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“THE BURNING MOONLIGHT”: THE TRAGEDY OF AN UNEMPLOYED YOUTH

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Abstract: The paper throws the light on an unemployed youth in the novel *The Burning Moonlight* seems to be paradoxical. The novelist, Sita Devi Vasireddy presents the tragedy of an educated, unemployed youth in the novel. Chandra is a graduate. He is the son of a late retired clerk. He, the descendant of a middle class family, for generations together sold the house he got from his father as patrimony, in order to equip himself with a degree. Chandra was flabbergasted. He had hung his head in shame. He would not have become that serious in this matter, if had not seen Lakshmi and Krishna in the cinema hall. However it was his fault – it was his inability – it was his fate. His ears rang with the words of Lakshmi, especially the abuse “dud”. A hand grenade burst in the middle of the road. He stood there looking at the bright red light. He was not starving. Now he was no more a Chandra (Moon) who shines with borrowed light as they say. He was not at all a ‘dud’ Chandra! Now He was Surya who is self – effulgent with a million billion rays! Comrade Surya!!”. Chandra has become a naxalite. Not only Chandra but also so many youth like him. This the result of the rotten set up, the conditions of the country, the society The novelist, Sita Devi Vasireddy, has tried to outline in this novel as to why and in what kind of circumstances such a sort of social being like Chandra turns a revolutionary and the Moonlight burns, in a thought provoking way.

Keywords: tragedy, unemployed, revolutionary, moonlight burns etc

The title of the novel, **The Burning Moonlight** seems to be paradoxical. The novelist, Sita Devi Vasireddy presents the tragedy of an educated, unemployed youth in the novel. She brings home the point that under critical, unbearable situations a common man finds no way to get out of them but chooses the path of revolution. The novel presents the reasons that led to the transformation of frustrated unemployed youth into a naxalite – burning mellowing moonlight. In the Author’s preface she writes:

“In these days, when the social being, the man in the society sees only counter-revolution everywhere and even in his dreams, I have tried to outline in this novel as to why and in what kind of circumstances such a sort of social being turns a revolutionary and when the moonlight burns”¹

Chandra is a graduate. He is the son of a late retired clerk. He, the descendant of a middle class family, for generations together sold the house he got from his father as patrimony, in order to equip himself with a degree. Chandra's father Gurunatham passed away bearing the unbearable troubles in his middle class family. When he was alive he felt that his son should never lead the life of a slave like him with a little education and wanted his son to pursue his studies in anticipation of seeing his son in a higher position. When Chandra got first rank in his examinations Gurunatham looked at him with a sense of complete satisfaction. His eyes swam in tears with delight. He asked his son to try for a job then. When Chandra wanted to study engineering Gurunatham encouraged him to get the application form. How could he study Engineering when he didn't have money even for the application form? He knew full well the state of affairs in his family. Involuntarily with a deep sigh he joined a long queue in front of Employment Exchange. Unlike him the other youth in the queue appeared like the ones who see the reality. He expressed his firm decision with his father that he was not going for Engineering. He killed his enthusiasm of yesterday.

He felt that it was foolish to think of running away from the reality. He should not try to stand in the space there. His feet should be on this ground even if it was hard, awful and gave comfort to his feet. He had got his name registered in the employment exchange and was ready to join the post of some clerk if at all it was available for him. His father wished that Chandra should not step into his shoes.

Saying so Gurunatham pressed his hand against his chest and that was the last night for him in this world. He did not, as usual, wake up with the dawn. He broke away from the earthly ties and took refuge in the lap of the eternal peace. The former NGO who had drawn only three months' pension, was no more. Later with the encouragement of the principal Chandra joined B.A., for which he mortgaged the house. He got six thousand rupees and deposited it in a bank and planned his two years future.

Three years had elapsed. A number of changes took place. Chandra ran out of the money he had borrowed pledging his house though he got his degree. His mother felt that he would become an officer soon but Chandra knew that a degree was not going to get him an officer's post. He felt pity for her innocence. Mother's ignorance was pitiable. How innocent she was! She thinks that joining a job was completely in his hands. Perhaps she fancies that he could go and occupy the chair whenever it pleased him.

Chandra saw no hope in his future. He found no employment. He saw some of his friends doing mean jobs and involved even in cheating. Educated youth! What a shameful act! But no way – no way to get their stomachs filled with some stuff. He remembered his friends. Anant who had taken to picking the pockets, Bhushan who was selling books, Thirumalaiah who had become fortune-teller and cheating the people, and Achari who was

cheating the people in the name of lottery of the portrait of Lord Venkateswara. All of them were doing some work for their livelihood. But he alone was doing nothing and was incapable of any such work. Chandra got a doubt whether he was an incompetent person? He was not even given the work of breaking stones. In search of some job he got entangled in a dangerous smuggling vehicle chased by the police. Knowing the fact, he jumped out of it saved himself.

Lakshmi, sister of Chandra was grown up to her marriage. She was in her youthful dreams. She felt that her life would be better after her brother getting a good job. Could he get a job? Could he get her married? Perayya, Chandra's maternal uncle, went after Chandra's family to give his daughter in marriage to Chandra. But things were completely different now. Who was ready to give his daughter to a jobless person? He controlled his daughter, Saraswathi not to go to Chandra's house though she wanted to marry Chandra. He warned his daughter one day that she should not the house for the jaunts in the neighborhood.

It was six months since Chandra had become a graduate. He was having his daily rounds to the employment exchange. Things in his house were getting from bad to worse. It was difficult to get loans for running the house. Starvations became a matter of routine. Utensils and other household articles were finding their into the pawn broker's shop.

Chandra found it difficult to get at least an interview from the employment exchange without giving a bribe to the officer. It was his fate that he had to sell his mother's mangalyams for paying the bribe money to the officer. His poor mother Santhamma felt that her son was going to get an officer's post tomorrow. She hurried away to the photograph of her dead husband and making obeisance to him, utters that their son is not going to become an officer that they are not fortunate enough to see him as an officer.

How ignorant she was! She did not know that it was not that easy to get even the L.D.C. post for which he had attended an interview. Things were worse. His younger sister who had come of age revolts against him when he beat her for wearing the dress purchased by her boy friend. When he insisted her on speaking the truth and lifted his hand to beat her she called him a dud and a useless fellow and so he cannot get a petty job for himself.

Chandra was flabbergasted. He had hung his head in shame. He would not have become that serious in this matter, if had not seen Lakshmi and Krishna in the cinema hall. However it was his fault – it was his inability – it was his fate. His ears rang with the words of Lakshmi, especially the abuse "dud". He felt in all the corners of his heart that he was a dud. He was a futile person who could not feed his mother and could not give proper clothing to his younger sister who had come of age. The thought did not even allow him to take a nap that night. He reflected to himself:

"I must, somehow, get a job. I should not show my face to my mother and sister until I become a man of some ability, some useful man who was gainfully employed, a man who is really a man."²

Chandra, making up his mind with a resolution, got down from his bed and disappeared in the dreadful darkness when his mother and his sister were sleeping. His mother Santhamma was so much distressed for her son going away leaving her alone. Her glasses were broken falling at some distance when she tried to get out of the house in a depressed mood and hit her leg against the wooden threshold and fell down. She was purblind now.

Lakshmi who had gone out in the morning returned home with her jacket torn, her hair disarranged, her bangles broken and with blood oozing from the cuts. Her looks suggest that she was on the brink of ruin. When she was asked what had happened to her by Saraswathi, her uncle Perayya's daughter, she was moving like a sleep-walker without a single word. On hearing her daughter's condition, Santhamma roared like a lioness! Yes, she was seduced. She lost her chastity.

Chandra was now scouring every inch of the city searching for his mother and sister who were missing. He stopped at a big hotel. A police van was stationed there and there was big crowd around the van. He lifted up his head above the crowd to see what was happening and found his own sister, Lakshmi's face in one among the four call-girls caught by the police when the other had raided a lodge. Yes, it was Lakshmi! His younger sister! Her sister in a police van! How terrible! He ran after the van and fell down unconscious. After someone had woke him up, he went to the court. He saw a young woman questioned by the lawyer embarrassingly and humiliatingly. She was not Lakshmi but a young woman like her. Perhaps his sister Lakshmi also might stand one day in the dock in this manner and answer similar questions. Tears were rolling down his cheeks.

Chandra saw a dead body on the pavement fully covered with a white cloth. Two boys in soiled clothes were asking for donations for performing the last rites of a dead woman. He saw his own mother in that destitute old woman. A woman, ripe in years, gave birth to children like himself, died with no one to care for her. He trembled with the thought that whether she was his mother. Even if she was his mother what could he do? Could he beg like them to perform the last rites for her now? He felt that he was a dud, a vain glorious fellow who could not even beg – a futile fellow who could not perform last rites for his dead mother. Though she was not his mother he reflected in this vein.

Chandra was terribly hungry. His bowels were getting twisted out of a cute hunger.

"Hunger! The scourge of hunger was the most terrible thing befalling all beings in this world. A mother unable to withstand this affliction sells her children. A woman commits adultery in order to satisfy her hunger. A man commits suicide unable to bear the hunger any longer."³

Chandra had seen reports in the newspaper about hunger deaths. He used to wonder whether hunger was really such a calamity as to cause the death of human beings. Now he

was experiencing it. He had not taken his meal for three days. He could not bear the torment of hunger which was killing him.

Two boys came to Chandra. They were holding buckets and brushes. One boy asked if Chandra was hungry and made the other boy bring some buns and tea. The boys had come to know about his hunger. For three days nobody had noted that he had been hungry. No one had enquired particularly whether he had his meal. Chandra, in his heart of hearts, thanked both of them. Chandra, while consuming the buns with zest, the boys eagerly watched at him. He took tea and leaned against the wall and dozed off for a few minutes. He was not even able to express his thanks immediately. They satisfied his hunger. Yes,

“The beast in his belly was pacified. It lay down motionless,”⁴

After some time he expressed his thanks to the boys. They came to know that Chandra was a graduate with no employment. One of the two boys asked him if he was willing to do some work they gave to him. Overwhelmed with joy he asked their names. They refused to tell him their names and said that they didn't know their real names and their names were given by their leader. If he joined them they would give him a new name. Though he didn't understand what they were saying, he showed his willingness to join them in the work of writing slogans on the wall like...

“Long live Revolution!”

“This bourgeois society has to be annihilated.”

“Police high handedness... down... down!”

Chandra had now understood what they are up to. He paused and reflected for a moment. He was going to choose the path of revolution. That was the only way he had then. Hot blood had spurted in his brain. His eyes became blood red. Some new vigour entered his body. He resolved to take the path of revolution. He took the bucket and the brush in his hands and joined with them in the work. One of them said happily that his name was Comrade Surya! From then onwards and asked him to join them to write such slogans on the walls.

Chandra is no more Chandra (The Moon), now he is Surya (The Sun). He is brave. He is not a 'dud' now. He sees some bright light amidst the slogans written by him. He sees a brave new world in that light – all men are looking cheerful, attending their work and full of enthusiasm. No one is sad now. Everyone has some work to do. In that new world, bat-like men, who always seek darkness, were conspicuous by their absence. There were no leeches which suck the blood of the other creatures, and look swollen, black loathsome and lead a life which is abominable. If and when a leech is found, people there through some lime powder on it and force it to spew the sucked thing. They are thus made to cough up.

Chandra sees no trouble in that new world, may it be troublesome. Life, now, is not like one in the past. He sees in his vision his sister and sisters like his sister in that world

would need not sell their honour for their sustenance. They never do so. They don't have the need to so. His mother and mothers like his mother don't die there like destitutes and dogs. No dead bodies are found there on the pavements of the roads. No one commits suicide there owing to starvation and misery. There in that new world, one doesn't find red caps which from darkness, chase and shoot down a person who is bravely marching towards the light...

Now Chandra doesn't care for anything – Headlights, the sounds of the jeep and for any other thing. He doesn't run away from there. He is ready to confront any situation now.

“A gun was fired off!

A hand grenade burst in the middle of the road. He stood there looking at the bright red light. He was not starving. Now he was no more a Chandra (Moon) who shines with borrowed light as they say. He was not at all a 'dud' Chandra! Now He was Surya who is self – effulgent with a million billion rays! Comrade Surya!!”⁵

Chandra has become a naxalite. Not only Chandra but also so many youth like him. This the result of the rotten set up, the conditions of the country, the society The novelist, Sita Devi Vasireddy, has tried to outline in this novel as to why and in what kind of circumstances such a sort of social being like Chandra turns a revolutionary and the Moonlight burns, in a thought provoking way.

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