

Hypocrisy

By Dr. Sangeeta Sharma

The party was in full swing. Champagne overflowed and jarring music reverberated in the enclosed air-conditioned hall. Revellers were crude in their demeanour under the influence of the booze. Decibels of music had multiplied. Dance steps of the inebriated were forceful and jerky. The group of the older women in fineries was occupying one remote corner of the dining hall though the group was no less than 20 grey-haired men and women, all related to Sanjiv in some way or the other- maternal and paternal aunts and uncles. They sat as mute spectators witnessing the naked display of wealth and power recalling fond memories of their deceased sister, Reshma. Some thirty people were Sanjeev's own first cousins with their spouses and kids.

It was a grand get-together organized on the pretext of Sanjeev's deceased mother's first birthday.

Witnessing these festivities, I was pulled into a whirlpool of disturbing thoughts.

Reshma, a hideously obese woman in her sixties, had been bed-ridden for more than eight years before she passed away last March in the well-known, fast-developing Northern Indian township, Gurgaon .She was infested with chronic diseases like blood pressure, diabetese, respiratory problems and above all obesity that had made her movement minimal. Lying on the 10"x10" bed, she was the one who oversaw the running of the entire household. Albeit there were two maids to take care of cooking, cleaning, and washing, she was the one who knew the location of the minutest thing in the almost 50 year-old household. Sitting on her bed, she used to organize treats for her brothers' and sisters' families and for her extended family members. Setting a sprawling dinner or lunch for her maternal family members was what she found great pride and pleasure in.

During times, when people had withdrawn into their shelled lives and referred to others only while criticizing or pinpointing their shortcomings, she was the one who periodically organized bashes for her loved ones. Even after 50 years of her marriage, her bond of affection with her

kith and kin was amazing. It seemed she lived life only when she was surrounded by her loved ones. She was so fond of company that life became a living hell for her the moment she was left alone. Life for her was a constant celebration. Even without occasion whenever people came down to her place, she used to first offer them variety of delicacies and then coax them to sing and dance. “C’mon, Rhea, dance. You dance so well,” she used to say, in order to cheer them up, herself shaking limbs to the music lying on the bed.

After shaking a leg at her place and making merry, relatives used to swish off to their homes in their Innovas’ and Scorpios’ criticizing her: “Oh how much does Reshma pester to eat. She wants all of us to bloat like her. No one should force to eat more than they willingly want to. It’s unsophisticated!”

Unfortunately, both her daughters-in-laws had breached her trust and left her to the mercy of God while in the evening of her life – very common in North Indian states today. The elder one made the maximum of the situation. She stayed in the same house on the first floor but never paid heed to her ailing ma-in-law. Hyper-critical, she always spoke foul about her being over-demonstrative of her affections. Second daughter-in-law, deserted her younger son, for no reason, right after six months of marriage. The younger son, a bright, brilliant chap was the cynosure of the eyes of his parents. The desertion of her younger son by his newly-wed bride was a big jolt to this Amazon lady who had always dreamed a very beautiful future for her boy. Due to the scheming of the new daughter-in-law, the family got sucked into several serious legal disputes, police case and infamy. It was only after a tough legal battle fought by the family including ransom of lakhs of rupees facilitated by the intervention of few concerned relatives that the family was saved of the disaster. Reshma was, undoubtedly, a struggler.

Undeterred by her constant poor health, she remained a shield for her family – for her elder son, younger son and husband. For the last six years, she was not able to sleep without external aids. Panting perennially, oxygen cylinders provided her bit of relief.

Her birthday, last year, I remember, was a silent one. The younger son, Sujeet, had tied the conjugal knot the second time. To give vent to her desperation, she had called up her daughter and said, “I am tired of being confined to bed. Going to the toilet also is a horrendous

experience. I go out of breath. Now, there is no other desire left. Sujeet is married now. God should call me.” Till late night, she had kept awake waiting for someone to celebrate her birthday. Neither were there parties nor celebration. She had sat alone the entire day with family members busy in their demanding routines and the elder *bahu* reluctant to visit or even to send her sons to wish her a happy birthday.

She injected herself with Insulin on her flabby belly and gulped tens of tablets after a meager meal of bland oil-free food and had gone to bed.

Exactly three months after Sujeet’s second marriage, she had left for the abode of God.

This was the first birthday of the deceased mother. But this year in her memory there was everyone and everything: food, booze, friends, laughter and revelry. Entire extended family had taken out time to join this bash in order to remember their mother, sister and aunt on her first posthumous birthday. Another round of drinks was taken with a loud toast in the name of the dead mother. Sujeet in his usual style revelled, “Why do we live? To eat! Why do we earn? To eat! Why do we work hard? To eat, drink and make merry!

His buddies raised an instant toast to his one-liner and a thunderous applause followed.

Brief Bio:

Dr Sangeeta Sharma is Associate Professor and head, department of English at Birla College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Kalyan, affiliated to the University of Mumbai, India. She is widely published as a critic and poet. Some of her poems are published in Stephen Gill’s World Peace Academy (Ontario, Canada); Labyrinth (Gwalior); Acerbic Anthology (USA); GIEWEC’s Writers, Editors, Critics (Thodupuzha, Kerala) research articles have got published in reputed journals like Panorama of English Literature (Delhi); GIEWEC’s Writers, Editors, Critics (Thodupuzha, Kerala); Global Responses to Literature in English (New Delhi); Changing Face of Women in Literature: The Flaming Spirit (New Delhi) and World English Literature: Bridging Oneness (Delhi).

In 2012, she published a book *In the Shadows: Women in Arthur Miller's Plays* (YKing Books, Jaipur) and co-edited *Delightful Dickens: Some tributes* with Sunil Sharma published (YKing Books, Jaipur). In 2013, she co-edited Indo-Australian Anthology of Poems (New Delhi) along with Dr Sunil Sharma and Rob Harle.

Besides that she is a regular freelance for the supplement of Times of India, Mumbai edition; D.N.A, and Mumbai Mirror. She has recently submitted her UGC-sponsored Minor Research Project on the *Structural, phonological, orthographical, grammatical and lexical differences in British and American English*. Under Faculty Exchange Programme, she visited the University Department of English, Clayton State University, Georgia, USA, in March-April 2012.