
G.V.DESANI'S ALL ABOUT H. HATTERR'S IS AN EXPLORATION OF SELF AND STRUGGLE FOR SELF IDENTITY IN THE WORLD: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract: G.V. Desani is an eminent Indian novelist and short story writer. He promises to be an outstanding representative of relations of the East and the West of general interpretation. Although he wrote only one novel *All about H. Hatterr* but made it an excellent piece of literature. In this novel Desani tries to express something that is not expressible. The novelist, who knows much about 'how is the inexpressible to be expressed,' succeeds in depicting man's psychological and moral state of mind and heart. *All About H. Hatterr* is a philosophical novel that deals, however obliquely, with such eternal conundrums as love, free will and appearance and reality. The present paper highlights exploration of self and struggle for self identity and also covers various themes of G.V.Desani's *All about H. Hatterr*.

Keywords: Hatterr's life, Exploration of Self, Struggle for Self identity and various Thematic Concerns.

Introduction: Desani's hero, H. Hatterr, is an Anglo-Indian and a "true spiritual devil-may-care." In seven symmetrical chapters, he seeks enlightenment from some sages of India, then sets out to the countryside to apply his new-found wisdom. Each adventure turns out to be a con game, with somebody else working the con and Hatterr as the game. Attempting to exorcise the mystical fit of an itinerant bard, he is himself accused of being possessed by a spirit and is nearly burned alive on a pyre. "Damme," he says, "this is Life and contrast for you!" *All about H. Hatterr* also reveals G. V. Desani's key philosophical concept that deals with such eternal conundrums as love, free will and appearance and reality. Its protagonist formulates no doctrines. But without ever quite losing his innocence, he does arrive at a visionary acceptance of all mortal matters as so much moonlight on the Ganges. "To hell with judging!" he concludes. "I have no opinions, I am beaten, and I just accept all this phenomena, this diamond-cut-diamond game, this human horseplay, this topsyturvyism, as Life, as contrast." Like Hatterr, Desani has roots in both the East and the West, and he considers the book "a criticism of both corrupt cultures." It seems to be something of a last word. Although pleased to see it reissued, Desani has no other novels in his trunk and no intention of writing any more fiction. "Hatterr was a kind of insanity. I'm glad to have it out of my system," he says. Disappointing news for readers, perhaps; but, as Hatterr might say, damme, this is contrast for you. The Indo-Anglican fiction in the post Independent India has assumed all kinds of colourful traditions. It has freed itself from the shackles of social and political tones of a nationalistic variety. The Indo Anglican novel has enjoyed its golden period during the last few decades. From the end of the 1920's, the writers of Indo English fiction started turning away from the past and began focusing their attention on

contemporary problems. This motivated Indo English novelists and they tried to depict the relationship of man and his surroundings in a new and realistic manner. The main contributors were Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Kamala Markanday and Bhabani Bhattacharya. Then we have a second group of novels which deals with an individual's search for identity as exemplified in Mulk Raj Anand trilogy. Then we find the variation of themes concerning an individual character being shown as either unable or unwilling to accept the social role in traditional society imposed upon him or her. The dramatic conflict arises out of the individual and Indian concept of super individual society. We encounter a variation in G.V.Desani's *All About H. Hatterr*, Kamala Markandya's *Possession*, Raja Rao's *The Serpent and The Rope*, Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. Here the psychological dimension of these conflicts forms the centre of the story while social, political or economic aspects are pushed in to the background.

All about H. Hatterr's is an Exploration of self and struggle for self identity in the world: G. V. Desani is an Indian who received high praise in the 1940's not only for his books but for his oratory. He, with the coming to literary field, promises to be an outstanding representative of relations of the East and the West of general interpretation. *All About H. Hatterr* appeared in 1948 with a grand success. It is based on his learned account of Patanjali's Yoga Philosophy - 'Darshana'. T. S. Eliot, the most famous modernist was compelled to say about the work... "**In all my experience, I have not met with anything quite like it**". Indeed it is amazing that anyone should be able to sustain a piece of work in this style and tempo. Like many important novels, it is a sort of education. It is about the son of a European Merchant Seaman and a lady of Penang. H. Hatterr is on the surface, a grotesque autodidact (self taught person) who has built up a remarkable vocabulary with the

aid of an English dictionary and a French and Latin Primer. H. Hatterr is trying to be a philosopher and as a good, Euro-Asian, he seeks his conclusions from Christianity rather than Hinduism or Buddhism. H. Hatterr is accused of breaking the law of Christian behaviour by allying himself with Satan and has to observe the law of consequence by going to Hell. Both he and his master Satan serve the purpose of the Lord by being awful examples. Hence the reader who expects the shapeless mind - it's wandering associated with the search of Truth, must now be informed that H. Hatterr's story is as carefully ever pedantically planned as *Ulysses* of James Joyce.

In this novel there are seven sections each of which begins with H. Hatterr who consults a sage. That means seven sages, each from a different oriental (Asian) city, each specializing in a different aspect of living. As a student having learnt some great thing, he then proceeds to an adventure, in which he attempts to spread the gospel to other minds. He ends the section in a discussion with his friend Banerji. Then refreshed and more hopeful than ever he proceeds to the next stage of enlightenment. More professional than H. Hatterr Desani lectures on philosophy in some of major universities of the world. Thus H. Hatterr is an engagingly shrewd naïve (inexperienced) Anglo Indian seeking wisdom from the seven sages of India. It proves a punishing process. He is robbed and hit by Pukka Muggers (thug) etc. Despite many setbacks, H. Hatterr's appetite for lessons from life remains unquenchable so do his sparkling torrents of words. In the beginning we study the introduction in which H. Hatterr tells "Biologically I am fifty five of the species -Human beings". One of his parents was a European Christian by faith, marine merchant or seaman. He autobiographically tells "From which part of the continent?" He wishes to tell the readers that the other was an Oriental, a Malay Peninsula resident lady, a non-Christian woman. He says that he could not tell which part of the peninsula she was coming from. He narrates that barely a year after his baptism, he was taken from Penang to India (East) "To odds where all in favour of the Indian resident..." He believed himself a good European and pious. Then H. Hatterr tells that he does not know what happened to his mother, maybe she lives or not who cares. His Seaman parent left the legal interpretation of the testament for him. I was brought up Christian, and court missionary society with living and mixing among the oriental orphans. Further he says "he became a sahib by adoption the Christian, English became his second vernacular from the orphan adaptation age." He discusses the Society which looked after him till the age of 14 or near about. As H. Hatterr confesses that he found then, the

constant childhood preoccupation. He further narrates... he often used to say, "Help others! Help orphans". He knew that the most deserving party that needs his help was himself so he decided to quit the school and get out into the open space of India and living there and winning his bread and curry all on his own. One warm Indian autumn night, he bolted as planned having pinched for voluntary study, as English dictionary, the Rev. The Head's own 'Latin self Taught' he lifted missionary funds from the head's pocket to see him through life. H. Hatterr commemorates that from that day onwards his education became free and his own business. Very often he fought off the hard realities and feelings of motherlessness in life. He studies the daily press, picked up tips from the straying Indian street dogs as well as the finest Sage available on the land. I then assumed the style name H. Hatterr. The 'H' suggests 'Hindustaniwalla' and 'Hatterr' was inspired by Reverend - the Head too large for his - hat. Further he says he went on completely living as Indian to an extent. He tells frankly that he has learnt from the school of life all the lessons, the sweet, the bitter and the messy. **"I am debtor both to the Greeks and the Barbarians."** He says he has had higher education too. He has been the personal disciple of the illustrious grey beards, the sages of Calcutta, Rangoon, Madras, Bombay and Delhi, the wholly worshipful of Mogalsarai.

Portrayal of the character of H. Hatterr: Throughout the novel, we find H. Hatterr trying to be a philosopher and a good Eurasian. We study him seeking truth of life from Hinduism, Buddhism, Sages and ultimately from Christianity. The novel provides a study of this protagonist - H. Hatterr's life, exploration of self and struggle for self identity in the world. Despite many setbacks H. Hatterr's appetite for lessons from life remains unchangeable so we find him and his struggle mystical experience. No doubt he is the hero and protagonist in search of self identity and the final truth of life. He is a soul awakened like Christian, a protagonist of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. As the novelist described in introduction - *The mutual Introduction* in which H. Hatterr tells about himself. "He is fifty five years old, orphan who faces a sense of rootlessness and insecurity everywhere from his birth. He is born of a European father and a Malaya mother." He confesses his birth situation as. . . "I am fifty five of the species - human beings." One of his parents was a European Christian by faith, marine merchant or seaman. He autobiographically tells "From which part of the continent?" He wishes to tell the readers that the other was an Oriental, a Malay Peninsula resident lady, a non-Christian woman. He says that he could not tell which part of the peninsula. He narrates that

barely a year after his baptism, he was taken from Penang to India (East) "To odds where all in favour of the Indian resident..." Further he narrates that he doesn't know what happened to her, maybe she lives or not who cares. His seaman parent left a legal interpretation of the Testament for him. H. Hatterr then was adopted by an English Missionary Society. He says in his autobiographical confession: "I was brought up as Christian and court missionary society with living and mixing among the original orphans". He decided to go to the west where he could become conscious of his mixed heritage. But when he returned to India he found that he was person rejected by both the races. He was betrayed, insulted, robbed, exploited and often put in shameful condition by both races' people. He, once, was driven out of a 'white club' on the false complaint of a washer woman whose advance in love he had rejected. Once a second-hand cloth dealer makes him nude and performs a dance round the pile of his clothes. Poverty and helplessness then led him to work in a circus as a lion tamer - a ring master. He frankly tells that "he has learnt from the school life all the lessons the sweet, the bitter, and the meddling messy".

Further he says: "I am debtor both to the Greeks and the Barbarians" Then with education, he became a personal disciple of the illustrious grey beards - the sages of Calcutta, Rangoon, Madras, Bombay etc. Then he is accused of breaking the law of Christian behavior by allying himself with Satan. Then starts along wandering associated with exploration of ultimate truth, the seven long sections, each of it begins with H. Hatterr who consults a sage. That means seven sages, each of them belongs to different sect, and Oriental city and each of them has specialising in different aspects of living and devotion. H. Hatterr smears his body with ashes and joins a Sadhu. He becomes a wandering saint in search of his identity in the world. Once a Naga Sadhu in India, steals his single cloth in which he has concealed his money. Hatterr is an "unaccommodated man". His tragic comic longings to get identity himself in the whole plan scheme of universal become a fake and his character, thus deserves both our pity and ridicule. He is anyhow, an explorer of Truth who has learnt from the school of life many sweet and bitter lessons of life. At last, he exposes the contrast between appearance and reality. Life seems meaningless to him after leaving the English Missionary Society. He thought to commit suicide but he changed his mind at once and decided to live life "which life... life of frustration? Danger? Or searching for what, what is called truth?"

As he belongs to different culture - parents he aims in life to get experiences and attain romance, adventure

and success. He thinks that life knowledge can be gained through experience only. Truth is the final outcome of Darshan philosophy and after witnessing the whole universal purpose and planning of God. His main concern is with the truth of life that life does not offer simply and directly even to saints, great men or incarnations. Yet to seek truth, he meets only those persons who are traditionally accepted in India to be the guardians of Truth, known as sages. He meets seven sages and has different experiences which range from the fantastic to the mock mystic sages. First of all he meets the Sage of Calcutta, who teaches him a moral that a man should always be suspicious. H. Hatterr has the same experience. In the chapter "The Sage, He spoke" the following questions are raised by him...

1. Can feelers reclaim blood from ice?
2. Has a man chance in the world or is it the fate of an icicle in Hades?
3. By St. Mango, is there any justice in the globe?

H. Hatterr, more than from sages' answers, gets something through life experiences. A sixty years old washer woman pursues him. He dismisses her advances with a hurried kiss, but she follows him to his club and get H. Hatterr dismissed through 'false complaint'. Once again H. Hatterr thinks to commit suicide. But this time his friend Banerji advises him to stick to life and he follows him. H. Hatterr also feels deeply shocked with surprise when he comes to know that his club member, Mr. Hakon flirts with his wife. H. Hatterr's life is journey of experience and efforts of exploring the identity and truth of the life. He has got into another experience by the novelist Desani. It is his experience with a magazine reporter; he goes to collect some data about a man called the Sage of Wilderness. He shares meal with the sage. Then the sage asks him to undress himself completely and dance around his clothes. He does so and returns hurriedly to his office in a half naked condition. He loses his job on account of his inability to produce the necessary report. He goes back to the sage to get back his clothes but fails because the sage runs the business of second hand clothes. Here he learns that "Life is a combination of opposites" - like the weak and strong, the exploited and the exploiters. Mallikarjun Patil remarks: Hatterr is a man of realities. His approach to life is practical. He sees the crosses and contradictions of human existence. According to Hatterr all qualities exist in the phenomenal world. But he sees them as monims. To him 'life' is a bundle of contrasts. Speaking of this, he classes it with Einstein's theory of relativity: "Life has always been *contrast*, just as motion has always been relative! Only some fellers have got to do the research and say it *first*". G.V. Desani has portrayed the character of H. Hatterr tactfully. As the title itself

suggests, he is a central character of the novel.

Major Thematic Concerns in All about H. Hatterr: Complex novels always deal with variety of themes and dimensions. In this novel we find the front line themes like East - West encounter on philosophic and material basis, search of identity in the midst of national and cultural restlessness, exploration of reality in the school of life and symbolic representation of the splinters of the westernised Indian sensibility. With these themes, the hero, H. Hatterr - Hindustaniwalla's talks, experiments, experiences, sense and non sense talks with sages, humour and irony, lofty wisdom and sheer buffoonery, foolish deeds, fantasy and realism, all are woven. All these create pathos and bathos in the novel. Moreover its strangeness of themes and narrative technique defies any simple critical classifications. The hero's experiences with different sages cannot be expressed in conventional and plain form of writing. The novel has been formed through the stream of consciousness method. The basic themes of 'Search for identity' and 'ultimate truth' are woven round the hero of the novel. The novel is nothing but a graphic imaginative picture of hero's growth of consciousness. His life is a journey and struggle. It shows his movement and growth from innocence to experience. H. Hatterr tells and teaches himself, how to develop consciousness and how to get proper education to understand the truth of life from the large school of life i.e. society, culture, nation and surroundings.

H. Hatterr, the protagonist searches his own identity as he belongs to different cultured parents, father is a European and mother is a Malaya woman. He is adopted by an English Missionary school. It helps him to learn and get education. But when the boyhood is over, he begins to be aware of the various walks of the world. He finds changes taking place in him. He can think of his likes and dislikes. Thus individual attitude to things and world begin to come in him and he becomes conscious of his own self-identity. But soon he grows fed up with puritanical instruction of Rev. the Head. H. Hatterr confesses that he found then, the constant childhood occupation routine, unskilled to his temperament, others like Asiatic Society constitute his orphan childhood. His realisation of self begins when he hears the inner voice "Help other, help others". He

knows that the most deserving party that needs his help, was himself, so he decided to chuck the school and gets out into the open space of India. He desires to live in India, by winning his bread and curry all on his own. In order to adopt new life ways, he has to leave his early identity, so he gives himself a new name - H. Hatterr means Hindustanwalla Hatterr. Indian soil and surroundings can offer him freedom from the tyrannical bondages of religion. He thinks now to acquire knowledge in life through planning himself into various life experiences. He is tired of a life of emotional starvation and religious principles. All these fail to inspire him. He pines for actual life experiences which cannot be mere introspection. Thus he enters in a new arena to experience a new life. Being an extrovert he poses himself to the naked realities of life. Therefore in the company of his friend Banerji he moves from place to place in search of truth of life. Their adventures cover up the whole India. He thus tells he has learnt from the school of life, all the lessons, sweet or bitter He says. "I am debtor both to the Greeks and the Barbarians" He meets the Sage of Calcutta, and becomes his personal disciple of the illustrious grey beard Calcutta sage. Then he meets Sages of Rangoon, Madras, Bombay, Delhi, Mogalsarai and receives instructions and starts thinking about them. He gets the self realisation, so he says to himself: "Be suspicious meditator like a male dog, look for the indirect lesson. Reality is not appearance." Thus he gets clear vision and idea about different presumptions such as youth is ugly age, evil triumphs, kismet is a damn thing etc.

Conclusion: G. V. Desani's present work is a combination of many themes. It is considered as a classic of its own kind on account of its strangeness of theme and technique. The hero is seen in his endless hunger for experience in the world. So he is made to do linguistic experience in the "Indianized style", thus is found in G. V. Desani and other novelists like Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. In this way *All About H. Hatterr* is a complex work with universal theme of individual's search for truth and identity. It is woven in a new style, in Indian English. It has Westernised Indian sensibility interpretations. It makes the novel highly suggestive. It has nothing to tell directly or preach. Through the experiences of the hero H. Hatterr the readers are invited to share the same experiences within the frame work of the novel.

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