

Career of Ram

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This case study is an anecdotal version of the Chapter 1 - The Career of Ram from the book 'When the Penny Drops: Learning what's Not Taught' by R. Gopalakrishnan, Penguin Books India, New Delhi.

From a phenomenological perspective we get to gaze at the pell-mell of an ordinary man's life. The description absorbs the reader's attention because it renders the ordinary lived experience of a person like it was ink soaked by a blotter. Our consciousness enters another mode of self awareness. It is a subjectivity that transforms into a reflective mode. The text aims to create a dialogic or conversational relation to the reader. At the same time the text creates knowledge that is transformative-plumbing the depth of embodied knowing and the soul and spirit of man.

The text transfers insight into the subtleties of human life and creates a poignant critique of a theory of life. The text prompts the reader to enter into a reflective philosophical dialogue. What strikes us as a singularly unique effect is that the text draws upon an intense phase of professional life, where the person commits to a sustained effort to grow and develop within life constraints, and is busy with the affairs of life. The meaning and significance of this experience for a successful adult is profound. The paradox of missing the trees for the forest is one that bedevils most of us as we negotiate, with the competitive pressure to deliver on the job, and still retain intrinsic meaning and pure joy of living. This method of human science inquiry seeks to put down in writing and textualises human life. In that sense this text attempts to bring research and writing into close contact, however sometimes the effort is fertile while at another point this results into impressionistic work. Researchers and writers belong to two opposed epistemological churches: art versus science. The researcher is essentially a methods person and although the essence of research is passionate and creative but the writer refutes that version vehemently because he finds his writing to be an act committed out of love; the writer is an anarchist, a rebel who challenges

every dogma held sacrosanct by tradition. He has his opposition to the researcher's methodology, the touchstone of systematic, regulated inquiry. The human science researcher is seen as someone who sits in an ivory tower, isolated he philosophizes, subject to the rigor of logic and rationality. In contrast the literary domain requires another kind of intense discipline where there is a method to madness too!

The avowed aim of textualizing lived experience in the form of linguistics is to externalize the internal; makes some aspects of the lived experience meaningfully sensible, understandable, and intelligible. In the act of writing there is reflection and thinking. Writing then becomes a transformative experience. The written work carries the signature and soul of the writer. In that sense writing then becomes self-making because it helps one to measure depth of the phenomena dealt as well as extending the depth of his being. In a sense writing disembodies what was embodied-unless written we do not know what we know. Writing then is an act of simultaneously producing fusion and fission, separation and togetherness.

This dialectical construction opens the life-world and also closes it. In Ram's life we discover the existential structure of experience and this reconciles the dialectics of inside and outside. Writing also creates the gap between us and the world where the subjectivity of experience contributes to the objectification of reflective awareness. In the space of reading and reflecting comes a moment of deepened understanding of the significance of certain realities of the world we live in; as a professional from a middle class background we struggle tenaciously to carve out a niche for ourselves and that struggle involves moments of victories and defeats, ultimately ending our lives with a whimper. We never get to the goal that we had aspired for due to several reasons - shifting goals shaped by exigencies of life and the constrained choices leave us with a bad taste because we got to love what life offered us, or better said still" make the best of what you have". The act of living is

so intensely involving that we hardly get time or the inclination to remove ourselves from the practical immediacy of making a living. Ram is no exception to this lived experience. He has his shares of ups and downs. He could not have forgotten his context or disregarded the social, psychological, and economic context; in other words he cannot have transcended the din and bustle of life. Only a writer has that privilege of bringing that distance between living and life to gain a deeper sense of the meanings embedded in life experience.

However the act of reading a written text also helps to offset that disadvantage to some extent because the reader can reflect and live a more reflective praxis. Language to be meaningful has to be descriptive but logical contradictions rob language of its descriptive power. Bertrand Russell's "Theory of Logical Types" asserts that statements at one logical level make reference to only things that belong to lower logical level to overcome circularity of self-reference. The world is abstracted when we write and surprisingly it still helps us to understand life and world. Writing produces the essence out of concreteness. Language as its vehicle creates that story which moves, shakes and compels, stirring people emotionally and mobilizing action as the epitome of lived life. In this story we face an abstraction and intellectualization of lived life. Yet it powerfully conveys the deep engagement with life so much so that we emotionally and psychologically grasp intuitively that we are least prepared for death, the ultimate significant event that brings closure and reveals meaning - a paradox that is evoked powerfully by lived life of Ram.

Misery brings forth a feeling of being majestic deep inside the solitary soul. Amidst the darkest path of the journey of life, it empowers illuminating the torch of pride inside. It is that driving force, which keeps one moving ahead towards reaching the summit. Time comes to a screeching halt - recreation of past leads to regeneration of future. Self is torn apart, remade and reborn in an enterprise of adaptive response to vicissitudes of life. The text reflects Ram's character. His dreams were neither a mere minute optical illusion of a sub-conscious state, nor a bequest. The dream was

not about satisfying the most precious desires; it was to carry forward the torch of pride ahead of time - the making of the ego. The motive is not to realize the objective reality, but to visualize the life as "I am". Ram has been symbolized as a representative of dreamers by the writer. The text provokes the arising, awakening, and achieving of one's soul. Life is a battle and many avoid the churning of existential angst. Pride motivates one not to be bogged down by the obstacles. It pushes one step more towards dreams that elude his grasp inflicting psychological scars. Sense of achievement exponentially raises the hope of visualizing the future in an endless cycle of desire and grasping. The writer has drawn an ordinary character, named Ram, but whose unfulfilled dreams now need to be existentially integrated while living with the sense of disillusionment at a dream turned sour. One can taste the unshed tears of sorrow and joy at the same time - the paradox of life is thus explained in the text.

The text objectifies thought but at the same time subjectifies our understanding. It produces the writer's idea and his question of what is truly a successful life. The text confronts the consciousness of the reader and the interplay of the inner and outer world is poignantly rendered: the perfect against the imperfect, the ideal against the real. While writing about Ram's career the writer has constructed several layers of meaning but has retained the sense of ambiguity which confronts us and forces us to make sense of what kind of contact are we making with the world?

What is the character of this narrative form? This anecdotal form of story has a rhetorical quality that qualifies it to be called a poetic fragment - a four inch of ivory. It is so because in the form of Ram it narrates an interesting, biographical incident in the life of an ordinary human being that remains "unpublished". Epistemologically speaking an anecdote is one where we cannot grasp the essence of a subject and we look at it essentially from the outside. An anecdote may not qualify to be a proper argument and it would be fallacious to generalize from one case of Ram. But empirical generalization is not the purpose of hermeneutic phenomenological research. Anecdotes must not be discounted because it is not factual-empirical. Anecdotes

are poetic narratives that describe a universal truth. Its power to contribute in knowledge construction is unexplored as yet. It is a sensitive portrayal of wisdom and truth because we can see what is possible and what is impossible in this world. Ram is an exemplary character because his life is an anecdotal representation or message of a deeply sensed truth that otherwise cannot be put into words easily. Paradoxically anecdotes convey particular message from the universal as is done in this story.

The message of the text needed a format that could engage the natives of the digital world where identities are vicarious and shifting. This digital native needs anecdotes that can allow him to see things which otherwise he could have missed because of declining

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attention for the written word. The challenge for the writer is to engage them in a conversational manner a mode of existence that can awaken him to the kind of dialogue he is making with life. In that sense anecdotes function well because it makes the reader relate to himself in unique ways. By importing the lived experience of Ram, the writer situates his relation and responsibility in a practical way as we do in our mundane life. In that sense this research has the pedagogical objective of teaching how one ought to live and act and why lives lived with practical intent is necessary but not sufficient. In Ram we have the practical and concrete particular anecdotal illustration of what is the meaning of a career that we are negotiating!

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