

Vol 4 Issue 6 March 2015

ISSN No : 2249-894X

*Monthly Multidisciplinary
Research Journal*

*Review Of
Research Journal*

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2249-894X

Review Of Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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GRAND MASTER AS A MEGALOMANIAC IN THE CITY AND THE RIVER

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Abstract:-In *The City and the River* Joshi delineates the megalomaniac nature of the Grand Master, who identifies his self with his search for absolute power and control over others and its continuation through his son. He merges his conscious self completely with his unconscious or the Great Mother Structure/Power from the very beginning. His Great Mother Structure/Unconscious matrix is governed and structured by the hunger for absolute power and nothing else.

Keywords:*Narcissistic, Incestuous, Regressive, Collective Unconscious, Great Mother Structure, Megalomaniac, Power.*

INTRODUCTION

In *The City and the River* Joshi delineates the megalomaniac nature of the Grand Master, who identifies his self with his search for absolute power and control over others and its continuation through his son. He merges his conscious self completely with his unconscious or the Great Mother Structure/Power from the very beginning. His Great Mother Structure/ Unconscious matrix is governed and structured by the hunger for absolute power and nothing else. He is in a position to impose his search for power or narcissistic-incestuous regression into his Great Mother structure by actively attempting “to transform reality in such a way as to make it confirm . . . with his narcissistic image.” This search is not different from the history of, what Erich Fromm calls, “Megalomaniac” (Erich Fromm, *Heart of Man* 76) leaders like Caligula, Nero, Stalin and Hitler, who did not suffer from a conflict with their Great Mother structure or personal neurosis because they sought meaning for themselves in public life by trying to “transform reality so that it fits their narcissism, and to destroy all critics . . . since they cannot tolerate the threat which the voice of sanity constitutes for them” (Erich Fromm, *Heart of Man* 76). The Grand Master also does not seek meaning for his self through the elaboration of relationships in ‘social positions’ constituting ‘mental functioning’ in the Lacanian sense. Therefore there is no ‘Repression’ or a lack of dialogue between ‘the manifest’ and ‘the unmanifest’ of his self. His ego as a result does not develop into an entity or ‘inscription’ from the unconscious in a ‘psychic discourse’ and cannot be called a mature linguistic construct articulated through an ‘inscription’ of an unconscious discourse.

Instead he tries to impose his ‘uroboric’ ego on the objective reality, and the entire novel in his search for power can be equated to a tale of ‘consummation of reduction’ as the Grand Master reduces the objective reality into a verbal construct of the instrumentality of his narcissistic-incestuous and life-denying necrophilic ego. The Grand Master’s seeking of power as a search for his self involves a complete suppression of ‘the unmanifest’. It forms a psychotic state of affairs for the entire city. Davis aptly points out a text without ‘repression’ is “a psychotic text” and that “without the insistence of the unconscious”, the “text” is “locked permanently in the imaginary order” inviting “textual psychosis” or “in Lacan’s terms . . . foreclosure.” The Grand Master’s text, which he imposes on the city, is such a one because it does not involve elaboration of ‘social positions,’ ‘repression’ and, therefore, differentiation from the Great Mother structure. This happens because The Grand Master gives his ego, “a position of mastery as a substantial truth” (Davis 259).

The Grand Master’s search for power, and his seeking it in his Great Mother structure, is reflected in the

very structure of the city itself:

“It has spread along the bank of the river and in the north it touches the very margins of the pyramids . . . First comes the narrow brown band of the mud huts, Next, . . . on a higher ground lies the neat rosy pink oval of the brick colonies and their special schools, clubs, shopping arcades. Beyond the brick colonies stand the famous Seven Hills ranged in their picturesque formation. The hills vary in altitude and are now the seat of the Grand Master’s government. On the tallest stands the palace: it is easily recognized by the delicacy of its dome, which is said to be a marvel of modern architecture . . . On the remaining hills stand tall structures of steel and glass”. (Joshi, *The City and the River* 12)

The structure of the city reveals a narcissistic domination of the macro reality by the rulers with the imposition of their ego on it from the high altitude of the hills through the dominating structures of concrete, steel and glass. These structures are in sharp contrast to the river which represents time, and who is the Mother to the boatmen, who hold their “elegance” only to the river and are willing to die for their “beliefs” in contrast to the brick people who “can be talked to, cajoled, distracted, and, if necessary, threatened” (Joshi, *The City and the River* 13-14). To Grand Master, the river does not symbolize the eternal flow of time or collective unconscious or God because as Erich Fromm suggests “the idea of God . . . is the negation of narcissism because only God – not man – is omniscient and omnipotent” (Erich Fromm, *Heart of Man* 89). Therefore, the river and her children or the boatmen exist as a threat to the absolutist ego of the Grand Master as they exist outside it as an independent living entity and refuse to be reduced to the state of verbal constructs of Grand Master’s power-seeking ego.

His dream reveals his fears and aspirations along with the uroboric-narcissistic state of his ego submerged in the Great Mother structure of power. The Grand Master dreamt that “he had become a king,” and he sat on “a throne on top of a hill surrounded by the waters of a river” (Joshi, *The City and the River* 14). The Grand Master fails to realize, in his dream as well as in his waking up, that his dream has tried to open him to his unmanifest depths by revealing to him cosmic harmony:

“[T]here was a full moon in the sky and the colour of the waters was the colour of lapis lazuli. High above him, and in the four quarters of the moon lit sky, the gods were playing music on a boatman’s one string. The music rose to crescendo as though in a prelude to a god’s descent”. (Joshi, *The City and the River* 14)

For the Grand Master’s narcissistic state, any power above him and beyond him, is a threat to his self, so instead of feeling enlarged and enlightened by being a part of this cosmic spectacle, he feels threatened by it. He cannot feel himself opening to his depths which are in turn being connected with the higher spiritual powers than the idea of power in the uroboric state of his ego. Instead of preparing himself to receive a god, he finds himself challenged by a man rising from the river, “his dark naked form glistening in the moonlight . . . followed by . . . a vast host of naked men” (Joshi, *The City and the River* 14) who surround the king’s throne, “and like a noose the circle of their nakedness lightened around the king’s throne until he could feel their breath, which was like the breath of a volcano from out of the depths of the surrounding sea” (Joshi, *The City and the River* 15). The Grand Master felt their breaths on his face and hands on his throne and he thought he would be choked to death. He wakes up crying “this hill is mine” (Joshi, *The City and the River* 15), something which he has been shouting throughout his dream from the moment he started dreaming their emergence from the river. Even in the dream, the Grand Master sticks to his Great Mother structure of power, and instead of opening up, tries to protect his inhibiting, growth-denying, narcissistic – incestuous, ‘Uroboric’ state of his ego. From now onwards, the city witnesses The Grand Master’s desperate attempts to cling to power and transform the objective reality according to his own idea of its governance.

This leads to an active megalomaniac imposition of the Grand Master’s ‘uroboric’ ego’s narcissism on the city or bringing the entire city within the envelope of his uroboric state of his ego. This is a megalomaniac exercise on Grand Master’s part which would affect the city at the macro level. In Som’s case narcissistic – incestuous regression led his undifferentiated ego to be lost in his Great Mother structure filled by assimilation of deadened objects and therefore in a perpetual state of death in life. In the case of a public figure like the Grand Master, this narcissistic incestuous regression would affect the entire city and turn it into a state of death in life. The Grand Master has turned away from the opening of his self to realities beyond it in his singular pursuit of power as the only meaningful reality for his self. The Grand Master pursues power by deliberately blinding himself to the cosmic “music” (Joshi, *The City and the River* 14) and shunning any signs or signals of emergence for his ego from its pleasurable protected uroboric state. He writes a text for his self in which he shuns his ‘unmanifest’ depths from qualifying his ‘manifest’ reality. According to Lacan a text, in which a transport between ‘the manifest’ and ‘the unmanifest’ does not take place through mental functioning or positioning of self in social relationships, lacks “Repression” and invites textual psychosis. The Grand Master’s pursuit of power involves elaboration of his ‘Uroboric’ state, and not social ‘positions’ of his self, and therefore scripts a psychotic text for his self and its imposition at the macro-level causing a mass neurosis, automatization and destruction to be culminated in the disturbances in the collective psyche of the city represented by the river.

The Grand Master rules the city and in his consciousness there is no deeper reality or higher mode of being except his becoming “The King” (Joshi, *The City and the River* 55). He rules the city through the gimmicks of the master of Rallies, the machination of the minister of Trade who in turn gets power and money through the underhand dealings of Pinstripe and his gang. The Minister of Education and his shock brigades and the police commissioner

are the two sides of the same coin i.e. Grand Master's tools of repression. The Astrologer, who is supposed to be the spiritual Guide for the Grand Master, acts as a chartered spiritualist. He misinterprets the deeper reality for him. There is a prophecy about a "king" returning to his "kingdom" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 8). The Astrologer, instead of enlarging the self of the Grand Master towards his people by opening him up to the spiritual part of the prophecy, acts as a paid seer, who, in order to please the King closes his self altogether towards the spiritual call of the prophecy. Instead of serving as an eye opener towards the call of one's deeper self, the prophecy is absorbed by the Grand Master into his megalomaniac structure of power. It suggests that boatmen, who owe allegiance only to their common spiritual self symbolized by the River, "mourn" in "astronomer's grave", and "the shadows mark", the "city walls" and the harbingers of spiritual reality, "hermit, the parrot, and the teachers die" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 8). The prophecy, as the Hermit says, is open-ended and it suggests that the over ambition to gain power will consume its spiritual saviour, and at the same time act of transgression by the people in power will have their consequences on the city or the macrocosm itself. The Grand Master may become the king but the entire river or the spiritual reality will "burn" and it will rise from "a teacher" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 8), who has regenerated the boatmen by illustrating them with his courage that the king is naked in his pursuit of power.

The absolutism of his megalomaniac is so complete that even in his dream, the Grand Master cannot rise above his megalomaniac self and sacrifice his throne to people who surround him in their "nakedness." In dream too, the Grand Master cries, "The Hill is mine" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 15). The Grand Master has merged his self with his search for power so much that he cannot understand that he is a mere "shadow" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 251) of the ultimate King or the "God" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 262) as Hermit would suggest that he can rule the city only by rising above himself and submitting to the higher reality by first surrendering his ego, "A man aspiring to rule this city must first learn to be the slave of the city" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 113).

But persisting in his megalomania, Grand Master goes on placing his ego or quest for power over everything else. The Astrologer misreads the prophecy for the Grand Master in accordance with his search for power. He suggests that the Grand Master would acquire power by hook or crook and there will not be any revolt in the macrocosm or from the spiritual reality or the River. His search is absolutely psychotic as it involves an absolute suppression of his deeper self as well as the suppression of any outside resistance to his power. In fact, everything else becomes a tool to gain power in his search. Those who resist or try to open his eyes become inconvenient objects to be eliminated. In this search for power, the Grand Master goes on plunging himself and the city into further darkness through his repressive measures which like the declaration of "the Era of Ultimate Greatness" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 79) and coercive "Triple Way" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 21). The festival of the River instead of celebrating the "Immortal time" commits a "sacrilege" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 97) or instead of the River, the king is eulogised: "the king is sung". the Little Star rightly tells Professor, "No shame left in the Seven Hills". The people are continuously oppressed, arrested, kept in dark dungeons and tortured and till the boatman take the oath of the allegiance to the Grand Master, the "dragnet must go on" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 141). "The King is naked" becomes not only the state of the Grand Master's self but also a state of the city. The Generals, Ministers, traders, criminals and media all become a tool of repression and shareholders in the loot of the city. Som regresses into his Great Mother structure but the Grandmaster extends his Great Mother structure to impose it on the entire state and even beyond the physical reality. For him every reality, whether political, religious or spiritual, is subservient to his megalomaniac desire for power. The Astrologer ironically says in the celebration of the River, "Our beloved Grand Master is almost immortal" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 101). The Grand Master too in his megalomania is too willing to believe him. Ironically Grand Master's megalomania has engulfed the entire city, while the Astrologer had hypocritically called him to be a "servant" of it where he was pouring his life as "ahuti" into the "Yajna" (Joshi, *The City and the River* 17) for the welfare of the city. Grand master's megalomania begins, operates and ends with power. His desire for political power is, in fact, an imposition of his absolute will over others absolutely which results not only in the decimation of the grand master and his successors but also in a massive destruction of the entire state/ city ruled by him.

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