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OUR LADY'S TUMBLER- AN INDIAN READER'S RESPONSE

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ABSTRACT

"Humility is endless". The play is essentially about the humility with which an offering should be made to God. A lily may be perfect in temporal terms but when it comes to the lily that should go to the feet of God, it is the heart that offers the lily that renders it perfect and pure and not the transient color of the flower. God does not accept anything that carries with it the human imperfection. The play brings to one's memory the lines of Lord Krishna.

The play takes place in the church on the day of Virgin Mary's Feast and we find the statue of Virgin Mary, as the curtain rises. We hear the Hymn of dedication from off stage. Thus, the play opens in a serene and sanctified atmosphere. Andrew has ceased on earth and has commenced his spiritual journey with the intercession of Virgin Mary and the play closes on a note of solemnity.

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Brother Andrew is busy scrubbing the floor and Brother Sebastian is found immersed in mending revising the poem "A Prayer for Lady's Intercession" which he has written to offer to Virgin Mary on the day of her Feast. Andrew, who comes to know only through Sebastian that it is the day of Virgin Mary's Feast, addresses the statue.

No body told me it was your birthday,
Or I'd have done something too³

Sebastian advises Andrew to watch the statue "move" since Andrew cannot do anything new at this juncture, and relates the legend that "when the perfect offering is made, the statue will make a sign. Sebastian asks as to why Andrew still remains a "novice" and Andrew says that he has been lonely, working in the circus and has left the same because of palpitations and that he could not afford any vigorous exercise. It is what made him a novice. There is probably a deep suggestion (*dhwani*) in the dramatist's introducing Andrew as novice. Ronald Duncan wants to project him as one whose soul is not smeared with conceptual dust and we, as audience, find Andrew free from any professional touch in him (In fact, we find T S Eliot's Becket in Murder in the cathedral having a professional touch).

Brother Gregory, Father Marcellus and Brother Tustin also appear on the stage. They start planning the execution of the Feast. Undisturbed, Andrew is scrubbing the floor. Andrew tells Father Marcellus that he has been unaware that today is the Feast Day of Virgin Mary and when Andrew is keen on doing something; Father asks him to light the candles and adds "the more humble it (offering) is, the more she is pleased. They all leave the stage to come prepared for the Feast and we hear an Aria which makes it explicit that Christ only can grant Grace and none else.

They all come prepared for the ceremony. Brother Andrew lights the candles before the statue of the "Blessed Virgin". After the choir, Father Marcellus ascends the pulpit and addresses the congregation. He says that the statue has never moved in previous years and appeals to the congregation not to mistake it as the inability of God to perform miracles but that rather we have not virtue to deserve it, nor the faith to perceive it. He mentions the three offerings, a poem by Brother Sebastian, a song composed by Brother Justin and a rose grown by Brother Gregory and prays that the imperfections of the gift may be redeemed by the humility in which it is given.

The statue is not moved with any of the three offerings and Father Marcellus leads the Recession. Brother Andrew makes it sure that he is alone on the stage. He removes his habit and now appears in the dress of a clown. He cannot write poetry nor can he compose a symphony. He is a novice. What he knows is only acrobatics and he has to please Virgin Mary with that alone. Andrew somersaults and performs, the Roman and Spanish vault and the French double turn and having failed to move Virgin Mary, says in desperation :

I hope you like it, for there's nothing else I can do
And O Sweet Lady, how I love you,
After my own fashion, how I love you
Though others may worship you with words,
See, Mary, I adore you with my heart
And with my hands and with my feet. (p.48-49)

All his gymnastics having failed, he wants to explain to Mary as to how he understands all this:
I made it all up myself,
It's all about a man who fell in love with a lady who was beyond his reach
I suppose he was a dwarf and she was very tall. (p.55-56)

These lines suggest that he is aware of his minuteness before the Almighty. He only translates his metaphysical anguish into familiar idiom, which he only can comprehend. He prays for forgiveness, for he thinks he did not perform these deeds when he could. Dancing, somersaulting, Andrew spends his breath. This may also be interpreted as the process of purgation. He crashes against the altar and falls at the foot of the statue. Father Marcellus, watching all this, only, says. "He offers all he has and with what humility".

Andrew does realize his helplessness to reach God and breathes his last with final prayer:
Sweet Lady, I can never reach thee

Unless thou reach down to lift me (p.55-56)

Andrew even in his last seconds is not disheartened nor does he complain against God's silence but only confesses his helplessness. This is akin to *Prapatti*,⁴ as propounded in the *Visistadvaita* Philosophy.

For the first time, the statue makes a sign. A rose drops from the statue of Virgin Mary upon his body. A perfect offering is made and the statue has moved. Father Marcellus and the monks bear the body down the aisle and we hear the "Hymn for the dead" which concludes so,

Virgin Mary, Holy Mother,

Intercede with God our Father

To receive his soul forever. (p.58)

"In my end is my beginning" – Andrew has ceased on earth and has commenced his spiritual journey with the intercession of Virgin Mary and the play closes on a note of solemnity.

References & Notes

1. The Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter IX, Verse 26
 2. *Atma- Nikshepa* is the surrender of the self.
 3. Duncan,Ronald. *Our Lady's Tumbler*, p.18 Faber and Faber Ltd.
 4. When a desired object is incapable of attainment by oneself or by others, *Prapatti* is said to be the placing of the responsibility or burden of securing it on somebody who is capable of doing so with a request for supplication. It is declared to be the specific thought such as "This object should be accomplished for me by you without expecting any effort of mine-beyond this."
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