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### Love as Patriotism: Inner Conflict in Jaishankar Prasad's *Puraskar*

**Abstract:** Love can be termed as the state of affairs when mind and heart are engrossed with the thought of a person; the feelings reach the pinnacles of imagination. Patriotism is a feeling that centers the consciousness of a person to the well being of nation at whatsoever cost. Jaishankar Prasad, a towering personality of Hindi literature, mingles both the emotions in his saga *Puraskar* in such a manner that the readership stand awestruck. Madhulika, the female protagonist, who cheated upon her beloved Arun by disclosing his secret plans to the king of Koshal, ultimately demands death punishment for herself along with Arun; therefore fulfilling the duties of a patriotic daughter of soil as well as that of a girl who loved someone to the very core of her heart.

**Key words:** Patriotism, *Chhayavad*, Death punishment.

“Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
Are melted into air, into thin air:  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Ye all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.”

--- William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Act IV scene I)

Love achieves its height when imagination strives; the imagination that allows us to brood over something beyond what is apparent. On the other hand patriotism is the height of one's personal sense of feeling for the nation; leading a patriot to even crush his personal feelings for the well being of the country. However the heroine in Prasad's short story *Puraskar* brings about a moment that enthralls one and all for the sheer depiction of a decision in which the woman protagonist Madhulika balances patriotic zeal with romantic love.

Jaishankar Prasad (30 January 1890 – 15 November 1937) who has the credit of propounding the Hindi romantic poetic movement called 'Chhayavad' emerged as a pioneer in the arena of literatures written in Hindi. He stood the test of time by way of writing in various genres of literature as poetry, drama, short stories, etc. His renowned works of creative writing are *Kamayani*, *Prem pathik* (The Love Wanderer), *Irawati*, *Akashdeep*, *Titali*, etc. Prasad attains renown by the virtue of his creative zeal to match cultural setup with humanistic vision. In fact his humanism transcends the boundaries of temporal and permanent. His quest is for the achievement of a romantic way of life that can ultimately lead towards salvation.

The short story *Puraskar* is an enigmatic saga of a brave girl Madhulika who stood for her virtues like self pride, family value system, sense of love and feelings of patriotism to the hilt. The story starts with the ceremonial festival of the kingdom of Koshal in which the King plays a peasant; therefore signifying his affinity to the common mass. As a tradition, a portion of land was selected for the festival and the owner was gifted with ample gift of approximately four times of the cost of land. Prasad narrates the scene quite effectively, "The solitary Ardra star! Dark and black clouds rolled and rumbled in the sky with the beat of celestial drums. The god of light peeped from a cloudless corner in the East as if to watch the royal procession. A soft, fragrant odour rose from the earth in the lap of the mountains. The gate of the town opened for the royal elephant to appear towering among the crowds. The mighty congregation surged forward like an ocean of gaiety. The sky poured on the earth—tiny, sunlit drops like mallika flowers. People hailed them as tokens of heavenly blessings." This time it was the land of Mallika selected for the traditional ritual of Koshal. Even the kings and princess from other kingdoms had come to grace the function. The prince of Magadh, Arun, was also one of them who seem to have been bewitched by the charms of the

peasant girl who had displayed a grand charm. Mallika was, as Prasad writes, “a virgin unexcelled in her charms in her lovely saffron coloured attire. The wind sported with her and now she put her garments in order and now her unruly locks. Womanly dignity and modesty gleamed in her smile. But despite her tenderness, she remained unfaltering in her duty.” When after the ritual, the king offers gold coins to Madhulika, she simply takes it and scatters all around making a daring display of disobedience to the king of Koshal. She asserts flamboyantly, “Maharaj! I got this land from my forefathers. How can I sell it and accept a price in return?”

When the minister says grudgingly, “Silly girl! What do you mean? Spurning the royal present! It’s worth four times your land. And then, don’t you know it is the custom of Kaushal? From today you are under the King’s protection. Thank your stars for this good fortune, Madhulika!” Madhulika becomes furious and says, “All subjects are under the King’s protection”, Madhulika retorted in an excited but firm voice. “Happily I offered my land to the King. But to sell it, no, it is not my right!” This reaction was something exemplary as the brave daughter of Singhmitra deems it beyond the pride of the family to sell out property received from forefathers. Further when all people leave, Madhulika takes shelter at a secluded place in the lap of nature. She works hard to meet her daily needs. The prince of Magadha, Aruna, comes to express his heart to Madhulika who was rather reluctant to reciprocate Arun’s feelings. When Arun asks her, “What is the secret of your grief then?” she says sarcastically, “Ah, it is the secret of the human heart. Young prince! Were the heart bound by laws, the prince of Magadh instead of going to a princess would not come to offend the dignity of a peasant girl!” After this response from Madhulika, Arun returns back. However he comes back after the gap of a few years to Madhulika as a traitor prince of Magadha who intends to establish his new kingdom by dint of his power. He is willing to make Mallika the queen of Koshal after occupying the throne. Convinced by Arun’s amours, she goes to the king again but to ask for the barren land on the south of the fort to which she intended to plough. King, though hesitatingly, gives her the portion of land. Prasad has given a wonderful expression to this state of time, “Standing in a thick bower Arun and Madhulika rapturously looked at each other. Evening was drawing near and flocks of birds returning to their nests noticed a new stir and bustle in that dreary forest and responded with a happy uproar.”

When Arun plans to attack the fort of Sravasti and takes delight in making Madhulika the queen of the throne next morning, Madhulika finds herself in a tormented position. She feels

guilty of her affiliation with Arun, the traitor who is hell bent upon winning Koshal. Her conscience refutes her. The inner tussle of Madhulika is well expressed in the following words, “The road was dark and dismal, gloom began pervading Madhulika’s heart too. Some unknown force seemed to be squeezing out her heart’s sweetness and her dear dream was vanishing in the gloom. A fear grew in her soul for Arun–“Well, if he fails in his venture, then?”

All of a sudden she asked herself– “Why should he win? Why should the Sravasti fort pass into the hands of a foreigner? Ah, his victory.....!..... But the King was proud of her, – of Singhmitra’s daughter. Singhmitra, the saviour of Kaushal! And his daughter, a traitor? No. No. “Madhulika”, “Madhulika”, she heard her father calling her in the dark.” Madhulika’s sense of duty towards country was exemplary. She meets the commander of the army of Koshal and informs about the plan of Arun to overpower the kingdom. As a result Arun was caught by the army and was put before public who demanded death punishment for the traitor. The king who was overjoyed with the patriotism of Madhulika asks her for any guerdon of her wish. However, as a true lover of Arun, she demands death punishment for herself as well. “Then reward me also with death!” Thus saying she stands by the captive Arun.”

The text of the story is alluring as it reflects a woman’s sense of duty for her country as well as her lover. The natural instinct that Madhulika represents is phenomenally outstanding. Elizabeth Grosz truly affirms, “Women are somehow more biological, more corporeal, and more natural than men” (Grosz 14). Unlike Antigone in Sophocles’s drama of the same name who finds herself torn between a lover and a brother, ultimately prefers the burial of her brother to that of the love of her beloved, Madhulika’s decision was revolutionary. She takes a holistic approach towards life and its ways. To her, attainment of love has no meaning without having sense of faith for the country. A typical Indian girl, she cannot have existence without the suitability of her subsistence. Simone de Beauvoir asserts in her book *The Second Sex*, “the body of man makes sense in itself quite apart from that of woman, whereas the latter seems wanting in significance by itself--- Man can think himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man” (Beauvoir 16). As a true beloved she seeks union in the afterlife, if it is not possible in this life. Her moral sense disallows her to cheat one’s *matrubhumi*, whatsoever is the price. As Virginia Woolf writes in *Mrs. Dalloway*, “closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death” (Woolf 202), similarly, Madhulika looks forward to attaining a sense of immense completeness despite the

incomplete saga of her love-life. The timeless waits for a hearty unification with the temporal whereas life moves its way.

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