

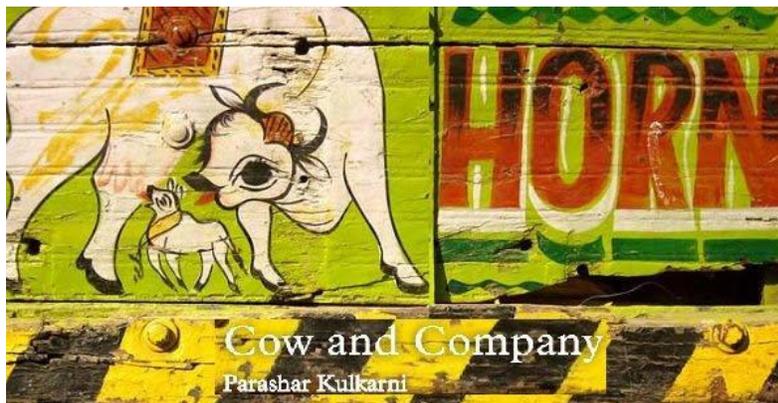
COW AND COMPANY

Author: Parashar Kulkarni
Winner of the 2016
Commonwealth Short Story
Prize

BOOK REVIEW BY MUHAMMAD SHAFIQ PAHAT

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Currently, an undisputed reward goes to India in English Literature. Star - Favoured (lucky), Parashar Kulkarni is the first Indian who has been granted “*Common Wealth Short Story Prize*” on his first and the only Charismatic short story – Cow and Company. The most interesting thing



is that this story defeats 4000 other entries and sweeps success in its credit. It covers the whole religious mentality of polytheistic culture with the possible economy of words. But here Cow “*Mata*” is the real subject of the interest of the writer who

critically and skillfully handles it. While reading this short story, it seems that Kulkarni knows surprisingly how to employ literary devices – irony, satire and humour – to explore his hidden intentions about a large cast and their way of life.

A deep insight into the handling of the story, undoubtedly, reminds Chaucer’s “*Canterbury Tales*” where the father of English takes effectively the techniques of “*laughing with*” instead of “*laughing at*” in exploring the company of pilgrims. Here, it can firmly be claimed that this budding short story writer has nothing malicious and objectionable against cow and cow – worshipers but he successfully highlights how pundits and clerics exploit the chaste and pure faith of innocent masses for their vested interests. It must be kept in view, it is not only the

tragedy of Hindus but, it also persists in every religious society. Corruption, that is deep-rooted in the class that is the flag bearer of faith and fraternity, has been the question of all ages. Consciously and unconsciously, Kulkarni wants to be free from the shackles of rigidity and intolerance of religious masters. So his story is a voice against such attitude.

“*Cow And Company*” is set in India back in 1900s. It follows four men – Office Manager, Junior Officer, Accountant and Office Assistant – looking for a mascot to present in their advertisement for chewing gum. When the managing director of this chewing company asks what the caption of the advertisement should, the other unanimously replies “*Jo Matta ko bhatta – the chewing gum the mother loves*”. When the manager doubts this advertising title, the man assures him: “*You can trust me on this, Sir. I have spent quite a bit of time on this subject. What better way to get the natives to love our chewing gum than to link it to the cow? The cow chews all the day long. All Hindus love cows. If we use her on our chewing posters, they will love our chewing gum*”.

Adventurously, the cow is found by employees in due time. The whole episode of finding, catching, roping, dragging and pushing her up – stairs is a laughter igniting one. The reader can't choose but laugh. She urinates and her excursion spoils the dressing of one of local employees. Assistant ironically utters on two different occasions. “*You people eat it, don't you?*” and when she urinates, Assistant says, “*It's OK for you. You people drink this, don't you?*” Throughout the story, assistant becomes a laugh store.

When a Pundit is refused to pay “*Puja*” offering, he manipulates the cow on the poster saying his followers: “*The foreigners have no respect for our values. How can we talk about non – violence when our cows are eaten openly. That foreign product has cow's intestine. See how shamefully they advertise. What are you doing about it? Wearing bangles?*” This pundit raises mutiny against foreign – established chewing company. His revolt brings a would - be - flourishing company down.

In brief, it can safely be concluded that religion can be exploited without firm certainty against any person, idea or state. Therefore pundit goes to the Muslim Mutiny of 1857 to egg on the burning emotions of people. While sermon, he says: “*What did the Muslims do when they found their cartridges greased with fat? The 1857 Mutiny!*” Gillian Slovo, chair the judging panel, said that in his short story, “*Parashar has conjured up a large cast their way of life, and at the same*

time he has succeeded in exploring serious issues in a way that can make us laugh. And all of this in a few thousand words". No doubt it is a story of worth reading.

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