UNIT 4 VIJAYDAN DETHA : THE COMPROMISE
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Structure

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you

1. will know about the life and work of the Rajasthani writer Vijaydan Detha,
   • the contribution of Detha to Rajasthani Literature,
   • the form of the folktale. Also, you will know how a modern reader today reads these folktales,
   • the special features of Vijaydan Detha’s writings on folktales,
   • detailed information about the tradition of Rajasthani Literature.

2. Next, the unit will also discuss the theme, characters and purpose of the story, Compromise, and its aesthetic qualities,
   • and finally the significance of the title of the story.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The story ‘Rajeenavo’ is one of Vijaydan Detha’s original stories. Detha is a renowned writer in Rajasthani. This story is symbolic and depicts the gradual decline of a person into corruption. It has different stages in its development. In the beginning the protagonist appears strange and funny. Later we see him transformed into a profound and troubled being. Before we discuss the meaning and aesthetics of this story, familiarizing ourselves with Vijaydan Detha a little more would be helpful.
Vijaydan Detha was born on 1st September 1926 in village Borunda, district Jodhpur. The village is on the border of Nagaur district. The language spoken here is the Marwari dialect of the Rajasthani language. Detha’s writings are in Marwari. It is a village with a Jat majority, and also includes people belonging to the Nai, Kumhar, Khati, Meghwal, Sunar and Rajput castes. Many of the characters of Detha’s folktales belong to one or the other of these castes. Very few people in the village are educated. The majority are still illiterate and are well-versed in their oral folk literature traditions.

Detha belongs to the Charan caste which has traditionally had close links with literature and the royal courts. Writing and reciting poetry was a tradition in Detha’s home too. His father and grandfather were well versed in the traditions of Charan literature. They were connoisseurs in the art of conversation, and were therefore held in high esteem in the village.

His early education was in Jaitaran, Jodhpur. For higher education he went to Jodhpur town. Here he began his writing career in Hindi. Later in 1953 he returned to Borunda village and decided to write in Rajasthani. In 1960, he and Komal Kothari founded the Rupayan Sansthan for bringing together and developing Rajasthani folk literature, and brought out a fourteen volumes collection of Rajasthani folk stories, Bataam ri Phulwadi (A Garden of Folktales). This constitutes one of the many achievements of his literary career. In no other language is there a collection of folktales of such discrimination and taste. The full depth and range of his creative capacities are present in this collection. For the tenth book of this collection he got from the Sahitya Akadami in 1974 the first ever award given by it to the Rajasthani language.

Besides the collection, collation and editing of folk stories, he has also re-written some folktales. Some critics do not consider this exercise of re-writing folktales particularly fruitful. The rewriting, they think, has neither led to the survival of the folktale in its original form, nor can it be counted as an original piece of writing. But Detha himself is of the opinion that this kind of writing should be counted as original work of his. He says that his re-writing follows the style of folktales, and that the resulting product is his own, not conditioned by the folk content. The Rajasthani critic Rameshwardayal Shrimali says:
"Though basically all these are folktales, the stylistic treatment given by the author has made a considerable change in their texture. To derive different conclusions from the existing forms of some of these tales, the author has given twists and turns to the prevalent text, thus trying to superimpose his own ideals. Apart from merits of literary workmanship in such attempts, it is a tragedy that the originality of the tales has been set aside". (Citation of Sahitya Akadami Awards, 1974).

Besides these re-writings Detha has also written, as we said earlier, stories of his own, stories that are his original compositions. These too he wrote in Rajasthani which he later translated into Hindi. After the publication in Hindi of Dvidha and Other Stories (The Dilemma and Other Stories) and the collection of stories Ulfhan, (Perplexity) fame on an all-India level came to him. Some stories of these collections too are based on folk stories. The main themes of his narrative are thus familiar. Some other stories, however, deal with themes hitherto not dealt with.

Detha’s stories have been translated into Hindi, English, Gujarati, Marathi, Oriya, Bengali and Urdu. These translations are read with great interest and have been greatly commended. Film producers, theatre directors and TV serial makers have had their eyes on his works. The recently released film ‘Paheli’ (2005) is based on a folktales. Mani Kaul also had made a film on this very folktales in 1973. Many of his stories have been staged in various cities of the country. Besides, he has travelled extensively in France, Belgium, China, Germany, Russia and other countries.

Thus, we can sum up the discussion so far as follows:

1. A major part of Vijaydan Detha’s writing is linked to folktales.
2. Another aspect of his work is his re-writing of folktales and his efforts to give them new meanings.
3. A third aspect of his writing is original composition, wherein he creates stories from his own imagination.
4. Some of his stories have been brought to the stage as plays, while some others have been made into films and TV serials.

4.3 ORIGINS OF RAJASTHANI

At this point we have to understand where the origins of Rajasthani lie, and where it gets its vocabulary from.

Rajasthani is one of the prominent languages of the Indo-Aryan family. It is spoken by around eighty million people (total number of speakers 36 million as of Census of India 2001) in Rajasthan and other states of India. It has eight dialects: Bagri, Shekhawati, Mewati, Dhundhari, Harauti, Marwari, Mewari and Wargi. Most of these dialects are chiefly spoken in the state of Rajasthan and adjacent parts of Gujarat, in the Malwa and Nimar regions of western Madhya Pradesh, and the Pakistani provinces of Panjab and Sind. Rajasthani language is classified in the Central Zone of the Indo-Aryan languages, which also includes Hindi and Urdu. Some of the Rajasthani dialects are considered by some to be dialects of Hindi. However many linguists agree that Rajasthani is a different language from Hindi at the phonological, morphological, syntactical and lexical levels.
The four most important dialects of Rajasthani language are:

Marwari. The ancient name of Marwari is Maru. It is widely spoken in Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Bikaner, Barmer, Nagaur, Pali, Sikar, Ganganagar and Ajmer districts. Marwari Literature includes the specialty of Sanskrit, Prakrit, Adbhurs.

Mewati. Mewati is widely spoken in the North West part of Alwar-Bharatpur and Gurgaon. It is highly influenced by Brij.

Vagari. It is widely spoken in the southern part of Mewar. It is highly influenced by Gujarati.

Dhundhari. Dhundhari is spoken in Jaipur, Dosa, Tonk and Sawai Madhopur. The sublanguage of Dhu dhari called Hadoti is spoken in Kota, Bundi Baran and Jhalawar. It is equally influenced by Gujarati and Marwari.

Rajasthani has a vast literature in various genres starting from 1000 A.D. In the past, the language spoken in Rajasthan was regarded as a dialect of western Hindi (Kellogg, 1873). George Abraham Grierson (1908) was the first scholar who gave the nomenclature ‘Rajasthani’ to the language, which was earlier known through its various dialects. Today, however, the Sahitya Akadami (National Academy of Letters) and the University Grants Commission recognize it as a distinct language. It is also taught as such in the universities of Jodhpur and Udaipur. The Rajasthan Board of Secondary Education included Rajasthani in the course of studies and it has been an optional subject since 1973. But, there is a long way for Rajasthani language to go. The reason is that it lacks a comprehensive reference grammar and latest dictionary prepared based on a thorough linguistic survey of Rajasthan. Now an extensive descriptive grammar of Rajasthani is under preparation.
(Rajasthani languages — Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

The Rajasthani language includes words from Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic and Parsi, Gujarati and Panjabi. Words from many other folk dialects of Hindi are also found in it.

Two views are expressed about the Rajasthani language. Most observers are of the view that Rajasthani developed from the Shaurensi Adbhramsha. Some supporters of Rajasthani, however, do not agree here. V.L Maliney, writing his ‘History of Rajasthani Literature’, sees it as a people’s language. According to him its earlier name was Maru Bhasha. Composed in 778, the ‘Kuvalachmaley’ is the first source of information about the features of the language of Maru Pradesh. Many linguists are of the view that the Rajasthani language had its birth sometime around the fifth century, but no notable composition of those times has yet been found. (‘The History of Rajasthani Literature’, Page 7, Rachna Prakashan, Jaipur, 2004). But what is certain is that Rajasthani finds mention for the first time in the second part of the ninth book of Grierson’s ‘Linguistic Survey of India’.

Because this language has been always spoken among the people, the influence of words from the neighbouring languages is clearly imprinted in it. Words from Gujarati, Malwi and Panjabi are present for this reason of proximity. Many words are straight usages of the Sanskrit terms, such as ‘neer’, meaning water. Because of the influence of the Sufis many Arabic and Persian words have also got absorbed in Rajasthani.
4.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HINDI AND RAJASTHANI

In any consideration of Rajasthani as a part of Indian literature, some facts have to be borne in mind. One is that Rajasthani is not a language in the sense that Bengali, Oriya, Marathi and Tamil are. These are languages in their own right. They have a set and standard form. They have a grammar of their own, a literature of their own, and also a tradition of literature. But Rajasthani is still involved in the exercise of becoming a language in its own right. It has still to acquire a settled form for itself. It has still to evolve rules of grammar. It is one among the many supporting languages of Hindi, such as Braj, Avadhi and Bhojpuri. Therefore all these languages have to be considered within the framework of Hindi. Besides, Hindi is a little apart from the other Indian languages. Unlike them it is not spoken just in one state but in five states. In addition, in Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore and Calcutta it is also used in trade, commerce, cinema, tourism and journalism.

At the 58th session of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan which year speaking about the pre-eminent position of Hindi, Ashok Vajpeyi said in his presidential address. “According to the report of the Population Commission of India, Hindi is not just one language but a family of forty six languages. This means that Hindi speaks through these forty six languages”. Elaborating on the mutual relations between Hindi and these forty six languages, (of which Rajasthani is one) he said, “It appears that within the last few decades the relations between Hindi and its sister languages have become increasingly difficult. Till the nineteenth century the mainstream of Hindi literature consisted of the literatures written in Maithili, Braj, Avadhi, Rajasthani and other tributary languages. But from the beginning of the twentieth century, the creative work in these languages has been more or less exiled from the terrain of modern Hindi literature. It is accepted that the true strength of Hindi lies in those words which are used in the local languages — their impure or corrupted forms, and the biggest fount of such words is in the dialects. It is not a matter of chance that even today a special feeling of intimacy comes in to the language when a writer, whether in story, poem, play or novel, uses words from these dialect-languages”. If we study and reflect on these observations, we come to the following conclusions:

1. Rajasthani is a dialect of Hindi.
2. It is evolving from a dialect into a language.
3. In the process of this evolution the relations between Hindi and Rajasthani are becoming uneasy.

It should be understood here that what is meant by Hindi is the present day form of it, the form known as Khadi Boli. It is the standard, recognized form, and is the medium of thought and expression of educated Indians. It is the medium that the newspapers, radio, television and films employ for their purposes. Along with this, in all the Hindi states there is also a supporting language in use. Its use is limited to the particular area. Both the educated and the uneducated sections use it and converse in it too. It too has its own literature, tradition, and thinking. In addition to these characteristics this language has a reservoir of oral literature not available in Khadi Boli Hindi. We can call it folk literature. This vast material lives in the realm of folk
memory. In some languages, some segments of this vast oral unwritten literature has been scripted and made available to educated readers. Some are in the process of being scripted. Some others are vanishing too. Such vanishing of the literature of memory is going on fast in the whole country. Side by side with the spread of education and literacy this process of disappearance is taking place. For the culture-and-tradition-conscious people this is a worrisome phenomenon.

I would like to point out again that Khadi Boli Hindi has no folk literature of its own. For its needs of folk literary material it has to depend on these other local languages. In such a situation anyone engaged in the difficult and important task of writing down and scripting this vast reservoir of spoken literature, earns the respect and admiration of the entire Hindi world. This is the task that Vijaydan Detha has accomplished in Rajasthani literature.

4.5 DETHA’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF RAJASTHANI

Broadly speaking, with the advent of the communication revolution and the internet, almost all the languages of the world are faced with the problem of survival. But the folk languages’ struggle for survival began earlier, with the development of Khadi Boli Hindi. They had to prove themselves in the face of Khadi Boli. An anti-Hindi attitude thus developed amongst them. Because of this attitude, the Rajasthani poets, on the one hand, refused to learn anything from Hindi: and on the other, at the same time, they tried to imitate Hindi. Thus, they brought an evolving language into competition with an evolved language. In addition, they had to answer the charges made against the language. The biggest charge against this dialect evolving into a language was that it was as yet a mixture of various other dialects such as Mewati, Marwadi, and Shekhawati. That, it hadn’t yet stabilized into a standard form. And without a form it had no grammar either, the opponents said. A dialect has no grammar. And without grammar a language does not exist.

The solution to this conflict and these charges will come only from writing. A language gains a standard form only from being written and the creation of literature in it. And it is only then that it develops a grammar. From this point of view the contribution of Vijaydan Detha is outstanding. Through his compilation of folk stories in fourteen volumes, namely, ‘Bataan Ri Phulwadi’ (A Garden of Folktales) he has established a standard and universally accepted form of Rajasthani. He does not tell the story. The telling is done by someone else. He has given an alphabet to an oral tradition, given it a script, given it permanence, given it immortality. He has made it, not just nationally, but internationally acclaimed. Everything that was preserved within the throats of the folk, he has transposed on to paper. This has by no means been an easy task.

In this way Detha has ensured the continued existence of an extremely mutable and changeable genre. He has given it a new form. Otherwise it would have gone into collective oblivion. Modernity and development have made the world lose memory. They have stolen memory from folk memory. Vijaydan Detha has rescued folk literature from this certain destruction. This is a wonderful achievement. And this wonderful achievement is helping Rajasthani develop from a dialect to a language. A standard form of it is taking shape.
4.6 DETHA'S USE OF THE FORMAT OF FOLKTALE

We shall now try to understand the form given to the folktales by Vijaydan Detha's scripting it and writing it down. The first noteworthy fact about these stories is that they have vignettes of pre-British India, or say, have depictions of a pre-capitalist society. There are rajas and maharajas, pandits, banias, barbers, dhobis, gypsies, farmers and labourers, ranis and slave girls, coming in as characters. Wealthy seths and seths' wives are present in them, but no capitalist. There is trade, but no industry and no industrialists. The deceptions of the seths' wives and the seths' trickeries are there, but not the exploitations indulged in by the capitalists. There are no cannons, guns, bombs, injections, medical capsules, cars and telephones. Thus, in the folktales a world that had vanished fully, is reborn. For the contemporary reader thus, this is the creation of an unrecognized unknown world. And the tales also afford the joy of seeing recreated a forgotten vanished world. You also can call it the joy of history. You can also derive pleasure from it by seeing it as the storehouse of antiquity.

Reading these stories you can also get the sense of release from your times, from the realms of the present. However joyous and heavenly the present, the pain, the loneliness and unease it breeds can lead to states of depression and heavy non-communication. Entering the world of these stories you are transported out of your context, and gain a sense of release from the present. And then, the characters of the folktales are not bound by time. They are human likenesses gone beyond the pull of gravity of time. They can come alive within us in different forms. But they may not. We can just as well be wonder struck by seeing them in their given forms. We can thus say that the time depicted in the folk story is timeless, the characters are of all times, and the country portrayed in them goes beyond geography. These are values not available in modern creative literature.

In the folk story is contained spoken literature, and this literature keeps gathering body and mass in folk memory. After receiving it from the preceding generation earlier, the succeeding generation commits it by heart, adds its own experiences to it, and hands it over to the generation after. This tradition goes on without break. We can thus say that folk stories carry the live experiences of many generations. It can also be said that they are not the creation of any one individual. Each person is a listener first, and the same listener becomes the narrator-creator and narrates the folk tale to another. Because it is based on memory, it has no heavy descriptions, pointless lamentations or complex philosophical discourses. The story moves easily towards its aims. Language chases it, jogs at its heels to keep track of it.

Grammar, theory and discipline get left behind in the folk tale. The language gains ease, flow and animation without effort. Dialogue is so lively that understanding comes on the heels of utterance — saying and understanding are inseparable, like thunder and lightning. Momentum is all important. Anything worth its salt has to move forward, has an inherent forward motion. Rigidity and inerence fall behind and melt away eventually. The folk story, thus, has the capacity to attract and contain within itself the hearts and minds of successive generations.
The narrator of the folk tale is of special importance. He is a man adept in speaking, adept in adapting his voice to the many characters he has to portray, has psychological insights into people and events, is a man of vast experience. He has to be all this. Only then will he understand the finer points of the story, and only then will he be able to communicate it to his listeners. As the story-teller he has to be even more engaging than the story he is telling — only then will he be able to keep his listeners spell bound. We can thus say that the story-teller has to have a creative capacity. The world of the story he is telling will not come alive in the absence of such talent. Any or every one cannot be a story-teller, no matter how deep his understanding of the story is. A run of the mill telling will make even a good story go heavy.

Since the folk story is pre-modern, its characters and the story tellers, and the audience are all illiterate. To bring them into the sphere of literates, at the same time keeping intact the beauty of the world of the illiterates is a difficult task. Not everybody can do it. For doing it, a thorough inside understanding of the worlds of both the literate and the illiterate is necessary. The story-teller and the story writer demand different kinds of capacities. The contents and contexts of oral literature are different from those of written literature. By casting oral literature into a written form the contents often undergo a change.

### 4.7 DETHA'S WRITINGS ON FOLKTALE LITERATURE

We can now consider Vijaydan Detha again. He is not an ideal story-teller. It is possible that he fails to preserve the beauty of the story while telling it. It is possible that he turns out a bad story teller. But he has the skill to change the oral tale into the written form. He is careful to retain the basic oral flavour of it. If Detha's written folk tale is sung to music the beauty of its folk character will float out. Everyone cannot do this.

His friend Chagan Mohta repeatedly said about Detha and his work on folktales, 'If Bijjo Bhai forgets his obsession with folk stories and steers his pen in the direction of the stories of the Mahabharat and the Upanishads, it will make for joy all round'. Vijaydan Detha himself believes and says: ‘I do not work half heartedly at anything once I have undertaken to do it, even if it is the task of sweeping with broom and brush. Every task has its own creative code and dharma, and it has to be done by the hands of the mind’ (ibid 24).

Two kinds of people read Detha. They are those who have already heard the stories that he has put into words. For them this is a minor job in the task of compiling the stories. But Detha’s compilation is no minor job because no other language in this country has a more complete compilation than his. The second kind of readers of Detha are those who read the stories for the first time through Detha’s rendering. For them his writing is unprecedented and wonderful, in the presence of which creative writing, so-called, is a pigmy. So when Detha was published in Hindi he was greeted with resounding cheers from all the Hindi states. That is why Detha keeps feeling that his own state has treated him cruelly. In ‘Roorkh’ he states this fact with immense pain. ‘No writer can ever have suffered such savage attacks on his work by his own state, by the people of his own language’.

A second fact, as pointed out earlier, is that modernity has led to the fading of folk stories. The full store of our folk literature, of our memory-based
literature, is going extinct. As this process of extinction goes on, the significance of Detha’s work shows up more and more. The only way to save folk literature is by harnessing it to the written word and having it in print.

The task of transforming memory into the printed word has its own challenges. It is a test of the writer’s command over language. The critics who have lauded Detha have showered fulsome praise on his linguistic ability.

Rameshwar Dayal Shrimali said in his nominating note for the Sahitya Akademi award, ‘He has a good command over language and knows it well to use the appropriate phraseology decked with fitting idioms and proverbs. He also knows how to coin words suitable to his needs and gives them a local colour which may be difficult to be singled out even by the discerning eye’. Writing on the English translation of the folk stories transcribed by Detha, Deepa Aggarwal says in ‘Book Review’, Volume xxi, No 8, ‘Vijaydan Detha’s richness of language, his poetic use of simile and metaphor, which add so much to the reading pleasure of these stories, the pithy statements that punctuate them, have been more than adequately rendered into English’.

4.8 TRADITION IN RAJASTHANI LITERATURE

If we consider this literature from the viewpoint of tradition, that is consider it along with the other languages of the Hindi belt, we have to keep in mind two or three factors.

The first of these is that the standard language of the early literature of Hindi, (roughly from the tenth century to the fourteenth century) has been Dingal. Dingal is an ancient form of Rajasthani. The whole of the literature of the early eras, filled with tales of heroism and valour is available only in this language. After this, in the Bhakti period, the Bhakti Kal of Hindi literature, Meerabai’s compositions are conspicuous for their depictions of the life and culture of Rajasthan. But of course after Surdas, Braj Bhasha practically became the accepted language of all of Hindi literature. All the literary works written in Riti Kal, are in Braj Bhasha. The poets of Rajasthan too wrote in Braj Bhasha. For example, the noteworthy poet of this period, Bharti, was the court poet of the Jaipur royal house, and his language was Braj Bhasha. From the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries all the literature produced in Rajasthani was what could be called for want of a better term Rajasthani. It did not win literary recognition.

Ever since the advent of the modern period in Hindi, Khari Boli replaced Braj Bhasha as the language of literature, and also won recognition for itself. Khadi Boli developed as the language of Hindi literature, as the standard medium of thought, journalism, administration, politics — of all spheres practically. This affected literary activities in the other languages of the Hindi belt. They lapsed into their former state as dialects. While folk literature is available in them in plenty, the number of nationally recognized, creative writers began dwindling. The successful initiation of the process of reestablishing these dialects as languages was made only with Detha’s compiling of folktales. Detha gave this task a luster. It was an outstanding job.
As far as fiction writing in Rajasthani is concerned, it made its appearance very late in the post-Independence period. Very few writers showed interest in the writing of stories and novels. Among the early well known fiction writers in Rajasthani are Annaram Sudama, Nrisingh Rajpurohit, Yadavendra Sharma Chandra, all of them contemporaries of Vijaydan Detha. Next in importance comes Sanwar Daiya, who has written some noteworthy stories. Among contemporary writers Malchandra Tiwadi and Bharat Ola are particularly worthy of mention.

Vijaydan Detha turned to creative writing much later after his compilation and editing of folktales. Because of his early and prolonged involvement with folktales, influence of the folk in style and form is marked in his stories. He is finding it difficult to come out of the trammels of the folktales.

Abstracting the line of his creativity from the mass of his writings, Vijaydan Detha says: “In the very first book of Phulwadi, with absolutely clean intentions and my senses whole, I called it: Rajasthan Ki Kadeemee Lok Kathawan. (The Ancient Folktales of Rajasthan). This title went on till the tenth book. I never felt the need to give it a second thought. Apart from a few writers in Rajasthani “I have not read or seen anyone asking, — what kind of a writer is ‘Bijji’. All that he’s written are tradition-soaked folktales. He knows it himself that the folktales of Rajasthan have been written times without number and have vanished without a trace. He thinks the one line he’s written in ‘Phulwadi’ is the greatest and irrefutable proof of his prowess”. To date I have not made any answer to these people’s illogic, envy, heartburn and small minded-ness.”

Then, discussing other writers basing their works on folk traditions, he said, “Albert Camus’s play ‘Cross Purpose’ is based on a folk tale, and the play has its own place among the plays of the world. Many writers in the Indian languages have based their works on stories from the Ramayan and Mahabharat, the Upanishads and the Puranas, which have won awards too. Most of the Kannada plays of Girish Karnad are based on folktales, and he is ranked high among Indian playwrights”. (‘Loksmriti’ Page 84-85, December 2005)

### 4.9 INTRODUCING THE STORY

After this familiarization we have built up with Vijaydan Detha and his links with the Rajasthani language and literature, we are in a position to read the story.

First of all, we shall focus on the outward form of the story. The story is written in the style of an autobiography, and it wants to impress on the reader that the writer is keen on making the reader participate in his experience. The story is set in Jodhpur, and its events take place in the students’ hostel of the Charans. Before going further, it is necessary to know that in Rajasthan the leaders of every caste have built hostels for the students of their caste. Charan students’ hostel, Bishnoi students’ hostel, Rajput students’ hostel, Farmer students’ hostel (which is the hostel of the Jats) and so on. The elders and intellectuals of the respective castes are frequent visitors to these students’ hostels. In Rajasthan this is a common, formal and accepted practice. Because the writer is a Charan, his visits to the Charan students’ hostel is but natural.
The main character of the story, Aaskaran too, is a Charan, even though his caste designation has no effect on the story. He could be of any caste, could be any one. In the same way, the story telling “I” too, could be of any caste, any individual. He is an uncommon individual and individuals like him are always interesting to one and all. People talk about him, say many things about him, and according to the “I” what they are doing is right.

The strange habit of the protagonist is that when he stands at the mirror he passes into a state of dialoguing seriously and honestly with his image in the mirror. Whatever Aaskaran does, the Aaskaran outside the mirror quizzes the Aaskaran inside it. Quite clearly the Aaskaran outside the mirror levels charges of various kinds against the Aaskaran inside, and, the Aaskaran inside tries to clear himself of the charges.

The story moves slowly. We get to know Aaskaran to some extent. And then, in the story some extra human elements come up. These probably have come in from the writer’s association with folktales. Detha has put these elements to good, aesthetic use. To the Aaskaran outside, the Aaskaran inside seems a being either horned like a goat, or long-eared like a donkey. These images go away but the tension between the “two selves” increases day by day. The self inside is told off roughly, is threatened everyday. A point comes when Aaskaran outside has reached the limits of tolerance with his image inside. He wants to settle things finally. They decide, eventually, to smash the mirror, and this way the Aaskaran outside stops all talk and conversation with the one inside. A compromise is struck between the two and the story ends. In other words the voice of conscience is not active any more. It is stilled forever. The story teller makes his appearance again here, and elaborates on the compromise. He tells us that in time Aaskaran has now become a police thanedar. And the rumour is, he says, that he has made lakhs of rupees and become filthy rich. This is the last sentence.

4.9.1 Discussion

Let us now consider the story again, after this cursory consideration of it. We shall try to get to the inner meaning of it. What does the writer want to convey through the story? Has he been able to say it in a telling way? Where does the message of the story lie? What is the momentum of the story like? Is it a realistic story? Does it or does it not succeed in expressing the real through the medium of the unreal? I am sure many such questions arise in your mind. Not only do they arise in your mind, they arise, from within the story. And this is exactly perhaps what the writer wants. How and where does an ordinary event become a story? This is something we feel compelled to find out.

The first thing to realize is that this is a not a descriptive story even though it may seem like one. Its aim is not to inform the reader about strange happenings. It is a symbolic story. The bizarre-seeming ordinary events have a different meaning. The main character is coping with his inner voice, the voice of his conscience. As long as he is engaged thus, it is a descriptive account, not a story. The story shapes out after the end of the story, when the compromise is struck, when the problem is no more, when the duality finishes. When non-duality is established? And then, Aaskaran, hale and hearty, through with his worries, eats, drinks, and makes his lakhs. He has silenced his aim, shining and pure like the mirror. He plucks out of himself the sense
of right and wrong that was nagging him, threatening him. What does he do then? What kinds of deeds, good and bad, doable and undoable does he do? The writer says nothing about these. And it is in all the things he does not say that the story lies. All that we are told is that he has become a thanedar and has made lots and lots of money. We can thus say that the story is made by the last sentence, or because of the last sentence.

The beginning of the story consists of simple, description-based situations. The "I" of the story tells the telling. He tells of a man who is not acceptable to society. He is a strange man. People do not like him because he is given to doing things that are not the norm, not typical. When the "I" tells his listeners about him, he seems to be in agreement with the people. But the last sentence of the story makes it clear that it is only the a-typical, the non-standard, that is right: it makes it clear that the typical, standard people have become dehuman, and that dehumanisation has become acceptable to society. The a-typical man too gradually becomes typical and indistinguishable from the others.

Till this point it looks as if the first person narrator is the main character, and that Aaskaran is not. He is but an example of comic idiocies, we feel. The writer regards him thus too, and shows him thus in the story. Gradually, as the "I" talks with increasing familiarity about Aaskaran, he — the "I" — disappears. But there are always two characters in the story. So far the two were Aaskaran and the "I", but now Aaskaran has got divided into two selves that are in a state of dialogue with each other. The dialogue becomes a conflict, and because of this conflict, in the mirror image too strange and idiotic changes begin to take place. Soon, however, a compromise is reached between the two selves. At this point. You feel the story is practically over, that there’s nothing left to say. A sharp jerk, the mirror cracks, and there, the story is over!

The story takes a new turn with the idiotic and comic antics of Aaskaran, as he sits before the mirror in deep dialogue. Till now, the story teller was with him. He is not needed any more. Aaskaran is grave, solemn. The man outside is giving a sharp talking to, to the man inside. The man inside is defending himself with equal gravity and solemnity. One man, with two selves within him. The author is grappling with both. Gradually a human truth emerges from this situation. The tension between the two selves rises. Strange things happen in this climate of tension, as we pointed out earlier. A donkey’s ears or a goat’s face appears on the image in the mirror. This is unreal. But in a symbolic sense it is also real. Donkeys’ ears and goats’ faces are not unreal. The real and the unreal blend in such a way that the unreal seems real. At times it even seems that the unreal is the real, the solid, tangible real. The so-called real, is just so-called, is superficial. If the story was purely realistic, if the image in the mirror hadn’t had the ears of the donkey or the face of the goat, it would have been weak. This unreality has made the story strong and arresting. This treatment brings out Vijaydan Detha as a story writer as his best.

Between the self and the image, then, the dialogue goes on. In the initial stages of the dialogue, a conflict is portrayed between the self as an obedient being, faithful to the do’s and don’ts taught by his parents, and the self falling prey to the pulls of the senses. It looks as if the traditional morality is resisting the liberal impulses of contemporary outlook. As the story unfolds, the self in the mirror frees himself from the pull of the other self. He becomes a full-
fledged character, who has to be either accepted or destroyed. When the
tension between the two comes to this point, the self turns round and cuts the
cord with his mirror image, with the value-bound, scruple-filled being who
harries him from the mirror. He smashes the mirror, smashes his better self.
The story should have ended at this point. But it goes a step farther. Freed
of his mirror image, the self gives full rein to the impulses of bribery, corruption
and get-rich-quick strategies. Exactly what he does is not made clear, but his
possessions run in to lakhs. As long as the image in the mirror was there, there
were checks, restraints, there was morality. Now that the image is not there,
which means that his voice of conscience has been silenced which means that
he has reached a compromise with himself. His decline is complete.

4.9.2 Significance of the Title

We shall now talk about the title of the story. The dictionary meaning of the
word ‘compromise’ is ‘an agreement to end conflict’. In the story, there are
two parties, both in opposition to each other. Both come to realize the futility
of opposition, and arrive at a compromise to break the mirror. Each sees the
other’s point of view. Both accept what is good for each other and come to
terms with each other. The conflict ceases. Moral scruples end, and the field is
left clear for immoral activities.

What this means is that as long as the mirror was there, the reflection in the
mirror was looking on, and the voice of conscience was clear and heard. With
the breaking of the mirror, the voice of conscience goes, it becomes muted,
and the inner conflict ends. This is where the meaning of the story comes in.
This meaning enters the story in a most imperceptible way, which one can
almost overlook. As said before, the main character of the story is strange,
eccentric, given to acting in the strangest manner. He is not ordinary. What
then, is ordinary?

In terms of the story the ordinary man is one who is corrupt and immoral. He
is a man who suffers no remorse at his corrupt deeds. His soul does not
reprimand him. Nobody considers him strange. In the beginning of the story
when he dialogues with his reflection everybody considers him strange,
touched in the head. As he grows older, proceeds towards adulthood from
childhood, distances begin between him and his reflection. Debates take place
between the two. One character becomes two independent personalities. Their
dialogues turn into conflict. As the story unfolds the conflict intensifies. The
inner self, contrite and pleading, commits errors one after the other. The outer
self becomes aggressive, threatens him under the pretext of making him see
reason. At this stage the story takes a turn. The reflection changes form. It is
not the images of the outer self. It becomes somebody else — the strange and
the wondrous make their appearance here. Aaskaran now begins seeing in the
mirror sometimes a donkey, sometimes a goat complete with long ears and
protruding snout. Here the story develops further. The characters develop. The
relationship of the two selves of the main character changes, and the first
breaks the mirror to wipe out the very existence of the second, and the
medium of their contact.

Now there’s no one left to cross-question him, ask him uncomfortable
questions. If this is taken to be the compromise, it takes place by the wiping
out of all dialogue and communication. The very medium of the dialogue is
broken. There is no dialogue, no questioning presence, and the self can get down in earnest to the business of money-making, untroubled by questioning voices. But the story doesn’t end here. It goes farther. And when it is about to end we recall its beginning. We remember that the writer had designated Aaskaran a strange and bizarre fellow. At that time he is alive to the voice of the reflection, to the voices of true values. But at the end of the story nobody calls him bizarre, strange, abnormal. He is considered ‘normal’, no more strange and bizarre. He has amassed lakhs. He has made his compromise with himself. The writer does not say this anywhere. He just suggests it. This open-endedness enhances the total effect of the story. And for this reason the title of the story is meaningful, is loaded with meaning.

As we see the writer employs the supernatural elements of the folktale in a very beautiful, aesthetic way. In an ordinary, realistic story it is not possible for the reflection in the mirror to be that of someone else, of something else, and not of the man standing before it. The reflection cannot be of a donkey or a goat in place of a human face, within the form of the folk tale. Such supernatural scenes can easily be accommodated. Detha has used this facility very creatively indeed. With the help of these devices he has most successfully highlighted the meaning of the story. After arresting before the last sentence in the paragraph.

4.10 LET US SUM UP

Vijayan Detha’s story ‘Rajinavo’ is an extremely beautiful depiction of the changing values of our times. It dialogues on a serious problem in an engaging way with the help of symbols, with economy of words, and without sermonising. In addition, by using the structure of the folk tale it has given a new form to the story, breaking new grounds in the development of the short story.

Vijaymohan Singh’s view is “Detha the writer is mostly absent (in “Rajinvo”). Only Detha the compiler of folktales is present in the story — but like a human audio-visual machine — recording and filming everything”. (‘Loksanskriti’, December 2005, Rupayan Sansthan, Borunda). Amrita Pritam said: “He tells his story in the form of a folktale, and at some point, comes out with statements that change the dimensions of the story. It becomes a fully contemporary story. This is a beautiful craft of which he is a master. It is not just a craft. Behind it lies a whole way of thinking that makes the story universal even if it is about things said before” (Ibid. 55-56).

Dr Santosh Tiwari’s opinion is: “His world as a story teller is pervasive and singular, but even better is his clarity and style. We feel we are in the company of a like-minded and engaging elder, who is acquainting us with the bitter-sweet and cruel experiences of life through the agency of various characters, an elder who is familiarizing us with life’s interesting and disgusting facets. There is such charm and inquisitiveness in the telling, the strands of the narrative are so well knit, that even though each experience is felt in segments it leaves the effect of an undivided whole”. (‘Loksanskriti’, January 2006).
4.11 GLOSSARY

Bat-ras: Do you know the meaning of the phrase 'the pleasure of conversation' what we call 'Bat-ras' in Hindi? Often, you must have seen people who are devoid of serious, original thought, but who yet give immense pleasure by the way they talk. Also, there are some who are thinkers, have thoughts worth listening to, but are lacking in the art of persuasive speaking. The man who thinks and is also a good speaker is a rarity. It is necessary for the story-teller of the folk tale to have a talent for speech that gives pleasure and stimulates thought. But it is equally necessary for the compiler and writer of folktales to be alive to this quality and produce it in the letter-bound, scripted folk tale. The Hindi poet Bihari also uses the term 'Batras', meaning the pleasures of conversation.

4.12 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss The Compromise as an allegory.
2. "The Compromise is a comment on the absence of moral restraints in modern life": Comment.
3. In what way is the story The Compromise relevant to our times?
4. Discuss Vijaydan Detha's art of story telling in The Compromise.

4.13 SUGGESTED READINGS


Bataan Ri Phulwadi. (Collection of the folk stories of Rajasthan). 14 parts. In Rajasthani

Anokha Peyd. (The Strange Tree) (Stories for children)

Kabboo Rani. (Stories for children)

Duvidha va Anya Kahaaniyan. Translated into English as 'The Dilemma and Other Stories' by Ruth Vanita.

Uljhan. (Complication)