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ROLL-17/UG1

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SHORT STORIES OF MANTO: THE
LOOKING DEEP INTO THE
PSYCHOLOGY OF HUMAN BEINGS
AT PARTITION

Among Indian short story writers Sadat Hasan Manto hailed as the best at the time of partition. Manto captured the daily life of Bombay, Amritsar and abled to look into the deep of these people. A keen psychological observation is traced in his short stories. In the way we can count alike some of his stories: 'Toba Tek Singh', 'Dog of Titwal', 'Frozen', 'Khaled Mian', 'Smell', 'Blouse'. The contemporary conservative writers association of Lahore may accuse him of obscenity in the stories but his truthful description of the violence, inner tussle into his characters is very obscure. He presents before us reliable descriptions of slums, brothels, criminals and there is a urge to find out humanity from the places which are commonly ignored (such as Sarita). Some time he tries to justify the reason behind the criminality such as the character Ishwar in 'Cold Meat' ('Thanda Gosht') who is struck between his lust and his conscience after tries to rape a corpse. A strange duality of Ishwar can be observed in this story, Ishwar is here represented as the archetype of human passion and lust. The coldness of the hand of the corpse and the hand of Kalwant Kaur has a strange parallelism. The consideration of Ishwar that the Kalwant Kaur is just an another heap of cold meat has reformed Ishwar. Ayesha Jalal says about this aspect of Manto: "...amidst the darkening shadows of criminality, avarice and lust, he plumbed

the psychological depths of his characters in search of some residual goodness that could restore faith in human being.”

The violence crept into human mind from the society at time of partition (i.e. India-Pakistan partition). The ‘dog’ of ‘Titwal’ and a lunatic (i.e.-who did not sleep for several years) of ‘Toba Tek Sing’ have the same temperament of violence of the partition. But here one important thing is clear to the readers the whole scheme of balkanized partition is totally unnecessary and does not connect to the whole mass of the country. We are also confused with the lunatic of ‘Toba Tek Sing’ and get no answer to question of that partition.

Manto discovers a strange existential void in the character Mumtaz as an existential human being in the story ‘Khaled Mian’. An absurdity of human intention and reason for existence and purpose of life is presented here as absurd. In a very skillful way Manto able to convince the protagonist of the story Mumtaz as a mental patient.

We can easily observe the poignancy at its peak when Sakina (in the story ‘Khol Do’) intention to unfasten her drawstring of her trouser as well as leave her life uttering the request to her father and the doctor:“Khol do”. Here Manto pointed out the evil wrought out in the whole country due to the violence and madness of partition. Again we witnessed the black facet of the society just hidden behind the pretentious face of it in ‘License’. Here the innocent protagonist Nesti is unknowingly slowly drawn to darkest torrent of society.

With the nature of a keen observer Manto go through the alleys of the marginalized people and portrays their pains, pleasures, dreams with mastery. They are often nameless people whose human essence and relentless quest for identity and dignity he sought to explore.

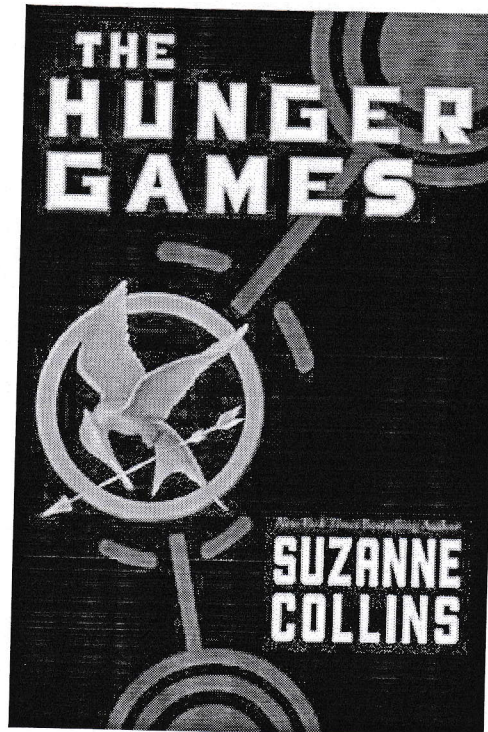
Manto had intense hatred to cold-bloodness in humans. He always remains the voice of marginalized people both of Lahore, Bombay and Amritsar. Manto believes himself as not any kind of prophet or moralist nor he put any kind of allegorical message in his story. He asserts the truth before our eyesight as it is. Manto took no side for the commentaries either good or bad. Manto did not reason their downfall, nor does he lament over their loss of innocence and grace. He only gives us a glimpse of that human space which they have vicariously created for themselves in the hell for their sustenance. Most of the characters are condemned to a sordid existence; however some of them transcended it.

6/10

Dipankar Mukherjee
25/4/19

Nirabhra Sarkar
English Honours/UG - 1/Roll Number - 19
Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira

The Hunger Games: Disobedience in Dystopia



In *The Hunger Games*, author Suzanne Collins has created the dystopian nation of Panem, which is divided into thirteen districts (out of which twelve remain), and a ruling utopian city, which is known as the Capitol. The ruling body in the Capitol has authoritarian control over everyone and everything in each district. Each year, the Capitol necessitates the twelve remaining districts to send two representatives, a boy and a girl, to participate in the Games, in which they have to fight each other in a man-made arena. Out of these 24 representatives, known as the “tributes”, only one will survive to become the “victor”. When 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen’s little sister Prim is randomly chosen to represent District 12 in the 74th annual Hunger Games, her life changes forever.

The Hunger Games is a breath-taking novel packed with drama, action, suspense, and romance. The book is very thought-provoking in certain ways, and can inspire intense discussions about both political and moral issues.

The author states that the roots of her book date back to her childhood. Her father had served in the Korean War and the Vietnam War in the mid 1900s. After hearing about her father's experiences in the battlefield, a little Suzanne was beyond fascinated. She also cites legendary American writer Edgar Allen Poe as one of her inspirations. However, she actually got the idea of writing this book one day when she was channel-surfing between reality TV and coverage of the Iraq War. Infact, reality TV is what inspired the idea of the Hunger Games being broadcast on live television for the entire nation to watch. She was also heavily influenced by the myth of Theseus. According to the Greek myth, every nine years, King Minos made King Aegeus of Athens send seven young boys and seven young girls to a labyrinth in Crete, in order to be devoured by the Minotaur. Likewise, in the book, The Hunger Games are designed by the Capitol rulers in order to maintain their dominance over the districts.

Katniss lives with her mother and her little sister in District 12. The majority of the residents of District 12 are poor coal-miners and she has been providing for her family since the tragic death of her father in a coal-mining accident. She has been doing this by hunting with her bow and arrows in the woods beyond the boundaries of District 12, along with her best friend and hunting mate Gale. Although it is illegal to hunt in these woods, they have never been in trouble as the Peacekeepers from the Capitol buy meat from them. She has also kept them alive by signing up for the tessera, which is one year's supply of grain and oil for one person, collected on a monthly basis. Children between the ages of 12 to 18 (those eligible to participate in the Hunger Games) can sign up for tesserae. However, this comes with a very heavy price. In exchange for this supply of food, the name of the child is entered an additional time in the lottery of the reaping, which is the annual ceremony in which the tributes are chosen at random.

Katniss loves her sister Primrose, commonly known as Prim, more than anyone else. She is very protective of her, and thus has made sure to not let her sign up for tesserae. Moreover, she is only 12, which means that her name has been entered only once in the reaping ball, and her chances of getting picked as a tribute are very slim. But regardless of that, and to their surprise, Prim gets chosen as the female tribute at the reaping anyway! When Prim's name is called, Katniss volunteers to take her place as a tribute without second thoughts.

Katniss is allowed to say her goodbyes to her friends and family before she is taken away. Gale promises to look after her mother and sister. Katniss promises Prim that she will try her best to win the Games. She is terrified at first but quickly determines to win the Games, for Prim. If she wins, she would become rich and the Capitol would shower her district with luxuries. Her basic instinct is not to hurt others, but to try to stay alive by protecting herself from the other tributes. However, things get more complicated when Peeta Mellark is chosen to be the male tribute. He is the baker's son and is around the same age as Katniss'. Throughout the book, Katniss constantly feels like she owes him a favour because of a kindness that he showed her by giving her bread when her family was in desperate need of help. As the Games will have only one survivor in the end, she realises that in order to win, she might have to kill Peeta.

Soon, she meets her mentor Haymitch, a former victor from her district. He is a heedless drunk, whom Katniss finds to be incapable of being a mentor. However, as the story unfolds, they develop a bittersweet, sarcastic relationship which has been beautifully illustrated by the author with witty eloquence.

With 374 pages, *The Hunger Games* is an outstanding potpourri of romance, action, sacrifice, heartache, suspense, revenge and insubordination. It contains some violence which some might find disturbing. The narrative is simple and compact, and it propels the reader through the entire novel fairly quickly. The book usually appeals to teenagers and young adults. However, grown-ups might also consider giving it a read.

7/10

Dipayan Mukherjee
25/4/19

Rohit Halder

English Honours/UG 1 Roll 21

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira

Devastation brought upon youth by World War I

Review of

Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*

All Quiet on the Western Front (1929), the landmark war-novel by Erich Maria Remarque, is the most famous and at the same time, the most controversial novel dealing with the World War I. The novel presents the war through the eyes and mind of a German schoolboy-turned-soldier Paul Baumer. Paul, like many of his schoolmates, voluntarily enlisted himself in the imperial army after getting stirred by the ideals of nationalism and patriotism by his schoolmaster Kantorek. But eventually he gets disillusioned with such ideals when he finds himself changed irrevocably, having experienced the utter savagery, dehumanizing effect and horrors of modern warfare. Remarque portrays the disasters brought upon young soldiers' lives by a war in various ways.

Paul comes into the war as a youth of nineteen but soon he realizes that he is not that normal youth mentally anymore. The harrowing experience in war has matured him far ahead of his age. The romantic, impulsive, optimistic approaches of youth are no longer found in him; these now seem to be rather illusions. So Paul says, "*None of us is more than twenty. But young? Young men? That was a long time ago. We are old now.*"(Chapter 1).

When Paul returns home during his leave, he fails to deal with his family members as he used to do before. He finds his mother suffering from cancer. When she asks him whether it was too bad there or not, Paul obviously has no other option than lying to her. How can he tell the ineffable? How can he run another risk by telling his experience to common people? How can he break the hard, inhumane posture that he has to keep in order to survive when he gets back to the war? The novel truly gives us an account of how drastically the Great War could damage the lives of young boys in Germany.

The notably romantic aspect of this unromantic novel is the bonding that the soldiers form within them. They live in constant fear of death, face endless hardships but when they are not fighting, they try to make the most out of their comradeship. They are together, isolated from

the civil world. Here Paul feels bliss in the company of his fellow soldiers like Katczinsky, Muller and Kropp. Paul, in his distresses and reflections, often transcends his nationality and becomes emblematic of a universal soldier.

The novel has elaborate episodes of trench warfare. We get to see the tragic deaths of Paul's comrades one by one and Paul falls on an extraordinarily quiet, peaceful day of October, 1918 as reported by a third-person narrator. Paul and his allies survive almost the entirety of the war only to die within months of the peace agreement. That day on the front was observed as '*All Quiet on the Western Front*' as there was nothing new to report. The title actually emphasizes the lack of attention and importance given to the fate of an individual soldier.

The role of agitators is strongly condemned. Paul finds it too easy to talk of the ideals of patriotism and nationalism and goad on others to sacrifice themselves for the nation. But he feels that when one faces death, one just wants to escape it as the ideal of self-sacrifice then faints. There were many people like Kantorek, armchair soldiers who could only incite someone to make the ultimate sacrifice for one's nation but could not dare to make it themselves, ***"While they went on writing and making speeches, we saw field hospitals and men dying: while they preached the service of the state as the greatest thing, we already knew that the fear of death is even greater."*** (chapter 1)

It is articulated that millions of people of different countries lose their lives in war which is nothing but the result of the disagreements and aggression of a handful of people in powerful positions. Kat says, ***"all top-grade emperors need at least one war, otherwise they don't get famous. Have a look in your school history books"*** (chapter 9). When Paul comes across the starving Russian prisoners of war, he finds it hard to believe these men with '*good peasant faces*' are their enemies. Paul ponders that ***"An order has turned these silent figures into our enemies; an order can turn them into friends again"*** (chapter 8).

The novel tells of the futility of warfare. It has a strong pacifist appeal, though the preface claims it to be just 'an account of the generation that was destroyed by the war'. Remarque was conscripted into the German army during the Great War at the age of eighteen. He was transferred to the Western Front where he witnessed the dreadful reality of warfare. His conscription that almost brought him within the ace of death at such a tender age and his firsthand knowledge of the circumstances, that the German soldiers went through, have influenced this novel greatly and have enabled him to depict the actions and events so vividly, making the novel a must-read.

7/10

Dipayan Bhattacharya
24/4/19

SK Shayan Hossain

English honours/UG1/roll no. 47

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira

Book review.

Journey from “Darkness” to the “Light”: A Book Review of Aravind Adiga’s Novel, “The White Tiger”

Aravind Adiga’s debut novel *The White Tiger* was first published in 2008 and won the 40th Man Booker Prize in the same year. In this novel the narrator, Balram Halwai narrates his life in a letter, addressed to the visiting Chinese premier, Wen Jiabao. Describing himself as an entrepreneur he explains how he escaped a life of driver to become successful businessman.

Balram was born in the village of Laxmangarh, which is belonging from the portion of India he calls the ‘darkness’, where he lived with his grandmother, parents, brother and extended family. He was a smart child nicknamed the ‘White Tiger’ by a school inspector for an animal that appears only once in a generation. But he was forced to leave school in order to help pay for his cousin's dowry and begins to work in a teashop with his brother in Dhanbad. While working there, He got a lucky break when he learned to handle a car, then lands a job as driver for a landlord, Ashok, the son of one of Laxmangarh's landlords. He took over the job of the main driver, from a small car to a heavy-luxury described Honda City. He stopped sending money back to his family and disrespects his grandmother during a trip back to his village. Balram moves to New Delhi with Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam. One night, Pinky Madam takes the wheel from Balram, while drunk, hits something in the road and drives away; we are left to assume that she has killed a child. Ashok's family puts pressure on Balram to confess that he had been driving alone. Ashok becomes increasingly involved in bribing government officials for the benefit of the family coal business. Balram then decides that killing Ashok will be the only way to escape India's Rooster Coop. After bludgeoning Ashok with a bottle and stealing a large bribe, Balram moves to Bangalore, where he bribes the police in order to help start his own taxi business. At the end of the novel, Balram rationalizes his actions and considers that his freedom is worth the lives of his family and of Ashok. And thus ends the letter to Jiabao.

The novel is set in a globalized economic environment of India. It shows a modern day, capitalist Indian society with free market and free business. It also shows how it can create economic division. In India there are social classes and social castes. The novel is based on the disparities of two worlds: darkness, inhabited by poor and underprivileged who cannot even meet their bare minimums; and the lighted world, inhabited by zamindars, politicians, businessmen etc. who shamelessly exploits the ones from darkness, making them even more poor and grows their own grandeur.

Balram, the protagonist in the novel, worked his way out of his low social caste and overcame the social obstacles that limited his family in the past. The novel is somewhat a memory of his journey to finding his freedom in India's modern day capitalist society.

“The White Tiger” is a remarkable piece of social commentary. It correctly identifies — and deflates — middle-class India’s collective euphoria. But Adiga is less successful as a novelist. His detailed descriptions of various vile aspects of Indian life are relentless — and ultimately a little monotonous. Every moment, it seems, is bleak, pervaded by “the Darkness.” Every scene, every phrase, is a blunt instrument, wielded to remind Adiga’s readers of his country’s cruelty.

The characters can also seem superficial. Balram’s landlord boss and his wife are caricatures of the insensitive upper classes, cruel to and remote from their employees. Although Balram himself is somewhat more interesting, his credulousness and naïveté often ring false. When he goes to buy alcohol

English honours/UG1/roll no. 47
Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira
Book review.

for his employer, he finds himself “dazzled by the sight of so much English liquor.” When he visits a shopping mall, he is “conscious of a perfume in the air, of golden light, of cool, air-conditioned air, of people in T-shirts and jeans. The problem with such scenes isn’t simply that they’re overdone. In their surfeit of emblematic detail, they reduce the characters to symbols. There is an absence of human complexity in “The White Tiger,” not just in its characters but, more problematically, in its depiction of a nation that is in reality caught somewhere between Adiga’s vision and the shinier version he so clearly — and fittingly — derides. Lacking this more balanced perspective, the novel feels simplistic: an effective polemic, perhaps, but an incomplete portrait of a nation and a people grappling with the ambiguities of modernity.

Thank you.

55/10

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25/4/19

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SOCIETY AND ITS DEMANDS A reading of "JANE EYRE" by Charlotte Bronte

This book has left a very deep impression in mind. In the past, the books that I read all had beautiful girls as their hero of the story. This book "Jane Eyre" however narrates about a girl who dared to fight against all the injustices in front of her and strive for a better life. Jane's character made me learn a lot from her regarding life, its struggle, etc.

"Jane Eyre" is a story about an orphan child. Jane's parents died when she was very little and it was her uncle (on mother's side) who took her charge. Jane's uncle also died not too long after this and he makes wife, Mrs. Reed promise him that she will take care of his niece as if she were her own. Sadly, for Jane her aunt does not fulfil that promise, she considers Jane as a burden and dislikes her for being poor. Her children are no better; under their mother's indulgence, they mistreated their cousin constantly, always making it clear that she is inferior to them. It is only at the age of ten Jane managed to get out of her aunt's house but her quality of life does not improve much. She is send to Lowood a charity school directed by Mr. Brocklehurst who does not hesitate in making the pupils face all types of miserable such as hunger, cold and even physical punishments. After remaining there for eight years our protagonist went to Thornfield as a governess. Moreover, there she develops a strange relation with the master of the house Mr.

Rochester. The friendship eventually turned into love but out of various discoveries of secrets and unequal social position, it did not last long. The character of Jane is not like the traditional heroes of the time. According to Charlotte, Jane is very simple and plain. She also differs from the traditional heroes in her strength as a woman. Charlotte created a woman character that was equal to the male character. Jane is not equal in status or class but in the emotional strength and maturity. One thing that I would like to highly emphasize i.e. on the fact that Charlotte Bronte has given long description of various ambiances throughout her novel is such a way that often at times it became very boring for the reader. On the other hand the thing that needs to be mentioned that her writing style is powerful and strong, most of the sentences contain numerous adjectives and sensual images. In addition, each setting of the books has its own unique mood in strong relation to the characters present at each place. Therefore, one could easily characterise the writing style by a rich description of the visual field of the story, such as the landscape, setting, physical appearance of the characters and observable gesture. The novel falls particularly into the tradition of gothic novels. Gothic elements can be seen in the mystery behind Thornfield and Rochester's past. There is also a prevalent theme of the supernaturalism such as the appearance of Mr. Reed's ghost, the ghoulish laughter of Bertha Mason and Rochester's disembodied voice calling out to Jane.

The novel's longevity resides partially in its social message and posing questions, its combination of literary genre keeps the story entertaining and enjoyable. Not just the story of romance between Rochester and Jane, the novel also shows the psychological or moral development of its main character and spiritual quest. The first person narration plots

Jane's growth from an isolated, unloved orphan into a happy world, independent woman. Finally, the novel should be read as a spiritual quest as Jane tries to position herself in relationship to religion at each step on her journey. In reading this novel, I think one can consider keeping a reading journal, writing down quotes that spark ones interest. In addition, it is indubitable that this book is a masterpiece, but I also believe it to be a book of self-discovery. The construction of every character is thoughtful. The dialogue simply touches the hearts and bristle the skin. There are line rather quotes such as "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will;" are really astonishing and prodigious. Another thing that is remarkably unique regarding the novel is the direct reference to the readers like "Readers, I married him," "I had not intended to love; the reader knows I had wrought nard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there defected;"

The novel explores both the dark and the light of the human soul as its page turning plots keeps one stick to it until the end. Unfortunately at the times the profound language of the book was difficult to get through and at times the story grew very gloomy and creepy (Bertha Mason). Nevertheless, I really loved the book overall and I was really only completely hooked by the book. It is a profemminist text that deals with the problems faced by unattached women compelled to earn a living in a hostile world. It is about identity self-esteem, majority. As such, it has a universal appeal.

6/10

Dipanjana Mahapatra
25/4/19

'Metamorphosis' by Franz Kafka

A Book Review

Rudraksha Das
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Metamorphosis- The Absurdity of Existence

Franz Kafka remodeled the world of English Literature of the 20th century. We don't have trace of Kafka's early writings, but 1912 proved to be a breakthrough year for him as he wrote some of his most important stories, including *The Judgement*, *The Metamorphosis* and much of his novel, *Amerika*. Many of his stories were published during his lifetime, but many were not. Over the course of the 1920s and 30s, Kafka's works were published and translated, instantly becoming landmarks of the 20th century literature. His emphasis on the absurdity of existence, the alienating experience of modern life and intricacy of authoritarian power reverberates in his writings. Today, people use the word 'Kafkaesque, to signify senseless and sinister complexity, and Kafka's reputation as one of the most important writers of modern times is undiminished.

The Metamorphosis is one of the greatest novellas ever written in the 20th century and is studied in universities across the western world. The style of writing epitomizes Kafka's writing. It was common for Kafka to present an impossible situation, as a man's transformation into an insect, and develop the story from there with perfect realism and intense attention to detail. The style seems to ground the story in reality, cutting off any possibility of its having been a dream, and yet the story is of an impossible occurrence. As a result, the reader is forced to look for deeper meanings within the story. The *Metamorphosis* as professed earlier is an autobiographical piece of writing, and we find that parts of the story reflect Kafka's own life. The story begins with a travelling salesman, Gregor Samsa, waking to find himself transformed (metamorphosed) into a large, monstrous insect-like creature. It is well known that Kafka felt like an insect in his father's authoritative presence and even developed a stammer while speaking to him. Gregor, likewise, cowers in fear of his father, who finds him repulsive and attacks him at every turn. Kafka even wrote that he was pleased with the similarity of Samsa's name to his own. Kafka's mother, like her alter ego on the story, hid

silently behind her husband's presence. Kafka was forced to take an office job he did not enjoy. *Metamorphosis* might not be a straight autobiography but there are elements throughout the book that portrays a struggle for existence in this fast pacing world.

There are times when we wake up one morning and feel immobile or lost; we have to toil a lot to make through the day. Kafka has done a brilliant work in showing how human existence can be a real struggle and it may result in an identity loss, too. The novel starts with the now classic lines 'One morning, when Gregor Samsa woke from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin.' Gregor Samsa, is a young, lonely, travelling salesman who finds himself transformed into a giant bug with diminutive legs. Before his transformation, he was leading a bored, unromantic life working for a firm that stifled and exhausted him. The Firm considered the employees as scoundrels, and had a distrust of them. The Samsas are a family of four that includes his parents and his sister Grete. Gregor was the one responsible for supporting his family, as his father had stopped working many years ago due to the failure of his business. In the patriarchal society of those days, the sister and the mother of Gregor Samsa had to conform to the gender stereotypes. Gregor at the beginning of this novella becomes a monstrous insect. He has a dizzy spell and gains an unintelligible animal voice. His presence in the house disgusts everyone. His sister is the one who initially cares for Gregor, but at the end she cries, "We must try to get rid of it."

There are two metamorphoses in the novella – Gregor's from a human to a vermin and the Samsa family's from a parasitic family sucking the life blood of their only son to a family free of its dehumanizing need of middle class comfort. The book concludes with the new dreams of the surviving family members. In the end, we find the parents on an outing with their daughter who is now a young woman with her own, useful presence in the family. The last sentence shows how "at the end of their journey their daughter got up first and stretched her young body." Grete is now alive, on the threshold of a new journey.

The Metamorphosis is a surreal novel about the empty, insignificant nature of modern life where every man is an island. At the heart of man, loneliness rumbles, and work becomes a torment. Kafka was always unhappy with his writings, and after his death most of his work was published. You need to read *'The Metamorphosis'* to understand the term Kafkaesque. The novel is about a nightmarish, unreal scenario that evokes feelings of futility, frustration, and helplessness. It's about bureaucracy's stifling existence and human condition's latent isolation.

The Metamorphosis is certainly not nihilistic as it ends with a glimmer of hope. The Samsas find a new, invigorating strength after an endless torment at home. They find tranquility. It is the end of March, and the spring is about to begin – a season of youth and hope, that brings alive the sleeping seeds, and dormant human emotions.

6-9/10

Dipnayan Mukherji
24/12/19

Vaibhav Ghosh

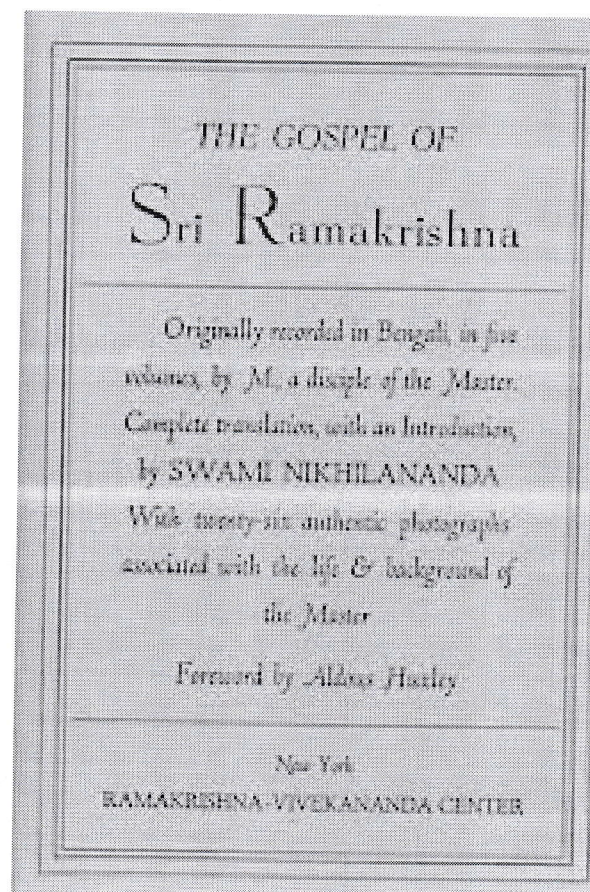
English Honours/UG 1 Roll 77

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira

Book review

The Gospel for the Modern Age: A reading of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

Vaibhav Ghosh UG 1 77



The word "Gospel" is a Greek word which translates as "good news", a term originally used in the new testament referring to the four books which recorded the life and teachings of Jesus. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* translated by Swami

Nikhilananda is an English translation of the Bengali religious text *Sri Sri Rāmakrishna Kathāmrita*. The text records conversations of Ramakrishna, a 19th century Bengali saint, believed to be an incarnation of God (the Sanskrit term used to refer to such divine beings is "Avatar"), with his disciples, devotees, and visitors, recorded by Mahendranath Gupta, who wrote the book under the pseudonym of "M." The *Kathamrita* became very popular in Bengal and other parts of India. It was published in five parts between 1902 and 1935. In 1942, Swami Nikhilananda, a disciple of the holy mother (Sri Ramakrishna's) wife, published the first English translation of the Bengali text in New York. This translation soon became the most authoritative translation, and was widely circulated amongst spiritual seekers, philosophers, academics, and interested readers. The book was voted as one of the "100 Most Important Spiritual Books of the 20th Century" by the American scholars convened by HarperCollins publishers.



Sri Ramakrishna, photo taken at the Bengal photographer's studio, 1884

The book starts with M. introducing himself and the social and mental circumstances he was going through during his first meetings with Sri Ramakrishna, referred to as the "Master". M. had a quiet disposition and had been struggling to maintain peace at his home with his brothers and mother. Finally, unable to bear the hostility of his brothers, one night in February 1882, he left his house with his wife and two children in the middle of the night. He went to a few friends' homes and requested them to offer him and his family shelter for the night, but all of them were able to come up with an excuse. Everyone he trusted closed their doors on his face. At last the family found shelter at the house of Ishan Kaviraj, M.'s brother-in-law. That night M. was devastated, he had been betrayed by his brothers, his friends, and everyone he trusted and thought of as his own. This led him to contemplate on the futility of life, and suicide. A few days later, he went for a walk with Sidhu, a friend, to the nearby temple garden of Dakshineswar, where Sri Ramakrishna lived. And this sets the scene for M.'s magnum opus. That evening M. met the master for the first time. They had a short conversation, and as M. was about to leave, the master said, "come again". And he did. He kept returning to the master regularly for the next four years, till the master's passing away in 1886.

The text records the conversations between the master and M, as well as many others: Hindus, muslims, christians, tantriks, vaishnavites, atheists, and agnostics. Like Jesus and the Buddha, Sri ramakrishna taught his disciples through parables, which were easy to understand and remember. "Be like a wet nurse," Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "who takes care of her master's children as her own, but in her heart of hearts knows that she has no claim upon them; so think also that you are but the trustees and guardians of your people, but the real Master is God

Himself.” in this way he taught his householder disciples how to live without being attached to anything while being surrounded by family and friends. Also, like previous incarnations, Sri Ramakrishna simplified religion and philosophy, to suit the needs of the times. The ancient arguments of different sects of Vedanta philosophy were shattered by his simplistic homilies. He stressed on the purity of the heart, truthfulness, and sincerity in spiritual life as the means to God realization. As Christ had said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”, similarly, Sri Ramakrishna said, “One can easily realize God if one is free from guile. Spiritual instruction produces quick results in a guileless heart. Such a heart is like well cultivated land from which all the stones have been removed. No sooner is the seed sown than it germinates. The fruit also appears quickly.”, and “Unless one always speaks the truth, one cannot find God Who is the soul of truth.”



Mahendranath Gupta (M.)



A painting done in 1882 of Sri Ramakrishna pointing out to Keshab Sen the harmony of religions.

Sri Ramakrishna also unified the different religious traditions by pointing to the fact that they are all merely different means to the same goal. Sri ramakrishna and his Gospel is unique in this aspect that unlike other avatars, he did not create a new sect, but rather, rejuvenated and strengthened the faith of the followers of all sects and creeds. He used to say: "A man can reach the roof of a house by stone stairs or a ladder or a rope-ladder or a rope or even by a bamboo pole. But he cannot reach the roof if he sets foot now on one and now on another. He should firmly follow one path. Likewise, in order to realize God a man must follow one path with all his strength. But you must regard other views as so many paths leading to God. You should not feel that your path is the only right path and that other paths are wrong. You mustn't bear malice toward others." His emphasis was always on sincerity, as

seen when he said, “With sincerity and earnestness one can realize God through all religions. The Vaishnavas will realize God, and so will the Saktas, the Vedantists and the Brahmos. The Mussalmans and the Christians will realize him too. All will certainly realize God if they are earnest and sincere.”



Dakshineswar temple complex, where Sri ramakrishna lived for thirty years and where most of the conversations in the Gospel took place.

The Gospel of sri Ramakrishna also chronicles Calcutta and its surrounding areas in the 1880s. The names of many noted personalities like Keshab Chandra Sen, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Girish Ghosh, Sivanath Shastri, Shashadhar tarkachuramani and many other such figures and their conversations with the saint are found in the gospel. Many buildings, many of which are important historical

sites today, are referred to throughout the text. These places include: the maidan, the Dakshineswar temple garden, the Kalighat kali temple, the Thanthania kali temple, Swami Vivekananda's ancestral home, the grand prayer halls of the Brahmo Samaj, the Minerva and Star theatres, and the Asiatic Society. These present, to the reader familiar with the northern section of Calcutta, a clear backdrop over which the reader can picture every event as it takes place in the text. This is why Aldous Huxley wrote in his Foreword to the Gospel, "...M' produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute detail."

Sri ramakrishna used to say, "one cannot limit god within any boundary", the same is true for his Gospel. This text is not only the life and soul of countless spiritual seekers, it has also presented valuable ideas to philosophers and moralists; hope and solace to those passing through tribulation; and something to comprehend beyond the mundane world to all its readers.

~~Word limit exceeded.~~

7/10

Dipankar Mukherjee
25/4/19

Hard Times: Revisiting the Victorians

Charles John Huffam Dickens" (1812-1870) tenth novel, *Hard Times: For These Times*, happens to be his most polemical work. Before appearing in the form of a book, it was serially published from April to August of 1854, in the periodical *Household Words* – where he worked with young authors like Wilkie Collins.

The novel is written in a tripartite structure, while the title of each book is taken from the ninth book of the New Testament: "For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (*Epistle to Galatians*, 6:7). In his earlier novels like *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839), Dickens criticized the mismanagement of private schools in Yorkshire through the character of Mr. Squeers. *Hard Times* satirizes the utilitarian values which were prevalent among educational institutions in the mid-Victorian society. The notorious school superintendent, Mr. Thomas Gradgrind has little space for imagination. Grad grinds the students of Coketown by promoting a distorted picture of Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian ideas. He opens the novel in Book 1: Sowing, with the lines: "NOW, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else" (Dickens, 1). Therefore, in the very first lines of the first chapter, Dickens sowed the seeds of fact over fancy. In the second chapter, he introduces Cecila Jupe (Sissy), the

daughter of a circus clown – who could not factually describe a horse and suggested that she would carpet a floor with pictures of flowers and of horses. Sissy's classmate Bitzer, on the other hand can recite all the physical attributes of a horse. Bitzer represents the whole of Coketown – under Gradgrind's system of facts and opposes the world of fancy as promoted by the performers of Sleary's circus – where Sissy's father used to work. The Inn where Mr. Sleary's circus workers stay is known as the „Pegasus Arms. This Pegasus is a model of a flying horse, with golden stars attached. It represents the world of beauty which Mr. Gradgrind's children are devoid of. Sissy's faculty of imagination poses a direct threat to their mechanization. She is then dismissed from the school by Gradgrind and his friend Josiah Bounderby, a manufacturer and mill owner, on account of being a bad influence for her peers. Later, Sissy continues her education but she had to work for Mrs. Gradgrind and promise that she will never return to circus, like her father. In the first four chapters, Dickens expressed his views that schools train children like “little parrots and small calculating machines” (phrase used in Dickens' lecture, 1857).

Even Gradgrind's own children- Louisa (Loo) Gradgrind and Thomas (Tom) Gradgrind are dissatisfied with their education. Loo, likes staring at the fire, thinking of her life. This fire is a life-giving force, providing hope and power for the machine and also destructive in nature. K.J. Fielding in „The Battle for Preston” suggests that *Hard Times* has its origin in the Preston weavers' strike (October, 1853), over the demand for ten percent increase in wage.

Maybe, one among those twenty thousand Preston weavers was Stephen Blackpool (Old Stephen), who in the novel used to work in the Bounderby mills. The imagery of „Smoke Serpents“ represents the effect of industrialization and comments upon the moral blindness of Mr. Bounderby – as he interprets the serpent of smoke as a positive sign, that the factories are earning profits and he completely ignores the unhealthy pollution of smoke. We confront old Stephen, after the days’ work and he meets his friend Rachael, a factory worker. Rachael happened to be a childhood friend of Blackpool’s drunken wife. Around the end of Book 1, we find Mr. Gradgrind tell Louisa that Josiah Boubderby has proposed to marry her. She accepts the proposal and the newly-wed set out to Lyon. In Book 2: Reaping, Stephen is suspected of a bank robbery, more because he left the town the next day. By the end of this book, Louisa refuses James Harthouse, a well-born young guy and even leaves Mrs. Sparsit’s place. Here, the symbol of „staircase“ comments upon Mrs. Sparsit’s belief that Louisa will elope with Harthouse, as their relationship strengthens. She feels that Louisa is running down a staircase into a “dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom”. She faints at her father’s feet arguing that her education has denied her to express her emotions. According to the „Norman Page“ (*Notes and Queries*, November 1971) the novel is influenced by Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Ruth* (1853), where Gaskell’s Bradshaw corresponds to Dickens’ Gradgrind. In the first chapter „Another Thing Needful of Book 3: Garnering, we experience a catharsis, when Mr. Gradgrind and Louisa share moments of emotional recovery. Here, Dickens focuses on the therapeutic power of the

feminine compassion, moral purity and emotional sensibility. Perhaps, Mrs. Gradgrind couldn't exercise her femininity and so Mr. Gradgrind has turned into a person valuing facts. Later, Louisa and Sissy find Stephen fallen in an abandoned pit shaft, and they now identify Tom, for the bank robbery. We come to know, that it is Tom who tried to incriminate Stephen by asking him to loiter around the bank. The third-person omniscient narrator then transcends into the future of the characters – Mrs. Sparsit gets punished by Bounderby and Mr. Gradgrind make facts subservient to Faith, Hope and Charity. Tom asks for forgiveness in a tear-stained letter and dies of fever near Coketown. Rachael continues her life of hard work, while Gradgrind forgives Old Stephen. Loo expresses love to Sissy's children and continues to live a life of imagination and fancy. This novel is dedicated to Thomas Carlyle, a social commentator of the Victorian era and the critic F.R Leavis finds that it is a „completely serious work of art“ and „for once possessed by a comprehensive vision (LEAVIS pp. 227 & 228).

This industrial novel, critiques the *laissez faire* economy put forward by the school of Manchester Liberalism, it employs women to restore social harmony and combat the mechanizing effects of the industrialization.

6-5/10

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GREENE'S *THE HEART OF THE MATTER*: A NOVEL CONCERNING MORAL DILEMMAS

The Heart of the Matter (1948) is a novel by English author Graham Greene (1904-91). The book details a life-changing moral crisis for Henry Scobie. This novel is believed to be based on Greene's real-life experience as a British Intelligence Officer in Freetown, British Sierra Leone. Although Freetown is not mentioned in the novel, Greene confirms the location in his 1980 memoir, 'Ways of Escape'. *The Heart of the Matter* was enormously popular, selling more than 300,000 copies in the United Kingdom upon its release. In 1998, the Modern Library ranked *The Heart of the Matter* 40th on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. In 2005, the novel was chosen by TIME magazine as one of the one hundred best English-language novels from 1923 to the present. In 2012, it was shortlisted for the Best of the James Tait Black.

Set in a small British colonial outpost in Sierra Leone during World War II, *The Heart of the Matter* occupies and comments on the ambitious subjects of war, espionage, love, adultery, treachery, and betrayal. But at its core—at the heart of *The Heart of the Matter*—it is a novel of moral dilemmas. Its plot, its psychological and spiritual depth, even its political intrigues revolve around two basic moral questions: Is it possible to make others happy? Is suicide ever the right choice? The novel's enigmatic protagonist, police officer Henry Scobie, even

wonders if Christ's death might be understood as an act of suicide since He allowed Himself to be sacrificed.

Before he reaches the climactic decision of his moral crisis, Scobie struggles to make his poetry-loving and deeply unhappy wife, Louise, happy. Fed up with the ghastly climate, the remoteness, and, in her case, friendlessness of village life in Sierra Leone, she decides she must leave, and Henry makes a fateful promise to send her to South Africa, even though he lacks the funds to do so and thus begins a series of decisions and bargains that push Scobie into a terrifyingly unfamiliar moral terrain. Though Scobie wonders if any human being can arrange another's happiness and even considers the desire to be happy in a world so filled with pain and suffering to be impossibly foolish, he still tries to make Louise happy. To raise the money to pay for his wife's passage, Scobie strikes a bargain with Yusef that leads to Scobie's corruption after many years of honest service. And once Louise is gone, Scobie begins an affair with the recently widowed Helen and soon finds himself responsible for the happiness of two people, rather than just one. When Louise returns, hoping to restore their strained marriage, she suggests that they receive communion together, which requires a full confession, and the cage door swings shut on Scobie and his deceptions.

Only one way of escape presents itself to Scobie, and he believes that eternal damnation awaits him if he chooses it. But he convinces himself that by sacrificing his own life, he can spare both Helen and Louise further misery at his expense. He tells Louise they shouldn't judge Scobie: "I know what the Church says. The Church knows all the rules. But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart." In a final paroxysm of despair, Scobie is forced to take the climactic decision of his life to avoid taking sides between the opposing forces that are fracturing his conscience.

Looking closely at the cover of the novel by Vintage publishers, we can see that a pair of rusty handcuffs hanging "like an old hat" above the desk of Major Henry Scobie. The shackles symbolize the sense of responsibility that hangs over Scobie as a husband, Catholic, and colonial police chief in British West Africa during World War II. But they also signal Greene's inescapable sense of responsibility as

a writer. Like Scobie, Greene approached his work as a function of conscience as well as conscientiousness, a duty as prosaic as accurate note-taking and as imperative as justice.

Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* is a poignant, exceptionally well-written book that looks into the flawed, deeply religious beliefs, of a Deputy Police Commissioner in the British Police force. This is not a book to read quickly but one requiring thoughtful analysis and introspection, motivating change and a reordering of priorities. It is a deep and penetrating look at religion and colonization and it leaves the reader pondering many important issues that are as relevant today as the day this wonderful novel was published. If this book doesn't make you think, then nobody knows what actually will!

7/10

Dipankar Chakrabarti
22/04/11

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The Devil and Miss Prym a novel of Paulo Coelho that tries to show, are human beings inherently good or evil?

"The Devil and Miss Prym: A Novel of Temptation," by famed author Paulo Coelho, takes place in a small town called Viscos and like most of his novels, the setting is placed far from his hometown or country. The whole story tackles a very difficult question, 'are human beings inherently good or evil?' and its main theme the conflict between good and evil does not provide any conclusions. The novel emphasizes the consequences of the choices and actions we make and take and the author uses temptation as a force which leads the characters to the main conclusion of the story and at the end we learn good and evil both are within us it all depends on individual choice.

This novel is very symbolic like the stranger symbolizes devil, with his convincing temptation while Old Berta symbolizes the Goodness within and lastly, Chantal represents us, human beings and our constant struggle of choosing right or wrong path. Lastly, the gold bars are like the temptation that distracts us from our hard work and we start sacrificing our principles, just like if Chantal had chosen to get the gold bar, she wouldn't have experienced all the hard work that ultimately led her to enlightenment.

The novel presents two different kinds of conflict in it first the internal conflict is between man vs. self where we can see that the turmoil Chantal faced in the story concerning the choice between giving up into the temptation or to say no to it. If she had chosen to give-up into temptation, she could have achieved her dream of leaving Viscos and exploring the world but this will compromise her belief that we human beings are not selfish and evil. Then comes the second one, the external conflict which is between Carlos and Chantal concerning their beliefs about the nature of human beings whether its naturally good or bad. Both of them wants to prove that each of their beliefs are true; one saying that we are all willing to commit a sin given the right price or circumstance while the other believes that we are essentially good for we are created in the likeness of God, In its entirety, the conflict of the novel is between Good and Evil; Morality and Practicality. In the end, the primary character realized that good and evil come together; it is a balance that exists in each of us and must be maintained.

The novel contains some very interesting characters who never fail to impress us throughout the story. The manifestation of temptation in the village of Viscos; The stranger is the one who made a deal with Miss Prym and the people of Viscos to determine whether we are good or evil. He is a dynamic character; from being the good man, he became a man who is a slave to one's Evil due to the fateful

event that cost him the life of his wife and daughter. The dynamism of his character can also be perceived in the way his ideas and/or thoughts about life and human nature shifted from the pessimistic one to a positive one assuming that he regarded the views of Miss Pym at the end of the story. Old Berta is the widowed woman who was thought of as a witch by most people in Viscos. She represents the Good side thus and then Miss Pym represents us – human beings Miss Pym is a dynamic character in the sense that at the end of the story, she ended up in a different situation; she was wealthy and able to explore the world just like what she always dreamt of. Another manifestation of her dynamism is the ideologies or principles in life she believes in; at first, she has confined into the thinking that no one is naturally or intrinsically bad because she believes that as beings created in the likeness of God we are in essence holy. However, in the end, she realized that we are both and it is impossible to be one without being the other first or vice versa. She is also a foil to both Carlos and Old Berta.

"The Devil and Miss Pym" novel is so interesting because it possesses a dense plot which maintains its consistency throughout the whole story. The novel introduces its characters loosely but the plot started to thicken when the stranger reveals his plan to Chantal and offers her a deal, and also the part where the main conflict of the story comes out. All of the events in the novel before the seventh day are part of the rising action because the progression of these events led all the characters to the climax of the story. I think that in this novel, the exposition part was not given focus because the story progressed early into the rising action part.

Actually what I think the plot follows a conventional structure and was narrated in a normal progression. The novel lacks a surprising twist in the story. The plot was somewhat predictable in the sense that there are no radical shifts in the events or flow of the story. However, I understand that the main purpose of the novel is to provide a perspective on a very popular theme which is a battle between good and evil, in that point, it was satisfactory because the plot offered a lot of ideas and thoughts to reflect and ponder about.

7/10

Di pinjam Mubini
20/11/19