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The *Nirvitarka* Concentration as Represented in Narayan's Mr. Sampath

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The novels of R.K. Narayan reflect that Indian sensibility which has been acquired through the ages from the wisdom of Indian philosophical thought that has been continually enriched since the ancient times but which had receded since colonization. Narayan adopts this 'theoretical base of the Indian philosophical tradition to retrieve and reconstitute a sense of Indianness. Perhaps, this is why he has proved to be "the most lasting, highly rated and widely accessible, while his writing is the most consciously rooted in local circumstances, traditions and values" as claimed by Dennis Walde(694). Meenakshi Mukherjee had earlier recognized Gandhi as having reached the state of *Jeevan Mukta* as depicted in *Waiting for the Mahatma* (Mukherjee 99-100). Even V.P. Rao observed that "Krishnan practices some sort of yoga. He goes through the... The last three stages of *Dharana*, *Dhyana* and *Samadhi*."(Rao 32) Taking this a priori. I attempt to evaluate Srinivas of Mr Sampath on the scale of Patanjali's *Nirvitarka* concentration as mentioned in his *Yogasutra*.

Before embarking on the venture of interpreting Srinivas's experience of undergoing *Nirvitarka* concentration during an exorcist's ritual, it is imperative to have an overview of Patanjali's Yoga philosophy, of course, in a nutshell. Throughout this paper I have referred to P.N.Mukerji's translation of Patanjali's Yoga-sutra as well as of the commentary on Yoga philosophy by Swami Hariharananda Aranya. In his Yoga-sutra Patanjali expounds the theory of controlling the mind in order to know the Self. As he says,

ksxƒpÙko`fÙkfujks/k% (*Aranya 7*)

Yoga is the discipline of restraining the fluctuation or modification caused due to the occupation of the mind. The occupation of the mind is to create the sensation of cognition, conation and retention by mixing together all experiences. The restraint of the fluctuation of mind implies that mind must be kept so engrossed on one idea or thought that all the other thoughts are suspended or suppressed. This precisely is meant by the concentration or convergence on one idea as stated in the aphorism of "On concentration":

ksx% lekf/k (*Aranya 1*).

The fluctuations of mind or the thought processes occur due to five types of basic afflictions or *klesas*. These five are *avidya* or nescience; *asmita* or I-feeling or ego; *raga* or attachment or passion; *dvesa* or antipathy or aversion and *abhinivesa* or the fear of death or love of life - as stated in the third aphorism of "On Practice":

vfo|k·fLerkjx}s"kkfHkfuos'kk% iap Dys'kk% (*Aranya 129*).

The fluctuations of mind can be stopped by constant practice of the *astanga-marg* which incorporates within itself the principles of austerity, learning, reverence to God and detachment (Mukerji 26). When the fluctuations of mind are thus overcome by practice and detachment, the

mind acquires the power of remaining fixed on any particular object or principle to a desired extent accompanied with good intentions. The *ashtangamarg* constitutes of the eight accessories of Yoga. These are:

;efu;ekluizk.kk;keizR;kgkj/kkj.kk/;kulek/k;ks-"Vko³~xkfu

(*Aranya* 231).

i.e. *Yam* (Restraint), *Niyam* (Observance), *Asana* (Posture), *Pranayama* (Regulation of Breath), *Pratyahara* (Withholding the senses), *Dharana* (Fixity), *Dhyana* (Meditation) and *Samadhi* (Perfect concentration) are the eight means of attaining *Yoga* (*Aranya* 231).

The five external accessories- *yam*, *niyam*, *asana*, *pranayama* and *pratyahara*-assist in getting established gradually on *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*. When the stage of concentration is so intense that it brings into focus its universal and essential features and the person is so engrossed that he becomes completely oblivious of his self to the extent that there is no reflexive consciousness of self, the concentration is said to be of the highest kind. It is called *Samprajnata* concentration. The *Yogsutra* mentions four kinds of *Samprajnata* concentration: the *vitarka*, the *vichara*, the *ananda* and the *asmita* type depending upon the object of concentration. In *vitarka* the object of concentration is anything perceptible to our senses. When the concentration is mixed up with words, cognition etc. it is *savitarka* concentration. When it is free from words and only the object is present in the mind it is said to be the *nirvitarka* concentration.

In the novel Mr. Sampath Srinivas's *nirvitarka* concentration manifests to him the essential and universal characters of the object 'road'. Srinivas, the editor protagonist of Mr. Sampath has read the first three of the principal Upanishads and therefore desires to possess an armchair - knowledge of 'Self'. Reading the scriptures alone, however, cannot help a man to attain Self-knowledge. One must perform the allotted duties in the right way to arrive at this knowledge. The first half of the novel presents Srinivas as a man who is aware of his goal of Self-realization but does not know how to attain it. He is in possession of *tamasic* tendencies of violence and laziness. He is strongly egoistic. As his life progresses, one observes that Srinivas not only overcomes these major impediments on the path of *yogic* upliftment, but also becomes steadfast in certain qualities that are favourable for self-development. Srinivas gets steadfast in the habit of contemplating on the 'self'. The thought persists in his mind whether he is sitting on his work-table or in the conference room or in his own home. These are the qualities that are favourable for self-development. Just as the establishment of 'The Banner' pushes Srinivas out of his laziness into a life full of physical and intellectual activity, its shutting down provides Srinivas with ample opportunities to get rid of the other baser tendencies in him. Life for Srinivas takes another abrupt turn when he is dragged in by Sampath to venture into the tinsel world as a script writer where non-violence, continence and non-greediness the constituent virtues of *yam* get established in him.

Srinivasa is, however, 'nescient'. He still considers himself the guardian of the erring Ravi and takes it as his responsibility to bring Ravi back to his normal senses. He is mildly cynical towards his wife and others who believe in the exorcist that has been called in order to exorcise the devil out of Ravi. Ironically, the hypnotizing atmosphere created by the tantric's rhythmic

beating of drums and cymbals and his chanting of mantras coupled with *aklista vrittis* of Srinivas pushes him into a state of intense concentration. A sweep of history passes in front of his eyes and in a flash he gets the solution to all his problems. As Srinivas's thoughts concentrate, pictures and scenes flash upon his mind in quick succession as if imposing upon him the idea of the flux of eternity, simultaneously revealing to him the truth of the transitoriness of all experiences related to matter.

In *Yoga-Sutra* 41 of "On Concentration", Patanjali while enumerating on the nature and types of objects of engrossment or *Samapatti* states:

When the fluctuations of the mind are weakened the mind appears to take on the features of the object fixed on - whether it be the cogniser, the instrument of cognition or the object cognised - as does a transparent jewel and this identification is called *Samapatti* or engrossment (Aranya 99).

It is to be noted that Srinivas's fluctuations of the mind have been considerably weakened by his practicing the accessories of non-violence, truthfulness, continence, non-greediness, non-stealing. He is also compassionate, helpful and benevolent towards imbeciles like Ravi and his family; towards the needy like Sampath's family and the other tenants, apart from being dutiful towards his own family members. Therefore, in the conducive atmosphere, he at once lapses into intense concentration which is based on the thought of existence converged through the words 'Anderson Lane' and Market Road' taken as, "one large, or small and tangible (with) the property of motion and is transitory" as well (Aranya 106). Srinivas's mind remains so occupied with the idea of 'existence' that it gets coloured by its very nature. The reflective self-consciousness that is revealed through 'I am the knower' or 'I am knowing' has been completely effaced and the mind is filled with impression, without the use of words. The concentration that is triggered through the words, "I might be in the twentieth century BC for all that it matters or 4000 BC" (Narayan 161), is of the *Nirvitarka* type during which his mind stops thinking in verbal terms and perceives the various aspects of the object in numerous images that have been previously accumulated and retained in the mind. The concentration through its intensity unfolds the meaning and purpose of existence by unfettering it from its temporal, spatial and material dimensions. The present Malgudi gradually recedes into the past giving way to foursquare understanding of existence. From the three perceptible dimensions of life arises the realization of the fourth invisible, intangible but essential dimension of life. Srinivas is impressed strongly with the idea that the three-dimensional existence, which seems to be "so persistent and inescapable" (Narayan 164) will go on asserting itself till the fourth dimension of "his (Ravi's) true identity" (Narayan 163) is not realized. The telescopic vision of history gives him the knowledge that whether it is Rama's righteous war against evil, or Buddha preaching his gospel of compassion or Shankara's philosophy of advaita preaching the identity and oneness of God and His creatures or the Christian missionary with his Bible - nobody, no religion, no philosophical treatise can help the man realize his own identity until and unless he himself makes an attempt to do so.

Narayan presents this 'vision' as stream of consciousness which comes close to the definition given by L.E. Bowling as:

A narrative method by which the author attempts to give a direct quotation of the mind not merely of the language area but of the whole consciousness without any intervention by way of comment or explanation on the part of the author. (Bowling 346)

During the 'vision', many ideas get collaged in the mind of Srinivas, so as to manifest a composite picture of existence and identity. A number of images emerge on the mental screen of Srinivas, which, though apparently unrelated, form an organic whole. The images are perceptual, conceptual and also figurative - that is they relate to the concepts metaphysically. These images follow one by one in quick succession to impress the concepts in their totality. The concepts are impressed through the perceptual images of the mythical and historical figures of Rama, Ravana, Sarayu, Buddha, Shankaracharya, colonial India, India's freedom struggle, collapse of dynasties and so on. The major concepts impressed are - the flux of eternity comprising of the twin concepts of spirituality and materialism and the concept of liberation from the flux of eternity through the spiritual orientation of one's earthly life. The concepts emerge not verbally but are rendered through sets of metaphorical images.

Narayan presents these sets distinctly by placing them in separate paragraphs. First comes the picture of the legendary past wherein appear the figures of Ram 'with a bow slung on his shoulders, brother Laxman and his devotee Hanuman. The impression that is received is transcribed by Narayan as:

Presently appeared on this path Sri Ram... He was a perfect man, this incarnation of Vishnu [humanity and divinity inherent in Ram side by side]. Over his shoulders was slung his famous bow..., to battle with evil there ... the enemy was a perfection of evil with all its apparent strength and invincibility... (Narayan 162)

The image of bow slung on the shoulder of Ram metaphorically suggests Rama's humility though possessing unsurpassable material strength and its juxtaposition with the image of Ravana's "apparent strength and invincibility" points to his ego under the persuasion of which he took a lustful course by abducting Sita. The sequel of an apparently trivial image of Ram extracting water for his forehead marking suggests in metaphors that life (water) in this ephemeral world (sand) is indispensable in acquiring divinity (forehead marking) inherent in man through rigorous efforts (scratching sand to extract water).

A new image comes up without any authorial comment. It is the image of 'Sarayū' running its course through centuries in the words:

The river flowed on. On its banks sprang up the thatched roofs of a hamlet... The jungle... gradually receded ... Corn fields appeared... The waving tufts of rice ... swayed in the air and stretched away as far as the eye could see. (Narayan 162)

The river of life flowed on slowly as if getting shorn of its spiritual aspect (which Rama had rejuvenated through his efforts). These were replaced by the material aspects. The jungles giving space to cornfields mark the perpetuation of materialistic tendencies and achievements of man.

The next cluster of images projects the concept of inevitability of death, underlining the perishable aspect of things material. Life is reoriented towards spiritualism with the arrival of Buddha who preaches the gospel of compassion. The image moves from 'prosperity to 'crumbling masonry'.

All the preceding sets of images project the concept of spiritualism versus materialism and the concept of life versus death. When the concept of life significantly dominates a set of images, the idea of death is distinctly absent. Contrary to it when the image of death becomes forceful, reference to life is negligible. The pattern is a non-verbal statement to reveal the notion that for a human being who has not gained spiritual insight, life and death are two distinct realities that never coexist. The group of images that succeeds projects the concept that for an enlightened soul like 'Shankaracharya' life and death do not push each other out, instead they coexist. The idea emerges through a number of metaphorical images as:

A cobra spreading its hood and shielding a spawning frog... Here, the extremes meet... This is where I [Shankara] must build my temple. He installed the Goddess there and preached his gospel of Vedanta: the identity and oneness of God and his creatures. (Narayan 162)

The 'extremes' that are concretized are cobra and frog, life and death, and God and his creatures. The cobra is the greatest enemy of frog symbolizing its death. The picture of cobra hooding a spawning frog giving it succour conveys that though life and death are incompatible yet life is dependent on death just as death follows life. But if the two meet or become co-existent, which is a rare phenomenon, the God/dess is installed. In other words, when the two extremes of life and death merge into each other, one realizes the God or his spiritual self. The body that enshrines this spiritual self or where the identity and oneness with God is realized becomes metaphorically a temple.

The humanity cannot resort for long in the spiritual dimension of life. Materialism soon takes hold of them. Another era of devastation follows with its sordid images of greed and power, 'fire and 'sword' whence dynasties rise and fall. Palaces and mansions appear and disappear. With Sarayu overflowing the bounds to clear the devastation caused by materialistic tendency the picture comes full circle. It starts with the image of Ravana who abducted Sita. It ends with Ravi's madness caused as a result of his lust for Shanti. This stream of consciousness enables Srinivas realize that Ravi and his likes could be redeemed only if they realized their true identity, though not in one birth, in a series of them. "Madness or Sanity, suffering or happiness seemed all the same ... It didn't make the slightest difference in the long run - in the rush of eternity nothing mattered"(Narayan 163).

What is it that mattered then? It is to realize one's true identity by shaking off all the follies and illusions, "though not in one birth, at least in a series of them" "(Narayan 163)". No panacea would work. Ravi is stricken with madness and we can also deduce that his madness was more of his own doing or rather because of 'his lack of self-knowledge'. Ravi had a choice of either working with detachment and concentration on his object or be seized by kama or lust and

fall into madness, and in so doing set at naught all that he acquired on his spiritual path while in the present life.

Srinivas has witnessed this reality in the state of concentration. As his concentration relaxes, Srinivas slowly regains his present identity, of which he had been forgetful for a while. He is still forgetful of his surroundings and therefore laughs loudly at the notion of his being a keeper of Ravi. Now, he understands that it is an egotistical assumption, 'a madness' to think that anyone could be the caretaker of another human being; that whether

he (Ravi) was mad or sane - all that seemed unimportant and not worth bothering about ... It was like bothering about a leaf floating on a rushing torrent whether it was floating on its right side or wrong side.(Narayan 163-164)

Srinivas's concentration thus reaches the *samprajnata* state based on the *nirvitarka* type of engrossment for he retains his knowledge with conviction and reorients his life accordingly. The rest of the novel shows that in his magazine, he is more humane and tolerant. He continues to help Ravi and his family, at the crucial moments of their life by acquiescing to take care of his father in the absence of Ravi and his mother when she takes Ravi to the *tantric's* village.

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