

Indian Culture and Infatuation for Power in “Rahul Sankrityayan’s *From Volga to Ganga*”

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Abstract – *From Volga to Ganga by Rahul Sankrityayan is a collection of twenty stories dealing with the contemporary social scenario. The book shows people's avarice to power which doesn't imply the only chair but it alludes towards many forms of power. Longing for power is not confine to the male rather it is the desire of human's heart, bound not to particular sex, age, place, religion or caste. If a person grows ambitious or greedy for the power, he tries his best to achieve it either by hook or by crook. Although Volga to Ganga covers a huge range of people, periods and places yet this paper focuses on how a person understands the value of something when it starts to slip from his hands. Many times, its impact is so deep that it blinds the person to such an extent that he doesn't want to see the consequences and its dark side. He only sees how much the grass is greener on another side. In the two stories of Volga to Ganga 'Nisha' and 'Diva', shifting of power and struggle to retain and gain is the main theme of these two stories. But the end of the story is not only very unexpected but thought-provoking. It makes one think about our limits for the ambition of position.*

Keywords: Relations, Position, Matriarchy, Volga, Destiny, Power, Attraction.

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INTRODUCTION

With the beginning of this cosmos, chair or power has been a center of attraction not only for man but God also. In history, a number of books have been written, how people kept captive, and killed their own blood relatives for achieving power of the chair. They hatched a conspiracy and cheated people to enjoy the power throne. This addiction was so extreme that umpteen battles were fought and blood was shed several times. History is full of snatching power. This is the one bitter truth that never changes. No matter whether people were poor or rich, illiterate, or educated, from the lower or upper class, men or women, greed for power have been unquestionably the same. A number of historical articles and books have been published to show the impact of blind desire for power.

Volga se Ganga' by Rahul Sankrityayan is not an exception to this very tradition. This is his one of the most famous books, originally written in Hindi and later on translated in English by Victor Kierman. This book is a saga that commences from 6,000 B.C. and takes place at Banks of the upper Volga. The story of this book takes us back to some 360 generations of human life, a time when all the races of India, Iran, and Europe formed one person then. It was the early dawn of mankind.

At that time people used to live in a natural habitat like caves or open field wearing no clothes from tip to toe. Their sole occupation was hunting. The conception of farming was not in their mind. They used to eat raw flesh and fruits. Apart from it, honey wine was also a part of their meal. They used to live the life of nomadic and migrated from one place to another according to weather conditions. For them, life was always very uncertain. No one knew how many lives could survive through harsh weather conditions or from the jaw of wild animals. They had a rule of mother viz a viz matriarchal system was the tradition by that time.

Mother was the head or ruler of the family but there was no rule of injustice or inequality. As all the children were the offspring of the oldest man and woman in the family, so there could be no question of mine or thine among them. During this period, the mother had paramount authority over all the males equally. It was a mother who held sway, not a father. There was uncertainty about the father of a child. But there was no doubt about a mother since there was evidence of their birth to prove it but to confirm, who the father was, was not possible.

When the story of this brilliant book of travelogue begins, the author starts with the natural scenery of the upper Volga River and the surrounding. Rahul Sankrityayan starts with the description of a family,

the only family there. He begins with who is the head of this family.

In *Volga to Ganga*, Nisha is the head of the family. She is the oldest and biggest as well as the most powerful woman. Nisha had eight girls and six boys born to her. When she is fifty years old, four daughters and three sons are alive. The total number of survivors of the family is nine. While Nisha's mother, the old grandmother, had occupied the chief position before her, she had numerous husbands in her maturity, some of them her brothers, some her sons; and gradually often enough in the family, the activities of singing and dancing with Nisha all of the men of family succeeded in making themselves the object of her love. In course of time when Nisha herself became the leader of the family, none of the brothers or grown-up sons ventured to deny her choice of love partners. Refusing the head was against the rules. Therefore lack any means of settling the paternity of her surviving seven children.

On each mother, chief devolved the duty of preserving her family from extinction-for every year some were bound to fall victims to the jaws of wolves or panthers, the claws of bears, the horns of bulls, or the Volga's flood. Although Nisha was the head of the family as well as the most powerful person, everything was going well and all were happy together. But it is evident that her superiority wouldn't be last long and one day she would turn into the old grandmother and physically frail. One day the present will be past. As leadership at that time was a matter of power. Although that was the system and shifting of power to next-generation was as natural as other things. But sometimes fascination for the chair was very difficult to leave and so was the case with Nisha. She knows it very well that among her daughters, Lekha was the strongest one and she would take her place. Evidently, a battle would take place between Lekha and her sisters. Traditionally, one or two of Lekha's sisters would succeed in founding separate families. Eventually, when only one man came to be the center of a group of women, as for now there is only one woman in the center of a group of men, this proliferation of the families would come to an end.

Lekha was making good progress and she was performing all activities very successfully. She was agile, brisk like a deer in the forest. She could scale any hill. Even she could perform the most difficult task which others were not able to perform. Once a beehive, so high up on the rocks that even the bear-the honey-eater was not able to get it but Lekha was unstoppable, she tried numerous poles end to end, and in the night swarmed up them like a lizard, scorched the big singing bees away from the hive with a torch, and made a hole in it and around sixty pounds of honey dripped into the skin bag, she held underneath. This act of Lekha was applauded by everyone in her own and neighboring families. With each victory, Lekha was getting stronger and the center of everyone's attention.

But someone in the family was not rejoicing the act and simmering with jealousy deep down. Yes, Nisha could not tolerate that the young men of the family were eager to dance with Lekha at her signal. She could sense that now they less welcomed Nisha's advances towards them, though presently they had not the courage to flout her directly. All the time Nisha had nothing but only Lekha on her mind. She kept thinking of getting rid of her at any cost. Although she had numerous plans in her mind, she was thinking about a full-proof one. Many times she thought to seize Lekha by the throat and killing her in sleep, but she knew that Lekha was stronger than her. Moreover, Nisha could not be successful single-handed against her daughter as her age was against her. At times, she thought to involve someone else in her plan but fearful why should anyone agree to become her accomplice? All the men in the family were already in her love and affection. There was no chance that Lekha's daughters come against her mother as they afraid of Lekha-they knew it very well that if such an attempt failed they would suffer a miserable death at Lekha's hands. A time comes and time did come for Nisha too. After making plans for a long time, one day suddenly her face lit up with something really a great idea-an expedient for getting better of Lekha.

On a fateful morning, when all the families were enjoying the sunshine, some were sitting or lying naked, unaware of their surroundings, or not very aware of their surroundings. But Nisha was very careful about all that happening around her. She alone was sitting in her own tent. Lekha's three-year-old son was playing in front of Nisha's tent. A leaf cup, full of red strawberries was in Nisha's hands. Nisha was unconsciously conscious about all ongoing activities around her and watching everyone without showing them. Volga was in its full current and it was the same river which was a source of life and death as well. Nisha was very careful and very close to it. The ground was sloping down to the steep bank of the river. Suddenly Nisha let fall one strawberry from the cup; the small boy ran towards it to pick up. She fell another strawberry a little further. The child again followed and ate it. After this, Nisha fell the strawberries quickly one after another and as fast as she threw them the child scampered to catch them, till the moment came when its foot slipped on the brink, and it fell with a splash into the swift current of the Volga.

As Nisha saw the child falling into the river, she screamed. Lekha, although, sitting at a little distance away, was watching. As soon as her child started to disappear in the river, she rushed towards the bank. His half body was above the water and floating with the current of water. Lekha struggled hard in the chill current of Volga and eventually succeeded in catching hold of him. Water was ice cold and the child swallowed a great deal of it. Water pierced the child's body like a spear, and he lost strength. But finally, due to her relentless effort against the current of water, Lekha could force herself towards the bank of the river. She was trying

to swim through the water with one hand and clutching her son with others. Volga's current was dangerously swift. But Lekha was just about to make it, but all of a sudden, she felt that a strong pair of hands is tightening around her neck. But in a flip moment, Lekha understood the whole matter. For a long time, Lekha could sense a change in Nisha's behaviour. Her cold behaviour towards Lekha and something which she could not put a finger on but still could notice that something is wrong. Suddenly the whole picture became clear to her. Lekha knew that today Nisha meant to remove her like a thorn from the path. Lekha was still strong and could make Nisha feel her power. But the child was clutching one hand. When Nisha felt that Lekha was fighting with full might with one hand, she strove to force her down. Nisha was struggling hard to win this battle. For it was the game of doing and die. The winner would be the survivor. For the first time, Lekha sank under the surface, and while she struggled the child slipped from her hand. So far, Lekha was reduced to helplessness due to icy and fast current of the river and Nisha's force against her. But suddenly, her fingers closed on Nisha's throat. Now, Lekha was senseless and Nisha was powerless against the heavyweight. She was dragging down with the swift current of Volga. Nisha made all efforts to save herself but to no avail. Both were locking together and vanished in fast waves of Volga.

What we say is, this might be the beginning of an addiction to power or destiny. Nisha couldn't bear the shifting of power which was all a very natural process. Every mother had to hand over her power to the coming generation. She couldn't accept that as she inherited her own mother's chair, in the same way, her own daughter would also become the head of the family. In the greed of power, she kept on stake her own grandson's life. She forgot the love and affection of a mother towards a daughter. Finally, not only headship but due to her envy and attraction for power, three lives were lost.

In the end, this whole saga of winning and losing power teaches us a lesson that sometimes greed of chair may ruin everything. Not only, interpersonal relationships but this infatuation for power affects the whole of humanity. This allurements for power sometimes makes a person victim of his own actions and leaves no option except repentance. But the crux of the problem is that sometimes this infatuation for power becomes so strong that in front of a chair nothing works- neither blood, nor gender, nor time, only power overpowers all other attributes. All who are involved in the game of changing chair keep playing and only at the end result comes and by that time you get too late. No one knows who or how to thwart the whole game and a loser becomes the winner.

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