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WOMEN AS OBJECTS AND SYMBOLS OF REGENERATION IN *THE LAST LABYRINTH*

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Abstract :- In the corporate unconscious of Som Bhaskar, women appear again and again as symbols of emotional, psychological and spiritual regeneration. Som meets them in a state of isolation and self alienation when Som's ego is struggling to save itself from objectification through sensual pleasures as he wants to be "re-assured that all was well". The reality of death and meaninglessness of life haunt him day and night, and all these women fail to bring him out of his self-made chaos, rather they are meshed up both physically and mentally with him and within themselves. These women not only fail in salvaging Som but they end up as objects in his psyche.

Key Words:- Women, Symbols of Regeneration, Emotional, Psychological, Spiritual, Chaos, Last Labyrinth, Psychotic, Loss of Self, Isolation, Alienation.

INTRODUCTION

In the corporate unconscious of Som Bhaskar, women appear time and again as symbols of emotional, psychological and spiritual regeneration. Som meets them in a state of isolation and self alienation when Som's ego is struggling to save itself from objectification through sensual pleasures as he wants to be "re-assured that all was well" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 63). The reality of death and meaninglessness of life haunt him all the time.

In a function organized for war widows, Som meets Geeta whom he finds to be a "no ordinary girl!" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 67). Geeta appears to him to be the verbal construct of the Great Mother 'Elementary' in its good form, and he realizes, "she meant more to me than I had imagined. I was not one to care for people's reactions unless they meant something to me" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* (67). The spectre of death through the war widows makes him take Geeta in his arms, who responds to his "pleasant, asexual surprise hug of a fellow survivor after a crash landing" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 70). He marries Geeta and perceives his marriage as a "deal for its sanity while doubting not Geeta but "the deal itself, its necessity, its durability, its very idea" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 71). For his ego, in its 'having mode' of existence, even marriage is a surrender which he "negotiated" because he "did not want to die of melancholia like his father. In his meaningless existence, he is afraid of a "ridiculous, foolish, humiliating death due to melancholia" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 72).

Som objectifies women as pain-relievers. He wants to address his spiritual urge for meaning through quantitative methods which he adopts to fight melancholia. He would have "all the equipment. Money I already had. If it was a whore so much the better. I shall also have a wife and children and fame. Yes, fame, too. What could be a better antidote to melancholia than fame!" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 72). "Fame was factual, quantitative" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 73) as people awed you by recognizing your ranks and photographs in the newspapers. In order to escape the meaning-searching turbulence from his deeper self or the 'unmanifest', he resorts to quantification of the emotional depths of his being through acquiring objects and marriage. This objectification of the emerging ego does not allow it to enter into 'the syndrome of growth', rather restricts its differentiation in a 'syndrome of decay.' That is why he cannot explain in spite of Geeta's trust and understanding his "these little fornications? Even if I can never go to the same women twice" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 73). Geeta, being the verbal construct of the Great Mother 'Elementary', the Good holds him but cannot generate the deconstructive

awareness in his emerging ego of its Great Mother structure, rather Geeta feeds the 'Uroboric' unity of Som's self along with all its contradictions. Therefore, after a while of his marriage, the hollowness of his objectified self or the disturbances from the 'unmanifest' start haunting him again. He wanders from one object to another, "Other women" had been "one shot obsession" but with Geeta also "it had not exactly been resounding success" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 59). Geeta appears to him to be reassuring, yet a "child of another world, traversing, like a plane at a higher altitude, a corridor separate from the dark vestibule" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 69) of death, Melancholia and meaninglessness. Som suffers to differentiate his ego from its Great Mother structure/Unconscious by reconciling its contradictions. Som moves from one psychiatrist to another, who try to analyse his disease but cannot comprehend the cause.

One psychiatrist comes closest in comprehending the problem when he tells Som that "psychiatry doesn't allow certain approaches to problem like yours" and that what Som needs is the "right soul" which could make him "peaceful" and even "move" him towards a "higher goal" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 74). He also comprehends that Som's spiritual crisis is a religious problem as he says "religions would not have been so successful if such a higher goal did not exist" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 74). He is suggesting differentiation of his ego from its Great Mother Structure/Corporate Unconscious and a movement towards meaning in his unmanifest depth but he has his limitations and he fails as a symbol of 'transformation' as he cannot suggest the way towards this higher goal. What is needed is a faith to override the modernistic duality of self. That is why a religious approach is needed. But what the psychiatrist can prescribe to Som is a book by Carl Jung. R.K. Dhawan rightly points out that, "All his life Som seeks someone who has the capacity to resolve the contradictions of his life." If his wife Geeta fails to move him out of his Great Mother structure then Leela Sabnis plays the role of the Great Mother 'Elementary' in its both forms i.e. 'the Good' and 'the Terrible.' Leela Sabnis with her "M.A. and Ph.D from Michigan, something else from London" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 75) cannot bring any change in Som's 'having mode' of existence, rather she serves to inflate what Frank Johnson would call "fractionated functions" of Som's struggling ego. She appears to Som to be "a reformer of the body and a mechanic of the spirit, a good lover." She belongs to "the neat kingdoms of reason" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 78) as she has an "obsession" for "explanations," "causes and effects," "effects and effects" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 78). It is a world dominated by "too much analysis" and "diagnosis." She finds Som's cry of "I want. I want" to be too general, vague, too mystical because what she needs is "detail" and "data" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 78). She prescribes Descartes and Freud to Som but Som finds them to be insufficient for those who cried for the "spirit" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 81). She rightly analyses Som that he is a neurotic and a "compulsive fornicator" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 80), which she analyses as his "playing games" with the world to "protect" himself from his "feeling of inadequacy" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 80). She is being the 'Terrible' Great Mother to Som in its Elementary form as her analysis does not lead him anywhere in his search for meaning.

The terribleness of the Great Mother/Unconscious just displays the current state of Som's ego to itself not by sharing but by passing an intellectual judgement, "you are lonely on the one hand. On the other, you have built a shell around yourself. To protect yourself" and "You are bored, bored, stiff in your little shell. That is the long and the short of it" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 80). Her "prescriptions" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 80) and judgement leave Som more "muddled" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 77) by his voids as he finds "books had done" the same "job for Leela Sabnis" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 77). In her 'Terrible' form Leela Sabnis rubs Som's ego on the wrong side by acting like a psychic surgeon who can open up the body for dissection but cannot sew it again into a healthy whole. It is only "when she made love, the confusion momentarily lifted" only to descend in "one roaring storm" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 78) again after the sex. After six months their relationship "fizzled out" because they kept two separate worlds of "matter and spirit" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 81). Leela Sabnis combining 'the Terrible' and 'the Good' aspects of the Great Mother 'Elementary' can give explanation for the fizzling out of their affair, "In the world of matter we had fed on sex and now we were satiated. In the world of the spirit we still enjoyed conversation. The two worlds, by her lights, did not meet, could not meet" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 81, 82). But she cannot turn the fractionated functions of his 'having mode' of existence into a state of being as one communicates with one's depth and tackles the disturbances emanating from 'the unmanifest.' Their relationship itself suffers from the same crisis of the separation of action and meaning from which Som's emerging ego is suffering in the contradictions of its Great Mother structure. Som rightly realizes the state of crisis in his relationship with Leela Sabnis and with himself, "May be, that was why we fell apart. What I needed, perhaps, was something, somebody, somewhere in which the two worlds combined" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 82).

The crisis of emerging ego is a religious problem and as Jung suggests it cannot be helped by passing "judgements" but by being in touch with "other person's psychic life" (Jung, *Modern Man* 270) for which Leela Sabnis with all her intellectual background falls short and inadequate, "She had slogged. She had studied and understood and memorized. Oh yes, Leela Sabnis knew a lot even if she had experienced little and suffered even less" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 79). For the transformation of his present having state of his ego, Som needs someone who has herself suffered and can be in touch with 'the unmanifest' depths of his psychic life and thereby can help him in taking his ego through and out of his Great Mother structure by combing action and meaning, "matter

and spirit.” At present the state of his ego can be described to be in the stage of ‘son-lover’ or ‘adolescent incest’ as his ego has an awareness of its identity yet it can exist only with the Great Mother as a “phallic consort” (Neumann qtd in Smithson 226) and wishes to be dissolved into the Great Mother structure in the ‘death ecstasy’ of sexual incest.

Anuradha appears as ‘Shakti’ the greatest symbol of regeneration. It is Anuradha who is meant to lead Som “through the sub-conscious.” She is shown touching ‘the unmanifest’ depths of Som as she herself is a child of suffering. She is an illegitimate child whose mother sang for strangers and was killed in front of her eyes by one of her drunken lovers. Anuradha, brought up in Bombay by her aunt, was molested as a child and exploited by several producers. At present, when Som meets her, she is living with Aftab without formal marriage but she is the “brains” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 52) and life for Aftab. Som is amazed to learn that she wanted to be nobody’s wife, “you can’t marry everyone you love. So why marry anyone at all” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 43). She appears as the Great Mother ‘Transformatory’ in its good form to Som when she tries to open up Som’s having mode of existence out of its possessive and narcissistic relationship with other beings in a regressive mode. The regressive mode results in ‘the consummation of reduction’ or self objectification by treating others as objects. She reveals her expanded self to Som, by telling him emphatically, “I can imagine I am married to Aftab. I can imagine I am married to you. My mother used to imagine she was married to Krishna” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 128). In her presence Som’s search for meaning or his ego advances into the third phase of its development i.e. ‘the struggler’ stage when in order to be meaningful, the ego struggles against the ‘having’ state of the ‘son-lover’ or the regression of ‘adolescent incest’ into one’s Great Mother structure. Anuradha has that understanding and sharing of suffering which takes Som again and again to the labyrinthine lanes of Banaras and the labyrinth of Aftab’s haveli. Anuradha, as Aftab tells Som, “can’t stand to see anybody fail. It breaks her heart” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 39). Aftab has totally given himself to his depths and Anuradha. His name means the Sun signifying the illumination from one’s unmanifest depths while Som Bhaskar’s name signifies the Moon and the Sun i.e. the ego in an orbit around its source of illumination waiting or obstructing its illumination from its depths. Aftab signifies the Jungian symbol of transformation in the form of the magician. He is described by Som as a guy wearing dark goggles, a “creature of the night” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 45) lost in the haunting melodies of Azizun. These melodies appear familiar even to Som with their “particular dementia” appealing to Som’s unmanifest depth, and Som finds them to be “frightening” in their power to push men into “despair, to decadence. . . and, thence, into madness and death” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 54). They try to transform the having mode of existence of Som to have a look into his shadow, “that core of loneliness around which all of us are built” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 54). They remind Som that he does not have the courage to accept his shadow side and move from the ‘state of funk’ to the state of ‘real thing’ or being.

Anuradha appears as mesmerizing to Som in Aftab’s haveli which itself appears as a place signifying symbols of ‘transformation’ to Som as there he finds images from his unmanifest depths or the deeper self. Som calls these images “photographs of the soul” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 28). Here Azizun’s songs make him “drop” his “guard” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 55), and he realizes that “shares or no shares, we belong to the same benighted underside of the world” where he finds himself flying in the city of Banaras across its “blackened out skies flapping my weary wings, notable, for all the striving to chart a course” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 55). He wonders whether the maroon blue room is a “part of the labyrinth, too?” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 53), “a dark brooding presence” with the authority of a separate creation” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 31). He finds the “idea of a labyrinth within the labyrinths of lanes” stretching “westwards from the ghats of banaras” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 29) making him appear like “an ant threading through a maze, knocking about against one wall than another” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 53). Banaras, Lal Haveli and Aftab act as symbols of ‘transformation’. They shake out the false sense of security of his ‘having mode’ of existence in which he tries to dominate the reality and neglects his depths, but they all act as the verbal constructs of Great Mother Transformatory in its terrible form. Lal Haveli, its sounds and colours, the maze of its layout and the maze of the City . . .” create in Som “unexpected stirring . . . of some long dormant essence of a different kind” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 42). Som is left wondering, “if only one knew what one wanted, or, may be, to know was what I wanted” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 53). Som cannot turn to his own depths without Anuradha and he finds the knockings from his unmanifest depths to be full of enervating doubts which leave him struggling in “this going forward and backward and sideways of the mind” feeling “This, then, was a labyrinth, too . . .” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 53).

Som mixes his drive for corporate acquisition and the cries of his soul. Som is drawn to Aftab’s haveli, Anuradha and Banaras again and again. However, instead of recognizing Anuradha as his leading light, he seeks to acquire her. His journeys symbolize the quest of his self to come out of his ‘struggler state’ into a ‘heroic’ mode. He cannot bear Anuradha’s gaze which he finds “forged for carrying out transactions of the soul”, and it dawns upon him that “it was to see her and not to negotiate for the shares” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 41) that he visits Banaras and Aftab’s haveli again and again. Anuradha’s sufferings make her appear to Som “gifted with a special vision, a vantage point high above the earth, from where she could see the melee below as ordinary man could not” (Joshi, *The*

Last Labyrinth 58). Som needs her in his fight with the dragon or his own dark side and he feels “I knew I wanted her” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 58). Anuradha, as if even without his articulating, shares his struggle, “I know. You want something. You badly want something . . . but it’s not me” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 59). She also reveals his state of helplessness in combating his dragon or in his differentiating himself from his Great Mother structure through his methodology of ‘having mode’ of existence, “But let me tell you something: You are not as clever as you think. You are wrong about many things. You are wrong even about yourself. You think you know a lot, when, in fact, you don’t” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 61). Anuradha prepares him as a Great Mother ‘Transformatory’ in its ‘Good’ form to face and overcome his own terrible side and become alive to his own depths and the world outside. Anuradha and Aftab take Som to Gargi’s hut where he finds, having “seen her before”:

... walking silently about the darkness of my dreams. That is why entering the room, I had felt at home with her. And, I was positive she knew me, too. She understands, I said to myself the only one who understands”. (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 99)

Som feels at peace with himself and eats the kheer which Anuradha brought on Gargi’s instructions, “It was as though a delinquent son, hungry and worn, had returned home” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 99). Som feels “very full” and Anuradha finishes the kheer left by him. Gargi also acts for him as a verbal construct of the Great Mother ‘Transformatory’ in turning Som to Anuradha in a bond deeper than the bonds of reduction established by him at his narcissistic having mode of existence. Som merely wanted to acquire her like the shares of Aftab's company but in her presence Som realizes, “I became aware of the charge that had gradually built up between me and Anuradha” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 100) since their meeting in the intercontinental hotel, the Blue room, the banks of the Ganga or the visit to dargah. At dargah Anuradha held his arm where he felt “tricked” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 49) by the sight of death but had the warm hand of Anuradha comforting him, or when he realized with Anuradha the new reality of Ganga as “some unknown stream, in some unknown segment of the universe, leading to a reality that I had not yet known” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 49).

Gargi tries to turn him alive to the reality of Anuradha, and Som also finds Anuradha, unlike other women, knocking at his loneliness. Anuradha on the other hand “was the daughter of disturbance itself. I could feel her pushing against this shroud of silence . . .” with a cry “that would have been the cry of the world’s first lost lover or of all men destined as they are to cry unfulfilled, to the stars” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 108). Som’s search for self remains at the ‘Struggler’ stage and he finds everything as a haze where “time itself seemed wiped off like the spools of a computer” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 110) because he had not created meaning in the engagement of his self with Anuradha but only felt the power of her transformation without transforming his terrible side in his Great Mother structure. Som proceeds through his corporate unconscious without allowing the healing to resolve the duality of faith and crisis in his unconscious resulting in uncontrollable disturbances from ‘the unmanifest’ or his deeper self which dog him in the form of “insomnia” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 110) leaving him “drained and depressed” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 110). Som thinks he can get away from all these disturbances emanating from Banaras, Aftab, Anuradha and their haveli by going abroad. But he soon realizes, like Aftab, that the “journeys” lead to “where?” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 38). Aftab has turned inward to his depths realizing “It is a great relief to know that there is no new thing under the sun” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 38) while Som still finds himself running around looking for some new thing under the sun. But Som’s visit to Europe, America and Japan puzzles even his wife Geeta as this journey does not give any peace to his self but “lust followed so startlingly by impotence” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 114). He decides to return to India by the first available flight and finds himself in Bombay lying “perspiring for an hour in the car” and finds his head in “Geeta’s lap” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 115). His effort to escape his ‘unmanifest’ has created in him nothing “but an empty roaring” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 115), a new state of helplessness in which he starts “enjoying” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 115) staying in bed.

In order to turn to his own depths, he wants to “build some bridge” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 119) to Aftab’s world, and this time he visits Gargi, who he thinks, is the only one who understands, and who perhaps can solve his present state of being “fed up of this restlessness” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 118) and also his desire and “need” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 121) for Anuradha. Gargi tries to open him up to the powers of Anuradha in bringing his depths alive to him. She asks him to “go with” Anuradha and tells him “don’t quarrel, she is your shakti” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 121). Som also realizes Anuradha to be different from other women, “why should she appear mysterious unless, possibly, there was a mystery within me, that, in her proximity, got somehow stirred, as one tuning fork might stir another” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 89).

The spiritual crisis and mental sickness of Som goes on deepening with his methodology of ‘having’ and not opening up to others’ suffering and his own depth. Instead of treating Anuradha as his Shakti to lift him out his present state of spiritual stagnation, he treats her as a “mystery” that “I had to crack” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 89). He turns to Anuradha to solve his spiritual crisis in his narcissistic mode of relationship. He lives on the “nourishment of the shades thrown by her naked body under the chromatic shower.” This ‘consummation of reduction,’ of Anuradha by Som, “far from cooling” his “passions served only to fuel them” (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 121). He finds the relationship disturbed by his unmanifest depths which like “the spoken or unspoken

question, like a vulture, circle the corpse of life: what lay in the last labyrinth?" (Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* 122). Of all the women, Anuradha had been a co-sufferer with Som Bhaskar but he has also enmeshed her in the objectified layers of his own labyrinth by absorbing her healing touch more as a sensual pleasure and source of more voids. Anuradha who came nearest to salvage the wreck of Som's self also fails as instead of responding to her as a sick person would respond to a curing medicine, Som treats her as a narcotic pill. All other women fail because either they were too intellectual, spiritual or not upto the level of Som Bhaskar but failure of Anuradha is a failure of human warmth, failure of sharing of suffering and of faith itself in an environment of objectifying absurdity in the high echelons of post-independent India.

NOTES

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