CHAPTER II

"THE TRIPLE CONCEPT OF BEAUTY, LOVE, AND JUSTICE"

THE STREAM
Life is glorious for those who are optimistic and gloomy for those who are pessimistic. For some, life is a bed of roses and for many it is a thorny bed. Some succumb to the stresses and strains in life, fail to encounter the will of life, and end in dismay or dismal failure. Many compromise with the flow and ebb of life and lead a mechanical and morose life. Only a few face tests with patience and endurance, fight the battles of life, exhibit fortitude and forbearance, and emerge victorious – ultimately. Consequently, they enjoy the glories of life. Most of the characters of Rama Sarma exhibit the third nature of spirit. Gopalam, the protagonist of the novel ‘The Stream’, exhibits the same spirit.

Rama Sarma occupies a unique place as a myth maker among Indian novelists in English. The myth underlying The Stream is the external myth of the pursuit of man for ideal love.

In this novel, for the first time, all the conflict in life, touched upon in his early plays, is systematized into a comprehensive view of life, the stream of life. In the words of the author, the stream,

symbolizes life. Its many currents and cross-currents stand for the various types of associations we have with men and women during our short, but fruitful mundane
existence. Peculiarly enough some currents come and get merged up with the main stream: some come in, get separated and flow on independently and some others definitely impede the march of the stream. These are the friendships, the separations and the definite rivalries we create for ourselves. But in spite of all this seemingly irregular and chaotic life, there is a strong undercurrent of justice controlling the universe.

The Sillapathikaram, the story of Kovatan's passion, forms the basis for this novel. The external theme is a troublesome and much-discussed problem – the external triangle – the love of Kovalan for Kannaki and Mathavi, the betrayal of the one for the other, and finally the convergence of the triangle to this static point is what constitutes the story of The Steam too.

Gopalam, his wife Suguna, and Swarna represent the love triangle. Rama Sarma presents the problem in an altogether novel way, tackling it from a purely different point of view, where neither love nor beauty predominates. The situation is solved most effectively by the triumph of justice. The purity, simplicity, contentment, and meditative peace of Suguna is the hero's answer, as well as the gift to his unsympathetic and non-understanding world.
Marriage incites man to be a capricious autocrat. Gopalam, the principal character of *The Stream*, is one such person. In his romantic idealism he sees himself as Antony, and finds that his wife Suguna did not possess the majesty of Cleopatra nor her infinite variety. He falls madly in love with poets like Keats, Shelly, and Wordsworth. So he was known among his friends as 'The Shelly of India'. His was an utopian world where love of the purest type was his goal. “Platonic love with all the dream-like unreality appealed to him”. His aesthetic tastes and appreciation of poetry made him detest ugliness in the world. With great expectations he marries Suguna. For him the moonlit nights were everything. He says, “Look, look, Suguna, how lovely the night is! This is indeed grand. The atmosphere is silence and tranquil. If we have moonlight, all through the year how happy we would be. (P.No.1)

Suguna’s reply coming from a practical and non-poetic person naturally shatters his idealistic notions to pieces : One must be a poet or should at least have poetic imagination to admire such lovely sights. I am afraid I have none of these qualities. (P.No.2)

Gopalam’s grand theory was that the moment Suguna was married to him she should think of him and no one else in the world. He little realized that her father did have a prior claim over her affections. He could take
liberties with his wife and even insult her, but could not tolerate an affront from her. When he found that Suguna did not have all these desired qualities, he cuts himself off from her, talked less, and almost observed a golden silence. Thus, temperamental incompatibility also happens to be one of the themes of the novel. It delineates the conflict between the platonic approach and practical approach to life.

Marriage becomes a struggle for dominance for Suguna. But she had to follow the destiny of her husband faithfully with love and reverence. She could not step out of the social system having neither liking nor the will to do so, and so endured the humiliation like the Sakuntala of the Mahabharata. As in the past ages, human relationship and partnership depended on the basis of endurance.

With the greater gulf he had created between himself and Suguna, he thinks of the girls in the college where he was working. He no longer feel that they earthly made with freedom of spirit. He had not tasted for the obedient wife in ethereal robes.

As the novelist describes platonic love with all its dream like unreality appealed Gopalam,
He became an ardent advocate of it, little realizing whether it was practical. In his utopian world anything was possible and even practicable". (P.No.23)

A mode of disgust, a sense of loathing, a deep despair came to Gopalam the moment Suguna dismisses his flights of poetic imagination. He is dejected and disappointed. This opening scene reminds us of Polly's frustration in *The History of Mr. Polly*. Polly utters imprecations against his home, his wife, and his life. "Hole! Said Mr. Polly and then for a change and with greatly increased emphasis; ‘Ole’------. Oh! Beastly silly wheeze of a hole".2

But as a matter of fact, when we study the character of Gopalam, we understand him to be with a peculiar make up of mind – as one who needed a constant companion to inspire him, to lead him by either appreciating his talents or keeping company with him all the time. As the novelist puts it;

For all practical purposes he renounced the world after having had an unpleasant life with Suguna. For a few months he withdrew himself into his Utopia. But here he was once again dragged from his seclusion by a magnetic pull". (P.No.23)
A woman who had more of the human element, was what he wanted. And Swarna was able to provide him with all those qualities. With Swarna the world was no longer a dreary place for Gopalam. It was on the other hand a thrilling and exciting spot where women like Swarna lived and loved. She satisfied him from every angle. He lends her his plays and poems. She found them interesting, intoxicating and enlivening. When the world had such dynamic women for him why should be run away from it and renounce its reaches? He took to life with zeal.

Meeting with Swarna was an unusual experience for Gopalam. She seemed to be his dream heroine. Swarna came as an inspiration to induce new hopes in him when he had lost all hopes of leading an ideal life. She was intelligent and so could read his frustrated mind like a book. She was quite sympathetic and understood the reason for his unhappy domestic life. She seemed to be a modern woman trying to be rid of the shackles of society and that was the kind of woman Gopalam wanted. As Nageswara Rao observes, “Like Sue in Jude the Obscure, Swarna is always in two minds”.

The tragedy of Gopalam was his inability to distinguish his acquired personality from his own inherited personality. He believed in the apparent externals, bearing under the influence the romantic poets. Gopalam valued
the concreteness of objects without giving any credence to their metaphysics:

If men failed to distinguished between their inherited and acquired personalities, it was their own fault. He was thoroughly convinced of the prevalence of reason over bestiality, of judgement over ignorance in man". (P.No.170)

In the beginning, because of her love for Gopalam Swarna found that she and Gopalam were inseparable. She was optimistic and was hopeful of a bright future with Gopalam. She justified her love for him:

Society might call her unconventional but to her it was perfectly natural. She loved Gopalam and he responded. Their hearts beat in unison. What more was necessary? In how many married lives was there such an amount of harmony contentment and understanding. She asked herself". (P.No.45)

The same Swarna who was loyal to him could not stand the test of time when separation came. Gopalam went abroad for higher studies, and
on the day of his departure her feminine instinct gives way to a sense of fear and insecurity:

You may forget me for the beautiful women there. After all I am nothing when compared with those foreign beauties. You may feel attracted towards them and then what will happen to me". (p.No.45)

To this Gopalam responds by thinking,

Swarna's words were gospel to him. He knew for certain that he could never displease Swarna. She might be far away from him, but her spirit would be watching him, guiding him and saving him from pit falls. She was his guardian angel and day in and day out her words would brace him against all possible temptations". (P.No.47)

While Gopalam maintained his integrity throughout his stay in London, Swarna in India becomes the opposite, and by the time he returned home, their solemn pledge had lost its significance.
Gopalam’s mind had misconceived Swarna’s love as a substitute for romantic idealism. He had looked into her but had failed to see deep into the mind. For Swarna’s mind was a weak and diffident one, and she bore no fighting spirit. Nor had she any faith in herself. She doubted her own strengths and feared her own shadow. And then there were the conscientious scruples that she had ruined the happiness of a good-natured and innocent woman like Suguna.

Above all, Murthy was threatening her. Swarna did not have the courage to defy him because his word carried weight with the members of the rich family that supported her. She became a fatalist believing that all the changes that came over her were only thrust on her through fate. Like a pessimist she looked forward to a bleak future and this policy of passive suffering proved to be ruinous to her as well as Gopalam.

Her letters to Gopalam became few as she was closely watched by Murthy. Gopalam was baffled by this silence. His predicament became similar to the bewilderment of Hamlet. Hamlet says,

I have of late wherefore I know not – lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercise, and it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory: this most excellent
canony, the air, look you, this brave our hanging
firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire,
why it appears no other thing to me than a foul and
pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work
is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty!
In form and moving how like a God! The beauty of the
world! The paragon of animals and yet, to me, what is
this quintessence of dust”.

Similarly Gopalam too loses interest in life. A darkness had entered
his soul and he wallowed in distress and self pity. At this juncture that he
meets Joan in London. Joan’s acquaintance with him was a turning point in
his life. Her pleasing manners and love for Indianism had a spell on him.
He says,

Physical attraction is not the only link between men and
women. There can be good companionship or
sometimes the friendship may be based on mutual
admiration”. (P.No.67)

It was Joan who revives Gopalam back to his normal self. Her
words were encouraging and his lethargy started vanishing and he gained a
new energy and vigour to write plays. Her words worked magic on him,
"Better use all your intellect for a good cause and not allow yourself to drift away into lethargy and frustration". (P.No.73)

As Nageswara Rao observes

it is his platonic love affair with Joan that illuminates Gopalam's intellectual life and his sense of justice is fully revealed and fulfilled through his friendship with her".5

Meanwhile Swarna communicates about her marriage with Rao to Gopalam. Gopalam had never before thought that Swarna was capable of causing him any harm. He was unnerved. For a moment his faith in himself, in the triple force, in the ultimate sense of justice was uprooted. Yet he did not go down to the depths of despondency. He developed for himself a certain unruffled mental state.

Rama Sarma opines that man's life is guarded by the Triple Force of Beauty, Love and Justice. He further explains that

The Triple Force consists of Beauty, Love and Justice.
This is the noble heritage of man. He comes into this world with all these attributes in him. You may call this
divine, if you want. Man is first moved by Beauty. Things that are beautiful attract him -----. Man gradually grows and comes in a stage when he develops a strong liking for certain subjects. This is the period when he is governed by Love. Finally he surrenders himself to Justice. Man goes through all these three phases of life and these phases are in a way three attributes of divinity”.6

He was determined to rule out passion for women from his pageant of life. Life had taught him a lesson not to bother about women. He strove for the substitution of all desires for the achievements of one single goal. In his college days he had dabbled in writing plays. He look to it now wholeheartedly.

Incidentally Suguna too suffered violently, caught in the midst of the tempestuous relationship between Swarna and Gopalam. She felt she was abandoned, but she had a firm faith in herself and believed that God would be kind to her and all would end well. She hoped that one day justice would be done to her. Her deep faith in the sanctity of marriage gave her strength to endure patiently her misery of separation from Gopalam without complaining.
The fundamental goodness of Suguna’s character and conduct is the secret of her strength. It is a strength that her good conscience offered. She stood for all that was good in tradition. Suguna believed in the worship of her Lord and master and wanted to conquer him ultimately with her devotion.

Previously when Gopalam tells her of his affair with Swarna, she does not abuse him. But her words leave him cold and shivering:

So this is what you have done. I suspected as much.
But I don’t stand in the way of your love. I want you to be happy. I am glad you have found a woman who satisfies you". (P.No.34)

This silent acquiescence on her part was too much for him. She had shown absolute serenity and even nobility. It was but natural on her part to fight for her possession. Instead, she showed no anger and exhibited no signs of jealousy. This was a lesson to Gopalam. It taught him about a woman’s capacity for self-sacrifice. Coming as it did from the woman whom he considered to be not up to his expectations, he was baffled and amazed. Suguna scored a point over him. At least in one respect she was superior to him. He was selfish, where as she was unselfish. He admitted to himself that he was unfair to Suguna in his madness for Swarna. By

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making Gopalam himself adore Suguna for her patient suffering. Rama Sarma shows that Suguna would win her husband back not only in terms of physical proximity but also in terms of emotional and mental harmony in life. The dream did come true. Suguna's love was paid.

Gopalam asked her to join him. She patiently waited for the word and she joined him the moment she was asked to do so. His life with Suguna was no longer unbearable and she could enjoy his pompous oratory, without getting bored. He tells her,

Man may correct himself or be corrected by others. But one thing is certain. We are not governed by blind chance. We often talk of fate only to excuse ourselves. In fact, we create and destroy, we love and hate, we sin and repent, we are responsible for all our actions". (P.No.172)

Adam violated the hierarchy of virtue through his excessive fondness for Eve. Gopalam found the comparison appropriate with reference to his own life. He had sinned. Now was the proper time for him to throw away lust. The right destination to reach was the love of Suguna.
The very concept of love in Gopalam's heart had undergone a drastic change. The physical love he had for Suguna in the beginning faded away to take up the emotional love for Suguna. But the intellectual love for Joan paved way for his better understanding, and the fidelity of Suguna and the circumstances that led to his awakening from the maddening passion educated him into a better understanding of life. He now learns that life is a paradox, where you can not expect every ideal to exist in just one person alone. He realizes that he must let the stream of life flow on and life, with all its limitations had to be accepted.

The eternal triangle in Gopalam was brought through his own individual efforts. Peace was attained through his own enlightenment. He grew serene and austere and was always poised. Mentally he was far advanced of his age, and he was keen on exploring to himself the riddle of life:

I now live for nobler ends, not for me the maddening days of love. I want to be a man, a complete man, a perfect one. Passionate longings no longer move me. The nobler element in me moves me to the more balanced and intellectual understanding of life. I have come out of the storm and stress of the stream. Now I look back and have a sigh of relief. I am not sorry for
my experience, for they have chastened and sublimated me. The stream of life now goes on calmly towards the annihilation of animal instincts”. (P.173)

In his characterization, Rama Sarma follows the method in which the character follow the gradual process of attaining maturity. The characterization is organized skillfully around the vital triple concept thus unifying the technique with the theme of the novel and furnishing the novel with a rounded fullness of structure.

As Nageswara Rao feels,

the novel would have otherwise become a philosophical treatise. Rama Sarma makes the whole concept a living experience through the conversation of Joan and Gopalam, without himself stepping on the stage, as it were, like Maugham in his *Of Human Bondage*.7

Towards the end of the novel Gopalam and Suguna settle down happily in life. As Ashwik aptly observes in another context referring to the play of Rama Sarma, “A proper approach of life, therefore, calls for enlightened compromise”.8
A happy finale is given to this novel and the concept of the triple force is employed and artistically articulated in the entire plot of the novel. It can be said that,

the myth underlying The Stream is the external myth or the pursuit of the ideal love of man .... The central theme is a troublesome and much discussed problem – the eternal triangle”.

The technique which Prof. Rama Sarma employs in the first novel, The Stream is the same as that of Somerset Maugham, a “semi autobiographical fictional made of narration employed in Of Human Bondage”.10

Prof. Nageswara Rao comments on the triple force rightly,

“The concept of the triple force developed in the novel reminds one of the concept of ‘Life Force’ as presented by Shaw and the way in which Rama Sarma artistically unfolds it in the course of action of the novel reminds us of the art of Thomas Hardy”.11
REFERENCES


6. Ibid., p.235.


