

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 12 : 10 October 2012

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

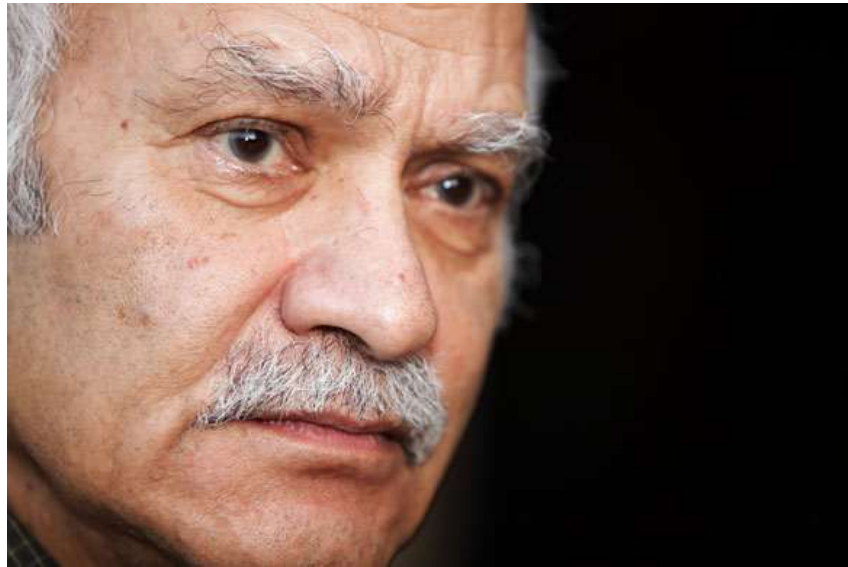
G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Assistant Managing Editor: Swarna Thirumalai, M.A.

The Crisis of Contemporary Indian Identity With Reference to Zulfikar Ghose's "Decomposition"

S. Selvalakshmi, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate



Zulfikar Ghose

Courtesy: <http://www.newslinemagazine.com/2011/07/interview-zulfikar-ghose-2/>

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

S. Selvalakshmi, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

The Crisis of Contemporary Indian Identity With Reference to Zulfikar Ghose's
"Decomposition"

Zulfikar Ghose, a Multi-faceted Creative Writer

Literature is indeed the most explicit record of the human spirit. It is a medium which the essence of our living is made paramount by linking it to imaginative experience. A creative writer has the perception and the analytic mind of a sociologist who provides an exact record of life, society and social system. Zulfikar Ghose is one such creative writer. Zulfikar Ghose is a novelist, poet and essayist. He records human's happiness and worries in his simple language through various forms of literature. A native of Pakistan who has long lived in Texas, he writes in the surrealist mode of much Latin American fiction, blending fantasy and harsh realism. While teaching and writing in London from 1963-1969, Ghose also free-lanced as a sports journalist, reporting on cricket for a sport journal "The Observer". (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zulfikar_Ghose)

Zulfikar's Works

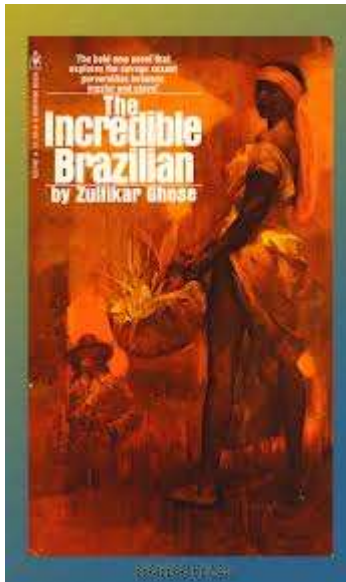
The Loss of India (1964) and Jets From Orange (1965) are his two collections of his poetry published during this period. The Contradictions (1966) and The Murder of Aziz Khan (1969) are his first two novels published in the same period. The Contradictions explores differences between Western and Eastern attitudes and ways of life. In the 1970s, Ghose gained international repute with his trilogy The Incredible Brazilian, which American writer Thomas Berger called "a picaresque prose epic of Brazilian history" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zulfikar_Ghose)

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

S. Selvalakshmi, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

The Crisis of Contemporary Indian Identity With Reference to Zulfikar Ghose's
"Decomposition"



Infused with Realism, Magic-realism, etc.

Often experimental in form and theme, Ghose's works are infused with realism, magic-realism, metaphor, symbolism, and allegory to create a metaphysical reality. He frequently employs mimetic strategies within his writing to force the reader to re-examine the purpose of the text. Ghose implicitly challenges the reader to acknowledge that storyline and language are secondary to a piece of writing and are merely tools for the author manipulates to convey his message. His works often express the viewpoint of a culturally alienated individual and relates not only to his own sense of displacement from his homeland, but suggests a wider response to life in a post-colonial society.

(<http://www.enotes.com/Zulfikar-ghose-criticism/ghose-Zulfikar.>)

Marginalization and the Poem “Decomposition”

In sociology, marginalization is the social process of becoming or being relegated to the fringe of society. Marginalization at the individual level results in an individual's exclusion from meaningful participation in the society All the people have legacy in their life. They can't take anything with them when they're dead. Regret can bury any man's

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

S. Selvalakshmi, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

The Crisis of Contemporary Indian Identity With Reference to Zulfikar Ghose's
“Decomposition”

regardless strength. At the end of days, they find themselves standing at judgment with their life's work in ruins at their feet. Don't be left with empty hands. Realize the potential now and not after the ten years. All the people in the world get only one time to live the wonderful life so they must not regret they must try to do only valiant effort.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_exclusion)

In the poem “Decomposition” the poet takes the central theme as marginalization of a beggar and the social responsibility for an individual towards the society.

The Text of the Poem

Here below is the poem reproduced only for an analysis here:

DECOMPOSITION

Zulfikar Ghose

**I have a picture I took in Bombay
of a beggar asleep on the pavement:
grey-haired, wearing shorts and a dirty shirt,
his shadow thrown aside like a blanket.**

**His arms and legs could be cracks in the stone,
routes for the ants' journeys, the flies' descents,
Brain-washed by the sun into exhaustion,
he lies veined into stone, a fossil man.**

**Behind him there is a crowd passingly
bemused by a pavement trickster and quite
indifferent to this very common sight**

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

S. Selvalakshmi, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

The Crisis of Contemporary Indian Identity With Reference to Zulfikar Ghose's
“Decomposition”

of an old man asleep on the pavement.

**I thought it then a good composition
and glibly called it "The Man in the Street,"
remarking how typical it was of
India that the man in the street lived there.**

**His head in the posture of one weeping
into a pillow chides me now for my
presumption at attempting to compose
art of his hunger and solitude.**

The Picture

Zulfikar Ghose writes the poem *Decomposition* in the first person narrating form and also in a thought-provoking manner. The poem tells the readers about Ghose's personal experience of a photograph he took during his visits in India. The photograph pictures an elderly beggar man who lives on the street of Bombay. The picture gets engraved in his heart and by its impression he writes the poem to make an alarm to the society. In India it is common to find beggars at rubbish dumps, road sides and under flyovers. The problem of beggary is a social problem of great magnitude and grave concern in developing countries. Begging is a problem for society. When there is large number of beggars means non-utilization of available human resources and drag upon the existing resources of the society.

The Title

The title is a negative connotation of decomposing or dying. The poet uses the same content in explaining the condition of the beggar. The old beggar man is living in a

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

S. Selvalakshmi, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

The Crisis of Contemporary Indian Identity With Reference to Zulfikar Ghose's
"Decomposition"

pathetic condition as he is “asleep on the pavement: grey-haired, wearing shorts and a dirty shirt...” The important motive for the poet is to bring out the pathetic condition of the beggar man who is living with a permanent poverty. The beggar man has permanent poverty in his life because he is not only getting money but also the considerable kindness, love and affection from the people. The poet uses the word “Shadow” in the fourth line as a simile for a blanket which let the readers believe the beggar lives on the street. These words prove that there is no developing measure has been taken for the beggar to get rid of his poverty and also to have a change in his life.

([http://imaad.info/Imaad_Isaacs_Foundation/BTG_-_Grade_12_English_Resources_files/Decomposition%20Textual%20Analysis%20\(TTC\).pdf](http://imaad.info/Imaad_Isaacs_Foundation/BTG_-_Grade_12_English_Resources_files/Decomposition%20Textual%20Analysis%20(TTC).pdf))

Concern for Other Human Beings

As a human being the narrator concerns very much for another human being’s poor condition. He feels sad for the beggar man’s condition because he is lying like cracks in a stone. He is looking just like lines in the ground. The line is becoming “routes for the ant’s journeys, the flies’ descents”. The line describes is an individual’s life which is marginalised by the whole society. He is becoming a “fossil” and a dead impression for the future history of the country. The poet has used the word “fossil” very particularly in the poem to describe the beggar man’s condition. He is going to remain like a prehistoric animal that has hardened into the society which is like a rock. The old beggar is becoming hardened day by day in the selfish mankind. He is creating a dead impression for the future history of the country. ([http://imaad.info/Imaad_Isaacs_Foundation/BTG_-_Grade_12_English_Resources_files/Decomposition%20Textual%20Analysis%20\(TTC\).pdf](http://imaad.info/Imaad_Isaacs_Foundation/BTG_-_Grade_12_English_Resources_files/Decomposition%20Textual%20Analysis%20(TTC).pdf))

Self-centred Present Generation

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

S. Selvalakshmi, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

The Crisis of Contemporary Indian Identity With Reference to Zulfikar Ghose’s “Decomposition”

Ghose brings out the real self-centered characters of present generation. People just walk on by him not having any thought to help the poor man or to bring a positive change in his life. The poet regrets not only for the beggar man but also for the people who do not have the basic human quality. All the people who walk around the beggar man do not think that they are seeing another person like them with sufferings. Nowadays people think only about their life and their attitudes are self-centered so they “bemired” by the beggar man’s condition. The author painfully states the beggar is poor without money but the people around him have all the health and wealth in their life but still they are poor without the basic human quality.

Portraying Contemporary India

Ghose states that the poem is a good composition about contemporary India because it pictures the twentieth century’s people’s attitude before the reader. India has negative aspects like the beggar man living all over the country with its positive, unmatched history and heritage. People call him just “The Man in the street” with uncaring attitude. The poet feels sad for the Indian people because seeing beggar all around the world is very common but seeing a beggar man in India without getting proper attention and consideration from Indian people is not good for the society. All the Indian ethics say the importance of charity and the Indians have the belief that they must give little part of their earning to the charitable needs. But in the poem *Decomposition* the poet brings out how people are callous and immune to the suffering of the old beggar man. They just see him as a man in the street and not seeing him as a man who is struggling lot to keep his life within him. He might be a noted by people when he is a valuable non-living thing. They are not interested to show any attention towards a person without money. They think that they are wasting their time when they take some valuable measures for these people’s welfare. (http://imaad.info/Imaad_Isaacs_Foundation/BTG_-

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

S. Selvalakshmi, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

The Crisis of Contemporary Indian Identity With Reference to Zulfikar Ghose’s “Decomposition”

The Beggar's Posture

In concluding the poem, the poet pictures the beggar's posture as "His head in the posture of one weeping", which makes the poet think the beggar is like a child longing for little kindness from the people who move around him. The beggar feels marginalized because he is poor considered to be low social status and viewed as being less human than others. Sometimes, marginalized person views his pitiable condition with hostility and fear.

This sense of difference and exclusion leads to communities not having access to resources and opportunities and in their inability to assert their rights. They experience sense of disadvantage and powerlessness vis-à-vis more powerful and dominant sections of society who own land, are wealthy, better educated and politically powerful. Thus, marginalization is seldom experienced in one sphere. Economic, social, cultural and political factors work together to make certain groups in the society like the beggar feel marginalized. The old beggar man is having very inferior thought that inferiority makes him to be quite like a worm. He no needs fight with the people but he must have struggled to get rid of poverty from his life to some. He must have fought with his life to get his self-respect. He must have proved to the people that he is becoming a positive fossil for the country's history.

The Tourist and the Artist

Zulfikar Ghose takes the photograph in a tourist point of view and with the artistic nature the poet composes art out of hunger and solitude. When he notices that the elderly beggar is under going with a crucial pain and distress in his life. He feels guilty for making art out in pain and suffering of a person. It brings about the realization that instead of

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

S. Selvalakshmi, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

The Crisis of Contemporary Indian Identity With Reference to Zulfikar Ghose's
"Decomposition"

looking at someone and finding amusement out of their lower class, one should rather think about some meaningful ways to help the suffering and to do that people must act according to one's own thought. The poem opens the reader eyes and has given an important thought that one should never allow ourselves to become callous and immune to the suffering of the others. The poet at last stresses that everybody deserves to be treated with respect.

References

1. <http://www.enotes.com/zulfikar-ghose-criticism/ghose-zulfikar>
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zulfikar_Ghose
3. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Inspirational-quotes-poems-and-sayings/110055315681404>
4. [http://imaad.info/Imaad_Isaacs_Foundation/BTG_-_Grade_12_English_Resources_files/Decomposition%20Textual%20Analysis%20\(TTC\).pdf](http://imaad.info/Imaad_Isaacs_Foundation/BTG_-_Grade_12_English_Resources_files/Decomposition%20Textual%20Analysis%20(TTC).pdf)
5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_exclusion

S. Selvalakshmi, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Karpagam University
Coimbatore 641 021
Tamilnadu
India
selva.lakshmi85@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

S. Selvalakshmi, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

The Crisis of Contemporary Indian Identity With Reference to Zulfikar Ghose's
"Decomposition"