to death. People thought that enough is enough and they don't want to bear the torture any longer. At last they have decided to raise their voices against the atrocities, "Yes let us all start. Let each man carry his sickle, cried Vadivelu. *Puratchi onkuhe....* Long live revolution... The cry rose to the skies as the police set out to release Palani"(162). They started their march towards the field of Naidu where police force was guarding him and his field. "The police men tried to overwhelm the Kisans by their brutal charge. But for once the peasants were frenzied with their passion for struggle and they had a demonstrable superiority of numbers; they did not give way but returned blows to the policemen with their bamboo poles" (167). Naidu stealthily left the place seeing the police force slunk away. Gopal demanded the police to release Palani. The police force opened van's door and disgorged Palani. The slogan "Long live

Revolution” rose to the skies as soon as the peasants saw Palani before them. Gopal exhorted “Comrades, this is our first victory in this struggle, if we stand united; nothing will stand in our way.

Shiva was arrested by the inspector on the charge of attacking the police. Gopal along with Kanakasabai came to Krishnaswamy Naidu. Krishnaswamy Naidu asked Gopal to leave the place. But Gopal was not at all surprised to hear this because he knew that “The parasites of the rich, the intermediaries, whose fortunes depend on the favors of those who have money ...This is our country’s misfortune. Krishnaswamy Naidu requested Kanakasabai to advise Gopal to leave the place. At this juncture Gopal noticed that Kanniah Naidu was lying on his back on the swing inside the hall of Krishnaswamy. Gopal immediately pushed swamy and entered the hall by that time Kanniah Naidu had already escaped from the back door bolting the back door from outside.

Immediately after this the poor peasants come to know that Papathi was brutally murdered and she was lying in her hut. “Head severed from body...My stomach churned at the sight of it ... gruesome... should we let that whorson live any longer? If we wait for the struggle that you are all taking about, he would have all of us murdered by that time. He will cultivate his fields with Harijan blood instead o river water.” (202). In front of Papathi’s house the tow parts of her body lay separate. “The blood had congealed. It was a sea of blood- a sea big enough to drown the whole of this land, the entire nation. Everyone drowns in it- sink and come up gasping for breath and die choked. Waves of blood engulf everyone and everything. .... This is the last deluge. This is the dance at the end of the Yuga. The directions break up; it thunders all round.... In the endless open of unlimited space dance the numerous ghosts singing their songs. There is no doubt of it this is the dance of cosmic destruction.” (204).

Towards the end Gopal thorough Vadivelu come to understand that Naidu’s men started setting fire to every hut. “The poor Harijans had been burning in the fire of hunger- with their very lives feeding it. Now there was actual fire engulfing them... set by the oppressors. They were being licked to death in a brief cataclysm”. (223). Naidu had taken his vengeance on the women and children of the village. He has burnt them all. Gopal felt helpless from nausea. He vomited into the canal to his dismay he noticed that the canal was red. “It was clear water but now it was tinged red, bloody red. This stream of blood will soon overflow its banks folding the land with the blood of men. First this village; then the neighboring villages; then the whole nation will be flooded by the river of blood” (225). The fire that has risen in this village should never be put out till the whole world is purified.

*The River of Blood* gives ample evidence that the revolutions are the result of the suffering, tortures, cruelty meted out to the people not for one day or a year they are the offspring of years of torture and sufferings. Through this it can be noticed that no revolution can change the fate of the poor and the weak. Every revolution stands as a testimony to this unending injustice and outcry of the sufferers. They stand only as a ray of hope but never change the pathetic conditions of the victims. As we noticed in this sad saga there are only glimpses of change but this change has never been for the good of the people. It thwarted the lives of the poor. Before the revolution at least there was a life but now there is not even a hope for life.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The fire that was set by the Naidu to the village of Harijans while police force watching the fire to take its ruthless lead and burnt the whole village is a stigma that is still attached to some people who still play with the lives of the weak with the support of some people who dance according to the beats of leaders who acclaim themselves to be the well wishers of the poor and sympathizers of the troubled. The lives of the marginalized are at cross roads. They can only imagine that the fire will purify and blood will save them. The dominance of people like Naidu is such that at any point of time they can ring a death bell. This whole sad saga of Harijans who tried to have their both ends meal, self esteem remained only a mirage which appeared to be realistic but when one actually comes near it one understands that their thirst will never be quenched. Let us hope that a day will come where all Hari jans (Gods People) will be equal , treated equally, and lead a life worth living with all dignity and honour. Is it a hope of hopeful or hope of hopeless?

If,

Hope the wishful optimistic dragon..

Patience the python of the poor..  
Weak the strength of the powerful..  
Wrong the right of the rich..  
Will there be justice in this unjust world ...  
Only time can tell.

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