

Optional Creative Assignment #1

Once there lived a king in regal Jodhpur¹,
Of great name, he was – Raja² Bahadur³.
His father, was a King, brave and kind too,
Who loved his kingdom and its people too.
But the King died young protecting his realm, 5
And Bahadur was crowned King, to the helm,
Poor orphan was he, for custom and day,
His mother was Sati⁴, to homage pay.
Plunged aghast Jodhpur was in anarchy,
For the loss of its prized monarchy. 10
Only had he Uncle one, of him to care,
For lad Kings need both, guardian and prayer.
In Uncle was his trust, of character
Shady and the bane⁵ of his royal master.
He liked his Uncle but reign didn't so, 15
Who knew him a sly and loathed him so.
They accused him of cabal, of things to say,
But none had proof, if the King he had slay.
Knew nothing of this, our young King, for busy
Was he, acquiring knowledge, no measure easy. 20
Of learning he was astute, mind gifted,
No noble was ever born, or scholar existed,
Who debated with our King undefeated,
And Knights did quiver, when sword he lifted.
Of height he was short and some vision too, 25
But of color was fair, never seen in that loo⁶.

¹ a royal city in Rajasthan, India

² Hindi for King

³ Hindi for brave, heroic

⁴ old, now abolished, custom of a widow burning herself on her husband's funeral pyre

⁵ cause of harm or death

⁶ scorching winds of North-western India

In body he had grown, and so in mind,
And it was time to avenge the crime. Find
The murderer and put him to justice,
Because that was a noble King's practice. 30
Pardon he did not, his traitor Uncle, who
Had borne him to youth from age ten and two,
For crime was committed and punished
Should be the guilty. Uncle was banished,
And the reign rejoiced, for the King had 35
Found light, but didn't retire. Clad
He was not in saffron⁷, instead bright hue,
And wed a nubile belle without royal glue⁸.

⁷ *the color of Lord Buddha's robes*

⁸ *royal glue – royal connections, blue blood*

“Imitation is the highest form of flattery” goes the old adage. I wasn't sure if I believed in it, most probably not, until I was faced with this daunting, yet entertaining Optional Creative Assignment. Chaucer's poetry had a charm and appeal which I could not resist, thus I took up the task of trying to write down the portrait of a person in Chaucerian Iambic pentameter. It was by no means easy. You may have also noted from my first draft that I am in no ways gifted as a poet and had no clue about the meter. But I picked myself up and rephrased the entire 22 lines which I had started off with. Now that I've started talking about the first lines, let me tell you about the 'person' and the theme that I chose. I was born and brought up in India and went to sleep listening to stories of brave Princes who fought and avenged all evil or stories from some mythological epic. Whatever the theme, but the moral of the stories remained the same – “the victory of good over evil” – one of the most important tenets of the Hindu religion.

Thus, my main character is in no way different from any of the Kings and Princes that my grandmother told me stories about. They are heroic and brave, young and handsome, just like “Raja Bahadur”. The poem is set in the city of Jodhpur, one of the most royal cities which still exists in its old grandeur in modern day Rajasthan, India. You may observe from the play of words (or maybe the attempt!) that I’m portraying the splendor of old Indian Kingdoms, rather “Princely States” and also hitting on the malicious traditions and evil that existed during that era. One such practice is the heinous act – “Sati” – in which the widow sits on the funeral pyre along with her dead husband and sacrifices her life, burning alive in the fire. Though once considered spiritual and holy, Sati had become a gambit, in the hands of “Pundits” (religious figures, like priests in Christianity) and greedy family members. In the poem, little Bahadur is as probably a greater victim of Sati, than his mother, as he becomes an orphan. If losing one parent isn’t bad enough, he has to deal with the loss of both! Another very common, yet disturbing, act was the plotting, over-throwing or murder of noble Kings, by lickerish courts men or kin.

There is some Chaucer style twist and paradox in the plot when the orphan King’s uncle is introduced. Though young Bahadur trusts his Uncle, the reader, like the people of the kingdom, is pained to think otherwise and believes that his uncle is the perpetrator of his parent’s death. There is intentional ambiguity, leaving the reader to interpret it the way he or she wants, as Bahadur’s father, the previous King, is said to have died “protecting his realm”. The reader is entitled to his or her own interpretation of that. The reader might also find the part, where Bahadur is shown outwitting other scholars, interesting. It might be interpreted in several ways. Either, that Bahadur is very

intelligent, which then raises a question as to why or how doesn't he figure out that his Uncle plotted the murder of his parents. Another type of reader might think that the scholars loose the battle of wits just to please their King and get rewarded! The description of the King as a short man may not be appealing, but his short sightedness can certainly be seen as a metaphor to his callowness. This also brings into picture the theme of "tragic flaw", which the Hero of every major Epic is suspect to. (Though this is not a "major epic", I tried my best to make it seem one!) Also his fair complexion differentiates him from the darker skinned plebian, but it can also be interpreted as a just and fair King. The ending is left very open too; the reader is free to think what is meant by "justice". It might be thought as bringing back the Kingdom in order or punishing the murderer of the royal family. In the lines where King Bahadur, finds the "light", its not the literal light but light as the truth about his father's murder and also a metaphor for knowledge or enlightenment. The part about the King retiring, is a reference to Lord Buddha, who unlike our Hero (King Bahadur), left his empire in search of enlightenment! The King marrying a "nubile belle" can either be read as a sadistic, sexual act or can be interpreted as a humane act, trying to break the evil caste system that existed during those days in India, which prohibited the mixing, lest marriage, of people of different social orders.

I probably can go on, singing praises for my own composition, but I probably should stop here and let the reader think and not give it all away!