

**ANIL K. SHARMA'S *LUCKY LADY* & K. L. ZAKIR'S  
*KARMAVALI* - A VIGOUR OF HUMAN RELATIONS IN  
DAYS OF PARTITION**

**- POONAM DWIVEDI  
INDIA**

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**Abstract**

*Padamshri K. L. Zakir has originally written Karmavali in Urdu and Anil K. Sharma has transcreated the novel as Karmavali–The Lucky Lady, in its entire sensitivity and soul. Karmavali, the novel deals with pathos of partition, has all the tools and techniques which a reader can imagine in his/her mindfulness for a mesmerizing fiction. The dialogues, parables, monologues, soul-colloquies of the author and reminiscence of the past events arouse nostalgia. Karmo grows and becomes Karmavali a married woman, a mother and later a widow, which shows the journey of human relations in many sojourns. This novel is a landmark in the history of Asian Literature and deals with the pathos of a mother-son living on both sides of the border of Hindustan and Pakistan – having their sealed destinies with the unwarranted partition of the country, and forced to accept their destiny i.e. never to meet again. All the characters in the novel, whether they are Hindu or Siks and Muslim, they all have distinguished manners which tells the tale of their peculiar characterization. Karmavali is not a fiction but a treatise written by a traveler, who saw the infamous “Train to India” and “Train to Pakistan” – both the trains, had heaps of human bodies with oozing blood from the compartments.*

**Key Words: Partition, Pathos, Parochialism, Bigotry, Haplessness, Violence, peace, Co-existence.**

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“Animals also miss their old habitat.”- A subtle suggestion in the beginning of the novel predicts its pathos of partition of the country, families and human relations. “ME- the lady with luck- Karmavali is my name.”<sup>1</sup> -- thus begins the episode of Karmavali- snaking its path through the rural footpaths, streets of towns, highways, railway platforms, and bylanes of refugee camps, rows of graveyards dotting the sub-continent and rows of tears dotting the human face.

Padamshri K. L. Zakir now has more than 130 books to his credit till date, but once he said in an interview published in ‘Contemporary Vibes’ debut issue of July, 2005- “I rate Karmavali to be the best which has been written – to quote Khwaja Ahmad Abbas- “Not authored with ink only; but penned with tears of humanity.”

The National School of Drama, New Delhi adapted Karmavali into a full length Play and Staged it about hundred times throughout India. It was also serialized in play-telecast by Doordarshan from its different channels. The Lucky Lady (Karmavali) was serialized in the Contemporary Vibes with its inception in August 2005 and it continued for more than Three Years without any break in total 15 installments. The popularity, it enjoyed, was beyond the imagination of its Transcreator and Editor Anil K. Sharma. The flow of the novel, its contents, its meaning and message has been carried forward with proactive approach. A vigorous emotional pathos originated in its Urdu version and it got translated in many languages- but its English transcreation has introduced the great living literary legend to wide range of Indian English fiction readers and writers. <sup>2</sup> Anil K. Sharma writes in Preface to the

Transcreation that “the meaning is usually lost in the translations; but still the masterpieces authored by the masters of fiction, have to be introduced to readers of the other languages; a humble attempt has been made by me in this regard. Karmavali. The novel has all the tools and techniques- flowers and flavours, which a reader can imagine in his/her mindfulness for a mesmerizing fiction.

Tools and Techniques in Plotting of the Novel: To understand the novel and its author, I would refer to his honest and candid confession of writing the last pages of the novel first and then approaching the ending with slow and steady pace of dialogues, parables, monologues, soul-colloquies of the author and reminiscence of the past events to arouse nostalgia. Sometimes nostalgic reminiscences repetitively made by the author agitate the reader but these provide infallible link to the story. K.L. Zakir- a master craftsman of prose says-

I write the last pages of the novel first- ending the same. Now I know my destination- I reach my destination through the paths, subways and terrains but never forget the destination- ending of the novel. The buzz word is the wounds of sensitivity and emotional climaxes in your life. Let us have a look at the ending of the novel which is unique in its pathos, because it includes blessings to humanity: “All may be bestowed with blessings in their homes.” It reverberates the love of a woman for her husband- may be deceased- “Faiza! My mendicant, my lover, my lord!” The posturisation of a pious and devout lady in her demise could not be better which has been presented by the author- “I have closed my eyes and my head bowed in reverence and hands in prayer.” The places treaded by the saints do become hallowed and sacrosanct but a commoners grave can be so eulogized by the author is marvellous in its description with light and fragrance- “Chak No.240 graveyard has no darkness all graves are lit with the light of the lamp of Faiza’s grave. Angels are showering flowers on graves of all.

In my opinion, ‘sensitivity and universality’ are the two touchstones to appraise any novel of substance because in the insensitive world only

parochialism rules the roost. Any treatise woven with the fabric of intense human emotions, which too, positive- one can make out that it is worth reading and deserves critical appreciation. To quote two lines, it becomes crystal clear that milk of human kindness flows in every vein:

“Who believe in religion of humanity- which has red blood in its veins to be transfused to any human being in distress; and white milk to be fed to any babe in distraught.” 5

A Post-Colonial Treatise Par-excellence: Karmavali is a post-colonial treatise but it is definitely shadowed by the colonial vagaries of partition which witnessed its hydra across the geographical boundaries of Asia, East Europe and Balkanisation of countries on political lines. The novel is:

“engulfed in a red storm- blowing away the feminine modesty of mannerism- but unfazed woman Karmavali, still maintains her dignity amidst the tearful adieu on both sides of the border. The reverential references to the icons of theology have special mention to avoid the bigotry to hijack the sensitive subjectivity of the novel. Subtle tools of refinery and finesse have injected a neo-progressive element of critical appreciation of historicity in fiction writing.” 6

The nicknames like Karmo suggest the rustic as well as well-kitted family bonds prevalent in both sides of Punjab i.e. in India and Pakistan. Karmo grows and becomes Karmavali, a married woman, a mother and later a widow, thus, the journey of human relations has many sojourns. The ending of the novel is in consonance with the spirit of the beginning. In the end, Karmavali’s soliloquy remembers all the character in her life, and the writer is suggestive of the reminder to the reader to recall the entire persona and their respective performing art:

“I am pouring oil in the lamps and chanting name of Khushia, Fatima and Javed and remembering Natha Singh granthi and JameetKaur, who picked up my son from a street and gave

shelter, protection of four walls and gave instructions to stick to his faith; and Guru Nanak's high ideals of friendship were maintained; SaiKutubudeen is in front of my eyes who gave such a nice girl like Fatima to Khushia and refined his forlorn life. My eyes are on Ramsaran and his wife Ratno, who kept safe my house as an entrustment; and they, in rains, kept intact the falling walls of the house." 7

Anil K. Sharma has transcreated the novel in its entire sensitivity and soul. The dialogue and monologue have kept their intrinsic meaningfulness without allowing the translation to eat vitals of the author's inevitable message of humanity:

"I am not bothered with the darkness of night and fast blowing winds; I am feeling as if the blaze of lamp burning on the grave of Faiza has been converted into a big blazing flame and its light has spread far and wide and towering to the sky. And with the fast and clear light, the borders of the world at large are enclosing in each other and the world is lit large with light. No border, no wall, no ditch, no gorge- all have melted into a pot of light. The whole creation is sinking in that light and bathing in that light- a new- a very long bridge is touching two sides far and wide and it is connecting one hemisphere of the earth with another." 8

The reviewer has deftly remarked:

"A landmark in the history of Asian Literature- a beacon to the literature of humanity- a message of universality has been given through the pathos of a mother- son living on both sides of the border of Hindustan and Pakistan- having their sealed destinies with the unwarranted partition of the country- the twain of tears destined never to meet again!" 9

Karmo also suggests her childhood as one has be called by nickname and not

addressed by the sophistry of famous name. All the characters in the novel, whether they are Hindu or Sikh and Muslim, they all have distinguished names to tell the tale of their peculiar characterization. Master Mooliram has a low profiling and shows not high calibre of an intellectual because the character is embedded in realism and shown to be teaching in a dilapidated village primary school where dogs rest and truant children seldom attend classes. The characterization of a Sikh priest is shown to be high in esteem as well as that of a Maulvi guarding a mazar of Shah. But the elopement of another Muslim priest with the partition and his sordid stories circulated across charms and boon promised to barren women, speak volumes about the hollowness of façade of religiosity.

We come across fragrant flowers and flavours in characterization. Small is beautiful, so are short sentences. The meaning of 'brevity is wit' has been reverberated in the pages of the novel. Sometimes long sentences tend to become loose and didactic, but the author has kept all such vagaries under check. To illustrate, I quote a few short sentences at the end of the novel, which are highly inflammable as these are doused and charged in human emotions:

"Today is Friday.

Last Friday, I was in Hindustan,

Last Friday, I lit lamp at the tomb of Shahchappu in Siswan village,  
and I had with me Khushia, Fatima and Javed.

Today again, it is Friday.

Now I am in Pakistan.

And in Chak- 240 graveyard,  
lighting a lamp- not on some mendicant's grave.

But on Faiza-mendicant's grave.

And now I have no one with me,  
not Khushia, not Fatima, not Javed.

I am alone- totally alone.

And night is very dark

And wind is blowing fast.

And my lamp has not much oil.  
The lamp is full to the brim  
I am sitting by side of the grave." 10

The 'pouring of mustard oil' is nothing but a feeling of keeping one's self alive with the breathing. Fast blowing winds do symbolize the communal atmosphere around one's self making the human existence difficult. The burning lamp at Faiza's grave symbolized the remembrance of our dear ones. The oil is 'dripping drop by drop' - life is evaporating and vitality is vanishing, but in the second line, the author assures that 'the lips' of the protagonist, a frail and old lady Karmavali 'are blessing all known and unknown people; who are engrossed in building and strengthening the small bridges of human relationship; and who don't think within the borders and think beyond the countries and families and religions.

Karmavali's gait and charming personality has been narrated by the author in the middle of the novel. Even the attraction browbeats her friend Teji's beauty which is also descriptive in detail.

Teji laughed again fervently.

"Your laughter is very attractive."

"Am I not attractive?"

"You are also loving and beautiful."

"But less than you. You are unparalleled Karmo, no Muslim girl is as beautiful as you are."

"You are a liar."

"If Faizdeen divorces you, Santokh would keep you in his house, I am speaking truth."

Now I laughed full throated.

"Your laughter is very loving."

Teji said all this; and in the meanwhile some women from her neighbourhood came there across, she parted away.

"Come sometimes, to our house."

"I fear Santokha."



I whispered in her ear while gliding her body towards me.<sup>11</sup>

The tender gliding of female's lean-waist and whispering may send signals of romance to the people of any age as short talk of Teji-Karmo reveals, but the author never forgets to portray the seriousness of other aspects of life which are gruesome, awesome and fearsome. Anil K. Sharma writes in his review:

"The inputs of romance, highhandedness, lewd eyes, corruption, morality and immorality, crime and punishment syndrome, moneyed people and poor people, tradition and its wreckage, high and low postures of politics, common people's point of view, rural scenario in picturesque mannerism, refugee camping- a vivid account, the caravans of biggest migration of minority and majority people alike" <sup>12</sup>

The sordid picture painted by the author of the eventual mishaps and reprehensible actions due to partition could not be separated from the orgy of outraging the modesty of womanhood. It has been boisterous and erotically narrated by the author to arouse revulsion: "If at all- Teji had been uprooted like me, a constable of Jhelam at the Lahore Railway station itself would have abducted her and Santokh would have been looking hapless. And if she would have reached the Camp by escaping the clutches of the police constables and military personnel by all means, and then the big car alighters, who appeared to be benevolent, bringing sweets and clothes, would have taken her to their big bungalows and would have filled the cup of her womb with whole hearted alms to the brim till it would have overflowed and out-turned the alms."

Ingenuity and optimistic brainwaves sweep the pathos of the author, who relate the wars fought between India and Pakistan in just few lines and its aftermath could find place in few words but with much impact due its brevity and sagacity. The author says:

"One more battle ensued.  
Some more people died.  
Some more people widowed.



Some more orphaned.  
Some more homes devastated." 13

Only a person of deep understanding could strongly feel and digest the wars and its devastating sequels, but without inflaming the sentiments of the reader, the author has successfully attempted to consolidate the human relations based on love and affection. The propaganda of war mongers has been belied, the hateful anecdotes have been reduced to ashes in the novel to build impregnable castles of faith and trust.

"The warring forces tried to blow up the bridge of human relations, so that by blasting those bridge, the distances and differences could result in wider gulfs of distrust; the lamps placed in the hands of the people standing on either side might have extinguished especially for those who had been looking for their near and dear ones since long time.

But warring forces have little life span, and their desired things never happen.

But again darkness vanished. Sky cleared of all blemished patches. Sun sparkled its shining fire and the water flowing underneath the bridges of human relations again became crystal clear surfaced its piety. And again light had vanquished the darkness and again falsity died because death is the fate of that falsity." 14

A thoroughly gentle and seasoned soul had the experience of decades and had seen the experiments with peace process, their failure and successes in the past. But the optimism of ushering peace at all costs makes him to react:

"Shri Kashmiri LalZakir admits that he has not lived life; he has suffered life all these nine long decades. He has tried to build bridges of human relationships throughout his life and wish the people of both the countries to forget the wars of yesteryears and welcome each other as they have been doing from centuries." 15

He is hopeful and optimistic, thus, says:

Ye aur baat hai ke aage – hawa ke rakhe hain  
Charaag jitney bhi rakhe- jala ke rakhe hain.  
(No matter- lamps are placed in front of the winds  
All wicks are in flames – whatever may be the number.)

A bridge of soothing sound and dawning light flashes at the end of the novel- in fact, a bridge of human relations starts building from the inception of the novel. Ramsaran remains there till the end to make sure that distrust must not creep in to eat the vitals of human bond. Hindu Muslim bonding can be witnessed in such relationship which is full of sound and light. A few dialogue would suffice to uphold the point of leaving the motherland, its lump of sacred soil and the impelled departure against volition:

And after that Faiza clasped Ramsaran with his heart and tears rolled down his cheeks. Ramsaran spoke in a choked voice –

“Sister Karmo! Have faith in God, you will come back soon-  
may be in few days time.” 16

My eyes became wet and I collected a handful lump of brown soil from the last post of our fields and tied it safely in my loincloth.

“What are you doing Karmo?” Faiza wept profusely.  
“I am carrying my destiny with me.” 17

The author knows very well that it is not the innocent populace on both sides of the warring groups that is interested in partition of the country, but it is the vested interests of the political class to capture power at all costs. Anil K. Sharma in his review has rightly remarked that “Focusing his laser beams on both sides of the border created by the politicians and theologians; he quotes Iqbal in his novel Karmaivali once to highlight the hapless-public amidst the rising tempers of such bigots”

“Spirituality smacked a spell;  
And rulers were the magicians.” 18

A commemorative skillful prophetic verse uttered by the author sums up the whole episode of partition. Karmavali is not a fiction but a treatise written by a traveler, who saw the infamous “Train to India” and “Train to Pakistan” - both the trains had heaps of human bodies with oozing blood from the compartments. Padamshri Kashmiri LalZakir relates his tale of tormented life-spans and sojourns, which have been penned out to ease his pent-up emotions: It is for the posterity to judge and abide self-restraint and respect for human values; and adopt the path of peaceful co-existence:

“Voh chalajayega zakhmon ki tijarat karke,  
Mudaton shahar me us shaksh ka charcha hoga.” 19

(He will leave the scene after selling his wounds; For times to come- city be agog with his tell-tales.)

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