CHAPTER III

"QUEST FOR SELF PERFECTION"
THE FAREWELL PARTY
The Farewell Party provides right answers to a wide range of subtle and sensitive problems likely to be confronted by a University teacher. The novel is also innovatively structured by the author in the form of a stream of consciousness narrative unfolded from the consciousness of Prof. Prakasam, the main character. It throws light on the various episodes in his life as a teacher for over thirty years, just ninety minutes before leaving for the farewell party, on the eve of his retirement.

Prof. Rama Sarma's The Farewell Party, at first look, may be regarded as a campus novel presenting active campus life in the Indian Universities. The whole novel is in the form of retrospective reflections. To use the novelist's words,

Prakasam traveled fast in his recollection of the past.

His mental pictures were Kaleidoscopic. They moved rapidly, persons and scenes, all in a jumbled fashion."

Prakasam is seems to be the least disturbed at the impending retirement at the end of his long but chequered career as a University teacher, for over three decades. Instead, he informed musing over the various incidents in his life, good and not so good, in his long career and exudes a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. As Dr. Nageswara Rao
The novel deals with the vicissitudes of life of a university teacher – his friends and tribulations, hopes and despairs, success and failures. But the protagonist Prakasam meets them stoically thus indicating his affirmative vision of life. His unflinching faith in the Hindu tenet “Karma Yoga” - ‘do your duty and leave the result to God’ – enables him to nurture a positive and optimistic view of life and an abiding faith that man, who has strayed from the right path, is bound ultimately to relish his innate good nature.

The Professor has been serving the University for the last five years, from his fifty fifth year. It is a University of his dreams, perhaps the novelist’s view of an ideal Rural University, his imaginative ideal given a concrete shape to the beautiful phrase of Shakespeare; ‘A local habitation and a name’. The Rural University satisfies him all the more as a good academic centre of learning because much was left to the student to think of;

He could commune with nature in all its glory, he could see the majestic river rolling by. Lectures did not occupy much of his time. He was not oppressed by the...
nightmare of the examinations and the unpredictable moods of the examiners. Living in the University campus for three years is an education by itself. It prepared him for a vocation in life and also equipped. So by the time he left the University he was a full man in a real sense – useful to himself and to others in society. (P.No.2)

Prakasam is a picture of supreme satisfaction as he nostalgically thinks of his self-satisfying career. His students have abundance of love and respect for him. Being a votary of ethical values, he believes that the education imparted to the students in the Rural University inculcates in them a sense of true culture and human dignity besides preparing them for a vocation. Thus a positive attitude towards life manifests itself even at this stage in the novel, “Who else could have that legitimate pride for having produced great intellectuals and useful citizens” (P.No.5)

Only a devoted teacher like him with a spirit of service can feel so elated. Prakasam’s approach to the teaching of English language is clearly voiced in the following passage:

Prakasam had his own views about teaching this language. He felt that a teacher should first create an
interest in the students for English. Many teachers differed from him on this point. They insisted on making their lecturers as scholarly as possible, and they expected the students to come up to their level. (P.No.55)

Prakasam in general worries over the presence of ugliness, hatred, and injustice in this world. He cannot understand why man, an image of God, should be bestial. Man has the free will to choose the noble path or the ignominious one. But Prakasam, the optimist, fervently hopes that the nobler instincts in man would ultimately triumph over the baser elements in him. It is only a question of time and ‘Man would go back to his innate good nature after having experienced several pitfalls and failures in life’.

Prakasam loves his student, Sarala, who belongs to a different caste. Thereby they become victims of social opprobrium. Prakasam pays a heavy price by losing his job. For two months, they find themselves in wilderness. Despite all this suffering, Prakasam faces the situation with a rare courage and unflinching faith in God. His simple faith almost native faith in himself, that he was destined for an eventful life----- stands him in good stead. He waits patiently for something to happen. And it does happen and he gets a job in Hyderabad. The novelist sees this difference in nature as a happy combination. He says, ‘This difference in nature did not produce
any conflicting results; on the other hand the one supplemented the other". (P.No.56)

Because of the inter marriage they had to face a lot of social problems. The novelist here finds an opportunity to demonstrate how the teacher with his reformative zeal and great courage marries a girl who did not belong to his caste, when the whole society was against such reforms. Prakasam takes it as a challenge and gets married to her and face.

The society's wrath. "The news spread to the small town where he was working. The persons in authority in the college were scandalized. They felt that Prakasam had subjected their college to ignominy. He had set a bad example. How could girls from decent families come to their institution any longer? Who would send his children to such a place where the guardians of morality practiced immorality? The prospect of losing a large number of students worried them. Not that they were in any way moralists or puritans, yet they had to take a stiff attitude towards Prakasam in the interest of the institution. So they asked him to quit. A notice of dismissal was served on him. (P.No.16)
Prakasam receives three letters on the day of his retirement, one from his son in London and another from his daughter, the third from the Principal, Mr. Gupta. Prakasam is visibly annoyed when he sees the third letter from Mr. Gupta of the Hyderabad college, his one time rival. It is only because of Mr. Gupta that he had to come away from Hyderabad after living there for nearly thirty years. This letter from Mr. Gupta makes Prakasam think of his life in Hyderabad. He, who believes in the innate goodness of human nature, fails to understand man's degradation to the level of bestiality. Commenting on Prakasam's positive attitude to life, the author writes "There was degeneracy but Prakasam felt that man could be revitalized".

Gupta does not feel secure as long as Prakasam is there. So he slight him and makes his life miserable. Though losing Principalship to an undeserving person affects his sense of justice his genial disposition makes it possible for him to be reconciled to the state of affairs. Gupta symbolizes intriguer. He makes it impossible for Prakasam to stay in Hyderabad. But Prakasam's faith in God saves him. Prakasam always believed in God's grace and man's innate good nature. The next year brought him an escape from impasse. Admiring the innate simplicity and unpretentious nature of the people at the rural University, in the last phase of his career, Prakasam tells his wife, "Losing Principalship in Hyderabad has been a blessing in disguise for us". (P.No.83)
Prakasam loved humanity and did not condemn vice outright, for he realized that it was a part of man. It was the negative force in him --- it was up to him to become divine or beastly. He pitied the unthinking man going down the path from one passionate desire to another. Prakasam has tolerance for others and he accepts life as it is. The author has successfully "immortalized all the mortals".

Elsewhere, the author writes how Prakasam practices tolerance in his relations with fellow human beings. To a lover of human nature like Prakasam these little angularities meant nothing. He sincerely believed that it was too much to expect men and women to be faultlessly pure and divinely good. It would be preposterous to do so. One had to live in an imperfect world with human beings not in any way perfect. It would be sheer folly, if one is to assume for oneself the godhead and condemn others as being beastly and inhuman. Tolerance was necessary. This is the comprehensive view of life that Prakasam develops.

Prakasam uses the magic word, ‘Karma’ to relieve the agony of Seshu’s father. Seshu, a student of Prakasam, commits suicide along with his fiancé, in order to escape the domestic pressure to marry his niece. Seshu’s father is broken hearted as he holds himself responsible for the ghastly tragedy. Consoling the old man, Prakasam says:
There is a higher force governing our actions. We are not completely responsible for our actions. And when fate wills it, human effort is futile. It is destined that Seshu should meet his death that way. You are only an instrument. If he were destined to die, even if you had not done anything to him, he would have. So don’t blame yourself too much. You ought to realize that you are in no way responsible for your son’s Karma. Seshu’s father says “every one blames me; society calls me a sinner. The same society would have called me a sinner if I had allowed my son to marry that girl of a different caste from ours”. How ridiculous social laws are; How foolish is man’s reasoning. (P.No.65)

As Prakasam comments, Perhaps sanity would prevail only after many a Seshu is butchered by the cold hand of society. (P.No.65)

Prakasam’s unswerving loyalty to God is manifested throughout the novel. He, at the outset, is grateful to God for making him choose teaching as a career where he can serve humanity faithfully and fearlessly. Even Sarala, his wife, often says, “We are indeed grateful to God for this peace and contentment.” (P.No.83)
Prakasam's conception of God is based on three qualities of Beauty, Love, and Justice. He believes in God, but religion with all its ceremonial and ritual has no meaning for him. He is more inclined to believe in an impersonal godhead and in the existence of an all pervading spirit in the universe.

Prakasam's affirmation of life is based on his rich and varied life. He says, "I have that feeling of pride and satisfaction, that comes to every successful teacher at the time of his retirement ----- I can happily look back and feel satisfied". (P.No.85)

Prakasam often refers to divine dispensation. Still he thinks that one should not resign oneself to inactivity. One need not get dejected if one's efforts go waste and plans do not materialize. It means something else is in store for him. He affirms God's ways are just, though peculiar.

A George Lukac's points out in his "Art and Society" that man as a social being can become a human individual and not a mere natural entity -- a view which Rama Sarma seems to endorse in all his novels and more so in The Farewell Party with the help of his mental attitude, every individual should strive to establish an equilibrium between his subjective mind and the objective world of things and try to fight the imperfections of the
society and evolve a new social order. Next he may aspire to reach the spiritual plane as Prakasam manages to do.

As S. Hari Babu points out The Farewell Party depicts how the individual’s self perfection gets shifted from the physical plane to the intellectual plane with the tools of tolerance and detachment and how it establishes a healthy relationship with the society.⁵

The novel with in its narrow frame work, may be said to portray successfully the threefold aspect of contemporary academic scene, a rare and dedicated teacher like Prakasam, the malicious Suri and a variety of other teachers modest, selfish, mercenary, and even cynical.⁶

The novelist himself believes in an ideal teacher. In the questionnaire, “Meeting of Minds; The Creator and the Critic”, Rama Sarma states,

The Farewell Party is mostly my vision of an ideal teacher and I have lived in it in my life in a large measure. To me teaching has been a great mission, a way of serving the nation”.⁷
Prakasam’s tolerance and detachment serve as the life boat for him to reach his goal of self-perfection. When blended, tolerance and detachment, it will furnish the individual with a permanent and lasting victory in the realm of marriage: “Professor Prakasam was a dreamer, his wife Sarala realist. He was an utopian, she was practical minded” (P.No.6) But the difference resulted in one supplementing the other and not in conflict.

Professor Rama Sarma is a humanist and an optimist, earnestly believing in the social duty and the essential dignity of man. Prof. K.R.Sreenivas Iyengar feels that Prakasam’s tolerance takes a fuller dimension only when it is made to interact with social beings, and maintains a balanced relationship with the society. In practicing this Prakasam does not rise in revolt to root out evil from the phase of his campus community nor accept in total silence because of his humanistic attitude as that of his creator.

Prakasam is a bit of self portrait, and as for the others, they are recognizable as “types” although they too are ultimately based on real life.”

Describing Prakasam, the novelist says,
we sincerely believed that it was too much to expect men and women to be faultlessly pure and divinely good. It would be preposterous to do so. One had to live in an imperfect world, with human beings not in any way perfect. It would be sheer folly, if not hypocrisy, if one were to assume for oneself the godhead and condemned others as being beastly and inhuman. Tolerance was needed, Prakasam realized that. (P.No.30)

As a social being Prakasam achieves his self-perfection through his attitude of tolerance, faith, love, and fellow feeling: As a man of thinking he kills his animal instincts and emerges as the supreme intelligent being in the evolution of man. His love and concern for fellow beings are directly linked with his quest for an ideal way of life in human terms. His tolerance is exhibited in his association with his colleagues like Sundaram. Sundaram is treated as an underdog. On account of Suri's evil influence on the Principal Gupta. Prakasam identifies the brighter patches in Sundaram, and sees that he is given a fair treatment in human terms to him. Even with a foreigner was Margaret, he maintains a humane relationship and drives home the value of human love and love for one's country.

Dr. Nageswara Rao further points out
the picture of a teacher cannot be a complete one if he is just depicted as one, fully confined to his class room alone. So to make Prakasam a fully rounded character, the novelist adds two more dimensions to this portrait. The character of Prakasam therefore does not become a flat type of just a dedicated teacher but a fully evolved and rounded character.9

And Sachithanandan states, "the law of divine dispensation is the dominant theme of The Farewell Party where the idealistic Prof. Prakasam -- unequivocally declares himself on the side of Karma after an earlier excursion into the rationalism".10

The idealistic professor is presented, more than all these, as an enlightened and detached observer of the complex and perennial predicament of life. He often asked himself why there should be ugliness, hatred, and injustice in this world, for his own concept of God was based on the three great qualities of Beauty, Love, and Justice. If there was such a God and if man had been created in his image there was no reason why he should be bestial.

Prakasam wonders why there should be glaring anomalies of life. He often questions himself;
If God is all merciful why should there be anomalies of some being terribly rich and others being miserably poor? If the great God has created only beauty why should there be ugliness in this world. If God stands for goodness how does evil come in to this world.”(P.No.84)

Rama Sarma says in the questionnaire I read the novel *Goodbye Mr. Chipps* and saw the picture as a student in the U.K. This also was an influence on one though of course *The Farewell Party* presents the teacher in a college and a University where as *Goodbye Mr.Chipps* presents the headmaster of a public school, but both figures as ideal teachers.8

Here the novelist combines different modes of the craft of fiction. The stream of consciousness technique of narration and the semi-autobiographical mode of projecting experience are admirably suited to the nature of the vision”.12

Sachithanandan feels that “*The Farewell Party*” is our only reminiscent of “*The Ancient Mariner*”.13

Nageswara Rao points out that the novel
The novel presents a vital area of Indian life surprisingly left unexplored by Indo Anglian novelist and a form and technique virtually left untouched".14

T. Asoka Rani presented the character of Prakasam as, “Prakasam is least perturbed at the imminence of the end of his long but chequered career as a University teacher, for over three decades. On the contrary, he muses over the various incidents in his long career and exudes a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction.”15

T. Asoka Rani herself expresses her views on the novel The Farewell Party, as concerned With the vicissitudes of life of a University teacher – his trials and tribulations, hopes and despairs, successes and failures. But the protagonist Prakasam meets them, stoically thus indicating his affirmative vision of life. His unflinching faith in the Hindu tenet Karma Yoga – do your duty and leave the result to God enables him to nurture a positive and optimistic view of life and an abiding faith that man, who has strayed from the right path, is bound ultimately to return to his innate good nature.16
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