

THE ROUTE FROM THE STRUGGLE TO THE SURVIVAL

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ROUTE FROM THE STRUGGLE TO THE SURVIVAL

Arun Joshi published a collection of ten short stories entitled *The Survivor* (1975), and two other stories, “The Only American from Our Village” and “Kanyakumari” separately. The stories present a variety of characters - a college principal who was a victim of Gherao, an immigrant Indian physicist who conveniently forgot his dear ones when he became successful, a soldier who felt rootless and homeless when he returned home after the war, a young prostitute whose only aim was to be accepted by the rich upper class society, an unemployed middle-class youth and eve-teaser, a sex-obsessed lusty servant, an old man desiring to regain his lost youth, a middle-aged traveller salesman who sacrificed his career because of his special affinity for his crippled daughter, and so on. These characters have one element in common, and that is their acute sense of loneliness and frustration. They desperately hunt for the meaning and purpose of their lives. Amidst their depressing experiences, they do sense a kind of hope and so they struggle to survive. The transition from the struggle to the survival is the route dealt with in this chapter.

“The Gherao”

The route from the struggle to the survival is clearly seen in “The Gherao,” the first story of the collection. It describes the struggle of Ravi Mathur a college principal whom the students gheraoed and defeated. The story is narrated by Mr. Chatterjee, a young lecturer in the department of English where the incident took place. The method of “gherao,” one of the powerful weapons of trade unions and political parties, created physical and psychological struggles for the victims. The story focuses on the declining sense of values among the post-colonial youth of India. From time immemorial “gurus” had been treated with high reverence in India. But with the influence of western culture and the interference of politics, the Indian situation has been adversely affected.

When the students of the college gheraoed the principal and made some demands, he promised to fulfil them in order to survive the struggle. The president of the students’ Union, Chiru Pandey and his supporters chanted slogans, used indecent words to abuse him and even denied him a glass of water. The struggle continued for a long time causing great mental agony and physical strain for the principal. Joshi

clearly and challengingly reveals the arrogant attitude of the present generation. The principal was a freedom fighter in his youth and had overcome a lot of difficulties including a long-term stay in the jail. But these incidents never ached his heart. When his students gheraoed him in his old age, it broke his heart. The disrespect and the negligence of his disciples crushed him down.

The student representatives appeared very cruel and indecent by not giving their victim a chance for survival. They created an atmosphere of tension and bewilderment. While the principal struggled for his life, the students celebrated his defeat with “wild cries of jubilation” (28). The principal died of heart attack on one side, the students on the other, got their demands approved. The sad state of the principal did not bother the students who survived the struggle. But “I must admit I have found it difficult to sleep tonight. When I could not bear it any longer I decided to write all this down, hoping thereby to ease my own oppression. But the night seems endless and, I am afraid, I do not feel all that young anywhere” said the narrator (29). The principal survived the struggles of life forever by his death.

The interested reader is shocked to observe the pathetic plight of the principal and accuses the young generation for their arrogance. The uninterested reader pities the principal but at the same time, considers a gherao as the true weapon for success and believes that the youth has the right to fight for their rights. The disinterested reader justifies the student-community for their apt action in order to get their demands approved.

“The Frontier Mail is Gone”

“The Frontier Mail is Gone,” a reflection of the theme of rootlessness, is a first person narrative, narrated by a worker in a factory at Faridabad. Living in a hut near a level-crossing, he had developed the habit of sitting at the level-crossing every morning. Members of his family, Leela, a young widowed girl of seventeen and her brother, Surrinder, also used to watch the Frontier Mail pass. Shy and young, Leela’s imagination was stirred by the ‘Frontier Mail’ as she saw it moving on to an unknown destination. Wide-eyed she would watch and think of the rich passengers and the world beyond her poverty-stricken hut. Her wonder is beautifully presented by the narrator: “I watched her gaze with

unrestrained wistfulness at the swaying carriages, the air-conditioned coach, its tinted glass reflecting the morning sun, the diving car. Her girlish face was lighted with wonder and as I was later to recall, a suppressed passion that none of us suspected her to possess” (35).

Leela was under the careful scrutiny of her father and brother because they knew what was in her mind. She could not resist her passion for the unknown world outside. So one morning she slipped out of the hut without their knowledge and got into the mail. The long journey took her to Bombay, where she was picked up by a pimp. Subsequently she was brought to a brothel where she became the victim for many men’s desires. Leela tried earnestly to overcome the struggles of her hut-life, but she landed in a worse situation where she had to confront an unknown dirty world.

The interested reader, at the initial stage of the story, hopes that Leela should not escape the careful vigilance of her father and brother, for he foresees the dangers awaiting her in the rich upper-class society. But when she was in the trap, he sympathises with her and hopes that she would find her way out from there. The disinterested reader observes Leela’s actions with curiosity, and traces her route with

interest but when she caters to her whims and fancies, he loses his interest. The uninterested reader believes that Leela deserved the fall as she was herself responsible for the tragedy.

“The Eve-Teasers”

“The Eve-Teasers” is a successful handling of the age-old problem of eve-teasing. Ram and Shyam, two teenagers, who had passed matriculation in the third-class, acquired admission in a university because they were rich. They had all that money could buy. Naturally, morality was a coin of less currency for them. The university days were memorable for them because of the forty-minute ride in the bus to and from their homes. They enjoyed the trips because they got chances to pull the clothes of women, block the entrance just to feel the female flesh that rubbed against them. Not once did they think of their mothers or sisters who would have had the same plight. The latter half of the day is even more refreshing for Ram and Shyam, in a perverse way, though. They would sit together and recollect the sweet memories of the day.

As fate would have it, one day Ram gave a horrific description of his latest victim - a girl in a blue Kamiz. As he turned to Shyam for an approval or a reaction he realized that Shyam had disappeared. He just walked away amidst the on-coming cars, like a mad man. He wanted to reveal the identity of the girl in the blue Kamiz, but he just could not. He was full of shame, and that shame turned into a kind of terror. It was the terror experienced by a man whose sister's fragile flesh had been torn by a decaying mass of flesh. He was moved to tears. He struggled hard to withstand the tears but the tears survived the struggle. He did not have the guts to turn back and look at Ram for reasons quite obvious.

The interested reader applauds the writer for handling daftly the theme of eve teasing, an evil practice prevalent in the modern society. He is happy about the fact that the predator understands the pain of the prey at the end. The disinterested reader looks at the eve-teasers with contempt, but believes that no one can root out these evils from the society. The uninterested reader has nothing special to offer as he believes that Shyam deserves the shame he faces at the end.

“The Boy with the Flute”

“The Boy with the Flute” is about Mr. Sethi, a successful businessman, “wealthy beyond calculations” and one among the thirty richest men in the country” (50). In his boyhood, Sethi’s mother had taught him a familiar prayer: “From evil lead me to good; from darkness lead me to light; from death lead me to deathlessness” (49). He took refuge in the prayer often and recited it frequently till he became fifteen years old.

The adult Sethi became a successful and busy business man and consequently indulged in all sorts of worldly pleasures. Gradually he forgot the sacred hymn that his mother had taught him. With the accumulation of wealth, he became tensed and over-excited. He also lost his peace of mind as a pervading fear of death overpowered him. Strange thoughts and dreams disturbed the harmony of his normal life. Though he tried to ignore it in the beginning he was not able to contain the anxiety and fear that haunted him.

In an attempt to overcome the gloom, Sethi took a mistress hoping that the touch of female flesh would keep off his obsession. But the girl did not satisfy him for long. Very soon he realized that the girl’s only motive was making

money. Disgusted and displeased, he left the girl one night, but unfortunately he was robbed of his belongings at gun point and dumped in an unknown house. He struggled to escape and in that state he was tormented by fearful images: “Chaos filled his head. And through this chaos marched the songs of his childhood, the nursery rhymes and hymns, the fables” (67). At that juncture the words of his mother’s hymn rallied to his thoughts and he began to recite it with fervour: “Asato ma sadgamaya; Tamaso ma jyothir gamaya; mrithyoma amritam gamaya” (67).

With the chanting of the prayer he lost his consciousness, only to recover and find himself rescued by a boy. This angelic messenger sent by God, perhaps, had a face covered with soot and a flute in his hand. Sethi could not identify him but he was very friendly: “The boy smiled in the fearful darkness, a smile of such unutterable sweetness that it reminded Sethi of his childhood, his mother, indeed all the goodness that he had ever known and somehow lost” (68). No efforts to trace the boy became successful. The whereabouts of the boy remained an enigma. Whether he was a simple village boy or Lord Krishna who answered his prayer on that fateful night, was not known. The words he chanted

throughout his childhood came to his rescue in the desperate hours of his life. Sethi's failure to trace the boy echoes Som Bhaskar's failure to trace Krishna in *The Last Labyrinth*. It is Sethi's childhood faith that saved him and supported him to survive the struggle of life.

The interested reader is awakened to the realm of faith and belief after reading this short story. He is convinced that the supernatural power will intervene to protect human beings in the hour of need if they have faith. The disinterested reader is enchanted with the interference of godly power but the uninterested reader is not convinced with the black boy's identity.

“A Trip for Mr. Lele”

“A Trip for Mr. Lele” is about a commercial salesman, Mr. Lele, who is a victim of the new socio-economic concept in which the individual is exploited. Mr. Lele, the second highest paid vendor of toothpastes, was admonished by his exacting and insensitive boss for the dwindling sale of toothpastes in the market. Lele wanted to resign his job but withdrew, when he thought of his demanding wife who stood as a cultural wasteland between western emancipation and

oriental indolence like some Indian women who have so majestically claimed the neo-culture as their very own. “Among the dunes and defiles of this dazzling empire she reigns with despotism against which Mrs. Lele’s timorous protestations are nothing but so much mist before the sun” (72).

Crushed down by the practical-minded boss in the office and the demanding wife at home, Lele’s only consolation was his nine-year-old daughter. A fragile creature, club-footed, bright-eyed, pale faced, she bore on her cheeks, the hint of a withered rose. Lele’s overwhelming affection for his daughter is described thus:

. . . something akin to that nostalgia which on a summer morning in the hills he might feel for a lone flower in the crevice of a rock, knowing as we would, that before nightfall it would be trodden into dirt by herds of passing mules. She reminded him of all the beautiful and perishable things with which so much of life’s mansion is furnished. (73)

Mr. Lele tried to spend as much time as possible with his daughter because his wife was busy in the ladies’ clubs.

After the tiring office hours, he would come back straight home where his daughter awaited him. Mr. Lele found time to take her to the zoo, and to the children's films. He collected stamps and pictures and post-cards for her and never missed her birthdays.

Around one of the birthdays of his daughter, Mr. Lele was ordered by his boss to make a trip to the southern part of the country to check the sales of his toothpastes from "rattling into a trough" (70). The birthday of his sick daughter was no excuse to the young boss: "Everybody has to make compromises, Lele. That is the least that the company can expect" (74). So, Lele took leave of his daughter promising her to return before her birthday. Lele spent sleepless nights struggling to promote the complicated sale of the product. One sleepless night at a Hyderabad Hotel he began to think of the meaning of his life.

On the last day of his tour, when Lele was flying to Cochin he met a boy who was returning to his home in Quilon from his school in Ootty on vacation. Lele gathered from the sickly boy that his father owned a cashew factory where his elder brothers worked. He had a sister whom he loved very much but she had died of leukaemia the previous

year. The boy had given up racing and sailing, and wanted to do nothing. The boy reminded Lele of his own daughter and of the essentials of life from which his job had estranged him.

Lele took a new decision. Instead of going to Cochin as his boss had ordered, he returned to Delhi, to his daughter, in time for her birthday. He woke her up with kisses and greeted her, "Happy Birthday." The situation culminated in the loss of his job but he did not regret it for he believed he had gained much more:

So now Mr. Lele doesn't sell toothpaste anymore. As a matter of fact, he doesn't even have a job. All day, he stands in dusty corridors waiting for interviews, but in the evening he sits with his daughter and watches the sky that is first grey, then blue and finally the colour of the Oriole's wings. (81)

Lele's love for his daughter encouraged him to survive all the struggles. The interested reader is thrilled to perceive the victory of love over material success. He appreciates Mr. Lele for sacrificing his well-paid job to preserve the happiness of his only child. The disinterested reader is

thrilled at the abundant love Lele has for his daughter but, at the same time, he thinks that Lele should have found some other alternative than resigning his job. The uninterested reader criticizes Mr. Lele for his inordinate love for his daughter, and considers him silly for resigning his job.

“The Survivor”

The title story, “The Survivor,” is a strong criticism of the materialistic aspect of the present society. It portrays an individual’s desperate attempt to survive “that fantastic racket that passes for the modern Indian society” (96). The story revolves round the narrator protagonist, Kewal Kapoor whose strong confessional tone is striking. The absence of love and care from his family and friends made him a victim of pretensions.

Kapoor was given to lying, because he was tired of speaking the truth which none bothered to hear. This had produced in him a hatred towards everything and everybody including himself. He hated his job, his boss, the city of Bombay where he was born and brought up and which he had once loved. He hated his wife, his wife’s father, and even his own parents. He hated the constant talk of money that went

on in his house. The atmosphere of the society he lived in was so stifling that he had forgotten “how to laugh” (82). He had a high level education and had luckily started his career in America. He came back to India after five years of experience there. He started teaching in a university. Though the salary was poor, he was happy to be a teacher in the University.

Trouble started for Kapoor when his nagging wife suddenly discovered that their house was not big enough. Not happy with a three-bedroom house, she longed for a five-bedroom one. His father-in-law, a retired ICS, executed his influence and got Kewal fixed up as a public relations officer in the drugs company of his friend. The job was tiring because he had to answer complaints from people, day after day: “I had complaints for breakfast and complaints for lunch and I took complaints home to bed. Take a job like mine if you want to know how grouchy people really are” (84).

Kapoor’s peace of mind was shattered after he left the university job. He searched for things that would give him entertainment, happiness and peace. He began telling lies to his wife, and started listening to film songs. But it hindered his work and so after a brief struggle with the conscience, he

began to destroy the mails. He took to womanizing to seek relief from the monotony of his life and his job. But he was caught by his wife, and questioned by his father-in-law for not being fair to his daughter. Kapoor unhesitatingly answered: "If I may say so, Sir, I can't stand your daughter" (88). That was the moment that snatched away everything from his life - his job, his wife, his daughter and his money in the bank which he had kept in a joint account with his wife. His immediate reaction was the sense of a wreck: "My soul sets sail towards terrible shipwrecks" (90).

Driven out of the house and deprived of everything, Kapoor landed up in a cheap South Indian hotel where he became friendly with a person named Penalty Rao. The man was so named because he had once played in a football team and specialized in penalty corners. Penalty Rao was "a thief, a smuggler, a pickpocket, a politician, a pimp and God knows what else" (93). The three - Kapoor, Rao and his friend, a taxi-driver named Ghorpad - formed a racket and decided to loot the house of Kapoor's father-in-law.

Kapoor pretended that he wanted to see his daughter. On the night of Diwali, when a party was in progress, he and his friends sneaked into the house, their faces covered in

masks. As Kapoor went to see his daughter who was playing alone with her friend upstairs, Penalty Rao and Ghorpade robbed many precious items from the house. Later, they drove to the sea-beach and uttered prayers to God for helping them to survive that night. Kapoor survived the struggles of life just as he survived that night. His prayer was a microcosm of the prayers of Indians in the modern society:

I am a survivor, gentleman, of card parties, of wedding receptions, five-year plans; of nosy neighbours, conjugal bliss, well-meaning friends and bloody-minded bosses. I am a survivor of life insurance schemes, stock exchanges and family planning techniques. In brief, gentlemen, I am a survivor of that fantastic racket that passes for the MODERN INDIAN SOCIETY. I am a survivor of mendacious mothers and relentless fathers of two-penny politicians, of lawyers and doctors. Above all, I am a survivor of that greatest disaster of them all: "THE MODERN INDIAN WOMAN".

(95-96)

The interested reader waits for the moment when Mr. Kapoor would realize his mistakes. He appreciates Kapoor to gather

courage to rob the money that originally belongs to him. The disinterested reader does not believe that Kapoor has survived all his struggles because he had to forsake his family. The uninterested reader finds fault with Kapoor's pretensions from the beginning.

“Home Coming”

“Home Coming” narrates the experience of a military officer coming back home after a long period of time. In the battlefield he had witnessed the agony of human beings which was still fresh in his memory. The loss of some of his fellow officers was so painful that he struggled to relate it to the people back home. Son of a successful businessman, he went to the war with all the romantic illusion regarding heroism. His mother was now keen on his marriage but the idea of marriage had become meaningless to him. He longed to share the experiences of the war with someone, but everyone around and including the members of his family were so busy that they had no time to listen to him. Even his sister had become a stranger to him.

The survivor of the war was haunted by many scenes: the nightmarish experience of the gruesome deaths of his

fellow soldiers; the neck to neck fight in the dark trenches with the enemies; the memory of a school building full of girls that had been the brothel for a battalion; and a deserted village where he found “a child stuck on a bayonet in front of every hut” (102). Whenever he was alone, these scenes kept “switching about his head” (104). He could not sleep in the nights thinking about these sights. Meanwhile, life outside, with the parties and movies and dancing went on as usual. The story assumes a wider significance because the soldiers who have been through traumatic experiences find themselves alienated from the society. Back home such soldiers need to fight with the society to survive the struggles of their minds.

The interested reader is startled at the inhuman condition of the soldier. He longs to sit with him and share his experiences in the war front. The disinterested reader understands the feelings of the soldier but at the same time he hopes to advise him not to expect anything more from the busy world around. The uninterested reader deals with the matter in a practical way and warns the soldier to be more realistic and show a soldier's strength.

“The Intruder in the Discotheque”

“The Intruder in the Discotheque” is the story of Shambu who longed hopelessly for youth and love in his old age. Shambu’s friend Vishwa, older and wiser than Shambu, spent his time reading and praying. By reading, he accumulated knowledge and through prayers he acquired the strength to face old age. On the other hand, Shambu indulged in all sorts of “youth” activities and therefore feared old age and death. He longed to be young again in order to keep up the thrill of life. Thinking that the company of young men and women and the touch of female flesh would help him to recapture his lost youthfulness, he regularly visited the discotheques of the city: “To that narrow, mirrored hall, he was certain, death could have no entrance” (106).

In one such discotheque he fell in love with a young girl who appeared to him to be an ‘apsara’. The girl ignited his passion and once again he started to have a dream. Finding it unbearable, he disclosed his dream to Vishwa who in turn advised him to bridle his unseemly desire. His dream could not be possible, Vishwa told him, because to realize it, Shambhu must be made young once again, which was “neither easy nor proper to do” (107). His desire was so strong that

he was taken to a merchant of dreams who agreed to restore Shambhu's youth on the condition that he would not touch the girl. He warned Shambhu: "Touch her and my magic will vanish. I am, after all, a seller of dreams. And none, remember, none has touched his dreams" (109). Grudgingly Shambhu agreed to the condition. Night after night, the old-young man danced with the girl and enjoyed himself thoroughly. But he did not touch her. Thus he forgot his age and his sorrow and the fear of inevitable death.

One night, Shambhu revealed the secret of his borrowed youth to the girl and feverishly appealed to her to share the burden of his age. As the girl jumped in panic and attempted to escape, he cried hysterically, and forgetting the caution of the magic, clasped her wrist. The magic spell broke. When the youth came forward to help the screaming girl, they found Shambhu dead with all the ugliness of his withered body exposed. The youth formed a ring around the dead body and looked in disgust at the intruder. Though Shambhu struggled to survive his youth unnecessarily, finally the course of nature and reality survived.

The interested reader enjoys seeing the old man and his odd desire to retain his youth. He considers it an awful

absurdity. The interested reader also agrees that the outcome of the frivolous attempt is justified. The disinterested reader criticizes the old man for being silly and rejoices in his doom. The uninterested reader too has no sympathy for the old man even as he falls down and dies finally.

The Servant

The short story "The Servant" is in the form of a criminal case diary, providing information gathered from various sources, about a servant who is accused of an attempt to rape the wife of his master and drive her to death.

A search into the servant's past life throws light on his neglected childhood, the humiliating jobs he was forced to do and the carefree life he had had so far. Nobody talked to him about the difference between right and wrong. He lived a life full of darkness. Finally when he took up the role of a servant, he had to go through a lot of humiliating experiences. He was in a society where servants were treated not as human beings possessing sensitive minds but merely as servants, insensitive menial labourers. Joshi criticizes the role of the masters who are partly responsible for the thoughtless actions of the servants. The servant in the story struggled to

survive but his untrained mind provoked him to seek the wrong path for survival.

The interested reader does not think that the crimes are momentary. But, at the same time he is not happy with the way modern man treats those who serve him. He firmly supports the author for his courage to reveal the true face of the society. The disinterested reader criticizes the servant for his ungrateful action but, at the same time, the outlook of the upper class also is commented upon. The uninterested reader considers the incident just as another episode of the every day crimes.

“The One American from Our Village”

“The One American from Our Village” is the story of Dr. Khanna who attained immense success in life but, in the process selfishly and conveniently forgot those who had contributed to it. Kundan Lal gave his son a good education in order to assist him attain success. His son became Dr. Khanna, “the most outstanding immigrant physicist at the university of Wisconsin” (55).

When Dr. Khanna was forty and at the peak of fame, he made a trip to India, his homeland, which he had left

fifteen years ago, with his American wife and their two sons. The four-week trip appeared a success by all standards. He met the President and the Prime Minister, inaugurated functions and delivered speeches at well-attended seminars. Everything went well for Dr. Khanna, until finally, he met an old man in the college of his home-town, where he came to deliver a talk. The old man named Radhey Mohan introduced himself as a seller of court-stamp and as a life-long friend of Dr. Khanna's father. The shabbily dressed man compelled Dr. Khanna to listen to him. His story and the manner in which he told it, reminded Dr. Khanna of his father and made him feel uncomfortable. But he could not help listening to this disquieting tale. The haunting quality of the story and Radhey Mohan's passion captured Dr. Khanna's attention.

Radhey Mohan narrated the life story of Dr. Khanna's father, Kundan Lal. He and Khanna's father were close friends from their childhood. They were born in the same village and attended the same school. Both had experienced poverty and privation. Kundal Lal was a brilliant student and stood third in the matriculation examination. Radhey did not pass but he wrote his name and his friend's name on a desk in their classroom. Kundal Lal left the village for higher studies and

did not return from there before his retirement from service. After his retirement he came back a proud man because his daughter had been married and his son had attained international repute: "He said you were the only American from our village. I asked him once what was so great about being the only American from our village. He said it was an honour" (57).

Kundan Lal was expecting a ticket from America. That was his only dream, and not having it shattered his hopes. Radhey Mohan then asked Dr. Khanna: "May be you don't have villages like ours in America but you must try to understand what it meant after the whole village knew you were going to send him a ticket. Did you send him a ticket?" (58). The question took Dr. Khanna by surprise. He looked confused, and said: "I could not, I did not" (58). He was greatly discomfited when the seller of court-stamp said: "What did we care for your achievements; what you did and what you did not do?" (57). Radhey Mohan thus made Dr. Khanna conscious of the hollowness of his so called success.

Radhey continued his story and told him further that his son's negligence shattered Khanna's father and he withdrew himself from the village and became very amiable with the

Gods. He started visiting temples every morning and evening. He had no money. He had looked for financial assistance from his son which never came. He became quiet and stopped talking about his son. When he fell ill, his daughter came to nurse him. Radhey Mohan, at his friend's request, also sent a telegram to Dr. Khanna, but he did not come. He just sent an ordinary letter saying that he was busy with conferences. A few days before his death, Kundan Lal requested Radhey to take him to the school in the town because he wanted to see the desk in the classroom on which their names were carved. The journey was a re-enactment of his childhood and he wanted to make sure that nothing had changed. The next day he died. As he spoke Radhey Mohan's tone was not harsh. He did not even look at Dr. Khanna. Still he had the irrational feeling that the old man was going to slap him: "I was very sorry to hear of his death" he said calmly (60).

Dr. Khanna returned to America but was no longer the same man. He sensed that something was terribly wrong with him: "To a psychiatrist Dr. Khanna has confided that he has periods of great burning in his feet." He had further indicated that he was cursed by his father, perhaps: "He has generally come to be known as the man who does nothing but stare at

his feet” (60). Dr. Khanna’s father had been struggling greatly to survive the struggles of his life and later his son was struggling for the help he never cared to render.

The interested reader appreciates Radhey Mohan for acting as an eye-opener to Dr. Khanna. The disinterested reader exults over Khanna’s change but knows that it is too late for him to realize his mistakes. The uninterested reader blames Dr. Khanna for neglecting his helpless father.

“Kanyakumari”

The narrator’s failure to see the sunrise at Kanyakumari is the inspiration behind the story “Kanyakumari.” Joshi is led to surmise that in India the sun has yet to rise:

Just then the sirens went off. I turned sharply to the east but there was no sign of the sun. A cloud hung on the horizon except that it was not a cloud. Nor was it a fog or mist. It was just a haze, a curtain through which you could not see. I thought may be I was in the wrong place. So, I ran up along the rock to the back of the temple. But there was no sun there either. Just the grey haze, a blanket. You could see nothing, not even a glow. (217)

Even from the Vivekananda rock at Kanyakumari, the narrator failed to witness the sunrise and he compared this experience with the unemployment, violent politics and corruption rampant in India:

One early dawn in March, I swam off Kanyakumari just as the great Swami had done back in 1892. The sea was turbulent and shark-infested as it had been for the Swami . . . So I crossed the turbulent, shark-infested waters and took position and began my wait for the sunrise and I looked back at the great continent of India which is also known as Bharat. (211)

At the end of his all-India tour, the protagonist, an unemployed engineer, came to Kanyakumari to see the sunrise. He found young men like him waiting for the sunrise and, perhaps, looking for God. But he could not join them because he had come to see the sunrise and not God. Besides, he was tempted to ask: "Where was God?" (213). He had no faith, although his friend Ayappan, told him that the hope of seeing the sunrise over Kanyakumari was also a kind of faith. He was confused, and he wondered why he had ever come to the place:

Some people had faith and some people did not have faith. And both were having trouble because those who had faith were often let down and those who did not have faith got mixed up. Faith was like the angle at which you set your telescope if you wanted to see a star. If you didn't know the angle you could not see the star. (214)

When the time of the sunrise passed, the siren went off. Still the eastern horizon remained enveloped by a haze giving no sign of the sun, not even a glow. Frustrated, he returned to the mainland, not by swimming like the Swami as he had planned, but by a boat. Something had disturbed him although he could not put his finger on it. Standing on the deck, in the posture of Vivekananda, with his arms crossed over his bare chest, he could decipher that there was no hope:

There was no sign of the sun. . . . There was a haze all over. You couldn't see very far because the sun had yet to rise. . . . And it was true you could set up sirens and write things in books any way you wanted. They didn't mean very much. Books and sirens didn't make the sunrise. (217-18)

The hero of this short story symbolizes the whole youth of the country who fail to put faith in God. They are waiting in the cold dawn, for the sun to rise and thus to survive all their struggles in life.

The interested reader views the protagonist with wonder when he attempts to observe the sun rise. He also feels disappointed along with the protagonist not to see the sunrise. On the other hand, the disinterested reader is not surprised at the protagonist's failure to see the sunrise. The uninterested reader criticizes the writer for making much ado about not seeing the sunrise because he knows that every action of nature cannot be interpreted in terms of human life and aspirations.

“The wide world and me. Me and the wide world. But how can one separate the two. The wide world took me in its wake, overwhelmed me, smothered me. As simple as that.”

Arun Joshi