

ISSN 0976-8165

*The Criterion*



# The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access Journal

August 2013 Vol. 4 Issue IV

**Editor-in-Chief**

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

**Managing Editor**

Madhuri Bite

[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)  
[criterionejournal@gmail.com](mailto:criterionejournal@gmail.com)

## Concept of the Divine in Kartik Sharma's *The Quest of the Sparrows*

**A.K. Chaturvedi**

Assistant Professor of English  
S.L.P. Govt. P.G. College Gwalior

Having got the degrees of B. Tech and M.B.A. from IIT Delhi and IIM Ahmedabad respectively and having been deeply influenced by his father's desire to communicate his spiritual reflections and observations to the seekers of the Divine, Kartik Sharma, like Chetan Bhagat, makes a successful literary attempt at addressing the doubts and delusions, queries and curiosities that relentlessly haunt the one who desperately wants to change oneself internally and eagerly looks for truths lying hidden at the centre of the glitter as well as the litter. This paper aims at bringing to light the spiritual gems and divine sparks that Kartik Sharma, under the influence of spiritual legacy inherited from his father Ravi Nirmal Sharma, the co-author of the novel, has attempted to provide to the seeker of the Divine through the story of the novel.

The central theme of the novel revolves around the role of Partibhan, a spiritually awakened Guru who gives ample evidences of being a true saint rarely found in the modern materialistic world replete with the so-called yogis & sages who miss no opportunity of rising to apogee even in politics—a field diametrically opposed to spirituality. Nikhil, a London based manufacturer of original equipments for Hybrid cars, comes to his native country India in search of peace & happiness that he fails to find amidst the luxuries & amenities he is having at his command in plenty. Unable to reconcile himself to his second wife's estrangement and his only daughter's refusal to live with him in the time of trouble, Nikhil feels solace when his eyes fall on an advertisement in the newspaper which reads, "When a helpless sparrow can enjoy this world without a care, why can't you? Everyone seeks peace and happiness but few find it. Most humans carry some burden or the other on their shoulders. They are always sighing, always wishing for something out of their reach. They are rarely happy, if at all."<sup>1</sup>

Moved by the message of the advertisement, he nurtures an inherent desire to find the path to happiness under the guidance of the competent Guru Swami Parmanand. With this intention in mind, he arrives and stays in Swami Parmanand's ashram and reconciles himself to the harsh reality surrounding the death of Swami Parmanand and the elevation of his son Partibhan to the state of sainthood. The fact that he is "a rich but unhappy person" (19) pushes Nikhil into repentance over the loss of his valuable time in fulfilling his mother's dream to earn more money. Having ignored the opportunity to evolve, he is left "without joy and without a real friend in the world." (19)

The atmosphere of goodwill and brotherhood in the Ashram makes Nikhil forget his past life and gives him a hope to transform himself into a happy person. The very first day, he is initiated by the spiritual guide Ramanujan into the technique of establishing connection with the divine self. Ramanujan instructs him:

Don't try to suppress your thoughts; they're like springs. Push them down and they recoil. Simply watch them. Negate them by saying "*Neti, neti*", which means "I'm not this thought nor that". When thoughts leave us, what remains is thoughtless awareness. In this domain you connect with yourself." (22)

Nikhil devotedly does what he is told to do with the result that he attains peace within and wonders "why some people who went in search of peace returned empty-handed from India. They were bitterly critical of Indian spirituality and the greediness of Indian gurus, whereas I

could see only beauty and patience.” (22) Partibhan’s discourses enrich Nikhil with theoretical knowledge in the spiritual field hitherto unknown to him. Till now he wrongly considered God as a myth and non entity. Partibhan awakens him to the fact that God is “no one else but our higher, more capable and wiser self.” (24) The key to success in spiritual field lies in connecting with the divine force. Self awareness can be achieved only through communion with this force. As Partibhan puts it:

When we achieve the connection between our divine selves and this force that runs the universe, we achieve the ultimate resonance—the highest awareness about ourselves and the universe. In this resonance, the positions become interchangeable—we become at once the higher self and the very universe. But for a beginner, it is wiser and simpler to connect to the higher self first. (24)

During the discourse after the fire accident in the ashram, a disciple expresses his desire to know why God does not solve all our problems if he’s so powerful. To satisfy his curiosity, Partibhan, underlines man’s insensitivity to the fellow human beings as well as to his divine self as the root cause of his problems. He also refers to the plight of those who remained trapped in the fire for long only because only a few people came forward to help them while many of them remained indifferent to the cries of the sufferers. Partibhan remorsefully asks, “Tell me, what would you have done if it was your daughter or your wife trapped in the fire. Would you still have been indifferent?” (27)

Likewise, very few people listen to the cries of their divine self. As Partibhan again puts it, “We do nothing when our higher self screams for help. We do not take the risk of freeing it from the traps we have imposed on it. We believe it is not our job and remain insensitive to its yearning for freedom as we are to the helpless cries of the needy.” (28) Partibhan, again & again, lays emphasis on the need to be attentive to the cries of the sufferers and those of inner self. By doing this, we can create miracles in our lives and make “our wishes & dreams come true.” (28)

In order to teach lessons on the Divine, Partibhan plans to organize a practical workshop called ‘Operation Free Bird’. As part of this workshop he proposes to start a journey to a six hundred kilometre distant holy place named Ganapatipule and sets a condition subject to which the travelers, like a sparrow, will carry no suitcases, no water bottles, no bedding, no money or credit cards or cell phones. To make them shake off attachment to material things, Partibhan preaches:

In our worries, we have forgotten why we have evolved differently from a sparrow. All the material possessions that we have created over the ages have enslaved us, and we seem incapable of going through a single day without our laptops and mobile phones. (30)

Partibhan’s idea of “living like a sparrow” exercises a deep influence on the psyche of Nikhil. A sparrow enjoys freedom of life for the reason that, unlike human beings, it is without any worldly possessions which irresistibly entangle our attention with the result that we lose the energy gifted to us by God for establishing connection with the divine self. Disconnected from the divine roots, we spend our lives finding ways to satisfy our materialist thirst and “manipulate, cheat and hurt others to have our own way and forget the Divine way.” (30)

Fed up with luxuries of life, Nikhil finds in Partibhan’s spiritual discourses a source of solace, peace and true happiness and prepares himself to proceed on spiritual journey. On the very first day of journey, Partibhan teaches his followers the lesson of faith in and surrender to God’s will. At three in the afternoon, after walking for hours, one of the hungry followers, Dr. Puyushi wants to know how & when her hunger will be satisfied. To her question Partibhan replies:

The spirit of surrender is all I have. And the belief that the Divine will provide what we need.”(33)

On the second day of journey Partibhan teaches his followers the lesson of selflessly helping the needy even at the sacrifice of physical health & comfort. During his stay in a big kuchcha house, when he sees the servant suffering from a cold, he is moved to pity and gives his sweater to the servant’s wife. His followers find it very difficult to tolerate to see their Guru suffering from cold and feel extremely sad to know about the guru’s generosity towards the needy. As Nikhil posits:

While insecurity about the future made me anxious about food and shelter, he gave away his only shield against biting cold. (42)

At Waithiware village near Nassik, Partibhan teaches his disciples the benefits of selflessly extending help to those in need. While walking beside a canal, Partibhan comes across some people struggling to repair a breach. He exhorts his followers to help the farmers in repairing the breach with the result that the leak is plugged and a lot damage to their crop is avoided with the timely co-operation of both male & female members of the entourage. The farmers become extremely happy to have got an opportunity to be blessed with the presence of a Karmayogi. They regard Partibhan as a godsend and request him to say something. Moved by the villager’s insistence, Partibhan says, “Our life is like water flowing in the canal with its two banks. One is the bank of acceptance while the other is the bank of thanksgiving. These banks have to be strong for the self to reach its true potential, and achieve resonance with the force behind the universe....Thanksgiving is the spirit of gratitude towards everything we have today—our house, our jobs, our children, our farms, our cattle, our clothes, our bodies, and our intelligence. Through this spirit, we achieve satisfaction and contentment. Achieving this is not easy, because the mind constantly takes for granted what it possesses and focuses on what it doesn’t have. By invoking the spirit of thanksgiving, we steer away from the cravings of our restless minds and force them to focus on what we have. We calm their turbulence and invoke peace.” (52)

One of the village youths questions why God makes us face failure even when we make effort to the best of our abilities. To satisfy the young man, Partibhan calmly and pertinently replies, “The designs of the supreme self are beyond our understanding, but they are invariably good for us because of its undiluted love for creation. Failure in material pursuits in spite of our best efforts is because a higher cause awaits us. It’s something we only realize when we look back at our journey and see how everything fits together beautifully. We must accept results cheerfully and not let disappointments divert us from our true purpose, which is to evolve. This is the spirit of acceptance..... If the bank of thanksgiving is broken, we feel jealous of others and lose our tranquility. The quest for materialistic attainment replaces our true search. We start hankering for what we don’t have. The thirst for more increases, and our evolution becomes a casualty. (52-53)

According to Partibhan, all miseries and evils originate from our attachment to worldly things. While materialism leads to corruption and ethical decline, spirituality invariably breeds morality. To bring this fact home, Partibhan elaborates, “When we meditate, we revise our value systems, and everything we learn. We introspect on our actions and remove our flaws. Forget to eat or sleep but don’t give up your meditation. Never underestimate its value and importance. It will make you aware of your true potential by freeing you from all that’s wasteful.” (80)

Partibhan considers suffering as a stepping stone to evolution. Without suffering our karmic dust cannot be washed off. Holding suffering as a must for our refinement and



embellishment, Partibhan observes, “Whenever we suffer, we should remind ourselves that difficulties lead to evolution. All suffering points to erring on our parts, they serve as a reminder to us about what should be our priority. The suffering inconveniences us, but also reminds us of the false ways we have adopted. A piece of gold, if it has to remain just that, will undergo no trials and tribulations. If it’s to become an ornament, it has to be smelted in fire, beaten into shape and polished by a fire to become a useful and beautiful piece of art. Our hardships turn us into beautiful ornaments. (83)

Partibhan’s concept of the Divine is different from that of the ordinary people. He takes everything good or bad that happens to him daily as part of the divine plan. To him, connection with the Divine is the fountainhead of peace and happiness. To his followers he unfolds his personal view of the Divine and says, “For me, the Divine is the greater being in us. One who is above petty greed, desires and other traits that actually block our evolution to a higher state. He’s not someone else, but you, me, all of us. When we connect with Him, we create happiness for ourselves and others with our unique gifts. This happiness is different from the feeling of temporary elation that comes from materialistic achievement—though materialistic seekers mistake it to be the same. If the Olympic medal-winning sprinter is not connected to his higher being, then he’ll be as miserable as all those disconnected from the Divine are—medals notwithstanding. I agree with you that mere praying is not enough, we must be attuned to our higher self, or the Divine and remain in balance while working on our strengths and gifts.” (130-31)

At Rajewad village Partibhan speaks on the cause of belief and disbelief in the Divine. He is of the view that when our connection with the Divine breaks, doubts surround us and when we connect to the Divine through meditation and collectivity, we protect ourselves against the onslaught of doubts. Underlining the importance of faith in developing divinity, Partibhan says, “By maintaining our faith in our higher self, we continue to evolve—to the next, higher stage until we reach the highest awareness about ourselves and the universe.... When this happens, we achieve a state that resonates with the universe. There is no conflict, no strife, no cross purpose, no clash of interest. What a beautiful reward we get for so many lifetimes of struggles and striving. What a beautiful finale of this great drama of life. Our faith in this higher being within us decides whether we attain this godhood or not.” (159-160)

As regards the role of a guru in establishing a connection with the Divine, Partibhan emphatically declares that the guidance of a perfect guru is a must for leading a spiritual life. To the question raised by Bajoy, one of his disciples, with regard to the need of a spiritual guru, Partibhan replies, “it’s the gap in spiritual knowledge between a guru and his disciples which makes a guru a necessity. A guru brings you to a point in your spiritual journey when you become aware and conscious of the self.” (161)

Finally, Partibhan, along with his followers, reaches Ganapatipule and at beach he reflects that his spiritual expedition packed with surprises “proved to be a perfect vehicle to learn spirituality at a practical level beyond expectations.” (168) Lost in thoughts, he lets his mind go back to the turning point of his life which changed him from an ordinary worldly person, haunted by the loan sharks, into a spiritual guru having three billion dollars and a big ashram at his command. About six months ago his father called him to the ashram and transferred spiritual powers to him before voluntarily leaving this world. His father’s disciples not only repose faith and trust in him but also hold him in high esteem as their spiritual guide. As Partibhan one day prepares himself to deliver his first lecture to the audience, he finds in his hand a note written by

his fiancée Shruti. The note contains important clues to what divinity is and where it resides. To quote the note reflects Shruti's concept of the Divine:

I had known for a long time that there is a Divine. There were always signs of His existence. However, I wasn't sure where he was. I thought, maybe He resides in me and you, and in all His creations. I hadn't ever seen or sensed Him. Since I have met you, things have changed. In the sparks that flew when I came close to you, I saw a light. Not in me or you, but between us. (207) During the sixth session, Partibhan nullifies the importance of money in spiritual pursuits and advises his followers, "A will is all you need, your divine higher self will show you the way. Focus on evolution—that's the only pure, unselfish need of your higher self, focus on this desire of yours, don't let the material side tell that you are small, when you can be a giant who changes the lives of thousands of suffering children." (223) Meditation leads to self realization which in return turns a man into a detached observer of his body and the world at large. As he posits, "Step out of your body, your physical shell, and see yourself as an observer. This will allow you to be detached from yourself and the material world and take you to a greater state of realization. This is what we achieve while meditating." (226)

Finding a strong link to the Divine is the sole purpose of human life. All great saints and scriptures lay emphasis on the need of tapping the divine power of God hidden in all of us. But, how to tap this power is a mystery we must seek to unravel before the end of life's journey. The key to tapping the divine power lies in withdrawing our attention from the body and the external world and focusing it on the power of God reverberating in the temple of body as music of spheres. As the scriptures say, "Turn your attention away from the world and direct it inward so that you recognize your innate power and realize that you are infinite, perfect and complete."<sup>2</sup> A sincere quest is all that is required to feel the presence of the Divine within us. In Partibhan's words, "the Divine exists without form, like air, water vapour, electricity heat, gravity and magnetism. The Divine is more like a force you feel, rather than see. You feel His presence only if you attune yourself to Him, just as you feel the force of gravity when you step out of a swimming pool, rarely otherwise." (229)

Earning money through pomp and show, magic and miracles, impressive oration and connection with the powerful politicians has unfortunately emerged as an important factor to establish an ambitious man into a spiritual guru. Such so called gurus do a great disservice to humanity. With the help of their money & man power they can easily win over their external enemies but winning over the inner enemies like lust, anger, avarice, attachment and ego appears many times a Herculean task for them with the result that they easily deviate from the ideals they enjoin upon their followers and thereby hurt the general public's trust in the Divine. Many times such gurus pose a serious threat to social harmony and do not hesitate to resort to violence for fulfillment of their selfish ends.

Unlike the so called modern gurus, he not only teaches practical spirituality but also moulds his life into the framework of the divine plan. He steadfastly adheres to the ethical values and imbibes the qualities like humility, firm belief in the benign power of God, surrender to the divine plan, compassion for those in misery, love for all irrespective of caste and creed, inimitable patience and tolerance during the moments of trouble, inner detachment from the worldly possessions, celibacy and control over self, abstinence from the physical enjoyments, selfless service and above all a truthful living which is, according to Guru Nanak, more important than truth itself. His discourses on meditation can serve as an unflinching medication to cure the stress and strain which have become endemic to modern youths. His reflections on the need of communion with the Divine for protection against miseries constitute the core teachings

of the great saints and scriptures representing the different religious faiths across the world. Such teachings not only lead to the Divine but can also cure modern youth's sick mindset which is ostensibly responsible for heinous social crimes such as murders, rapes, gang rapes and trafficking of women.

**Works Cited:**

Sharma, Kartik & Ravi 'Nirmal' Sharma , *The Quest of the Sparrows*, New Delhi: Rupa Publications, India Pvt. Ltd., 2011. P. 11. (All textual references given parenthetically are from this work.)

1. Quoted in "The Speaking Tree" column of the Times of India dated 19/12/2012 P.12