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## **POLITICAL MALPRACTICE IN ARUN JOSHI'S THE CITY AND THE RIVER**

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### **Introduction:-**

In this political novel 'The City and the River,' Arun Joshi presents the malpractices in which people wielding political power indulge and the ways in which people respond to them. Taxonomically speaking, the malpractices presented here are of two kinds: the malpractices presented here are of retain power and the malpractices resorted in order to eliminate dissent. The responses of the victims range from total surrender to uncompromising resistance. So far as the malpractices resorted in order to acquire and retain political power presented here are concerned, the first of these is the malpractice of manipulating people and incidents in order to lift oneself to the apex by giving the impression that one is very popular and that it is the people who want to have power. The Grand Master, the ruler in the novel, organized rallies in his support to give the impression that he is loved by his subjects and he makes the Master of Trade propose in the meeting of the "Supreme Council" that he be a king, and argue, 'that it is in the interest of the people, rather than that of the Grand Master Another malpractice, in which a person wielding political power indulges, as presented in 'The City and the River,' is that he tries to ensure that his descendant succeeds him. In this novel, the Rallies Master to organize rallies also for the Grand Master's son so that people may gather the impression that he too has endeared himself to the masses, as the Rallies Master tells the journalist: "And now, journalist, I must gather rallies not only for the Grand Master but also for his son as well. The city must face its final humiliation and I must be instrument to it." Another political malpractice in the novel is the ruler's making people regard himself as the nation. In the novel the Astrologer identifies the Grand Master with the river that is the symbol of the ruler and the nation respectively, when he says to the Headman: Do not bring the Great Yogeshwara into this, Headman. All I ask is that you also swear to the Grand Master. He and the great river are one. His words remind us of the assertion that Louis XIV of France made, viz, that he himself was the state. Another malpractice presented here is one of keeping oneself in the seat of power with the help of guns and thus using the Army and the Police, which are expected to protect the state from external and internal aggressions, in order to protect oneself from even the dissenters. The logic that is advanced in order to justify the mischievous approach lies embodied in the following arguments of the commissioner of the Professor: If you ask me, the New Era is not enough. What we need is a violent clean-up. But the people too might become violent? The people do not have the guns. Only we can afford guns, not that we should use them (for anything other than securing justice for the poor.) But the whole city is poor, the Professor pointed out. That is why need more guns. The might sound absurd but the fact is that the poorer a city is the more guns its government needs.(82) The novelist also shows the ruler indulging in the malpractice of giving ministerial posts of persons for political reasons rather than for their talents and capabilities. For instance, the post of the Education Adviser has been given in the novel to a person who has won the support of students and teachers, whose support the Grand Master wants to win, and talent or capability is not taken into consideration at all. The boy tells the Professor: "When the Grand Master inaugurated the New Era the Astrologer advised him to appoint the Education Adviser to the Council. That was the only way of keeping his stock-brigades from joining hands with the boatmen."(35-36) Giving posts for political reasons is

likely to encourage politics rather than bring efficiency in the administration. The novelist's use of spiritualism is being used as a narcotic to keep people homeless and reminds one of the religions, which, as Karl Marx put it, was made to work as opium. Another political malpractice hinted at in the novel is the authorities' manipulating the prices and the traded of commodities in order to earn money for the state or for oneself. It is this malpractice that has been hinted at in the following piece of conversation between Pinstripe and the Minister for Trade Pinstripe went on: In the light of the approaching Festival of the River cooking oil can bring in excellent revenues. Princes can be pushed very high if the product of the Gold Mines is cornered. I shall do what I can do. (64) The narrator is laughing at the ways of this ruler as there is no point in arresting a boatman for his wife's arrest for having cuckolded her husband. Likewise, a clown is there only to make people laugh and so there is no point in arresting a clown for laughing. Moreover, laughing is an innocent exercise and one indulging in it does not deserve any punishment. It is evident that the boatmen are arrested not because to have committed any crime but because they have refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Grand Master and have raised a voice of dissent against the Grand Master's hypocritical announcement of the beginning of 'The Era of Ultimate Greatness. It is almost impossible for people trying to find facts through the newspaper and the radio to find them in a country where such a situation is prevailing. Here people can know only the establishment version of facts. Since most people are too credulous to distrust the press and the radio, they are misled into accepting the establishment version and taking fiction as fact. In the novel, the Grand Master and his men are successful in spreading the fiction that Master Bhoma has hatched a conspiracy to unseat the Grand Master. Another malpractice adopted to discourage dissent is that of harassing the dissenters and causing them inconveniences in one form or another. It is this malpractice that has been highlighted in the novel when the Grand Master gets the boatman's musical instruments destroyed only because he himself has antipathy to music. (48) He uses it even in his public speech when he says: "In the darkness of night there has come a new wave of deadly assassins. Daggers in hand they have crept of their holes. They stalk the night, determined to strike at the very root of our lives, at the very heart of the man whose heartbeat of the city itself." (99) A barbarous malpractice adopted here in order to suppress dissent is one of disabling the dissenters. This malpractice has taken the form of blinding the Headman, the lady chief of the boatmen. The incident has been reported by the narrator in the following words: "During the night the guards pierced the Headman's eyes with long pointed needles and poured acid into the perforations." (164) The Headman gives one more argument against the policy of population control: "Is it not true, Astrologer, that the city's granaries are full? And is it not a fact that out of the mud people the city shall always extract work equal to what it feeds them, even as it is done to the animals?" One may have reservations while agreeing to accept these arguments, but one cannot justify efforts to restrict the growth of one single who is supported by the majority of the citizens. One more political malpractice to discourage dissent adopted here is that of laying the blame for every unhappy incident at the dissenter's door irrespective measures and, thus, try to direct edge of people's anger towards the dissenters. The fact comes to light when one finds the Grand Master blaming every boatman for his having been used the Police and the Army against the latter: "He forces us to beat him with sticks and fired bullets and lasers into him. He forces us to call out the Army." The novelist is ironical here and is laughing at the wrong-doer's blaming the victim for the wrongs heaped on the latter. Since this resolution is not transformed into action, it is surrender in resolution and so a temporary adoption of the path of non-resistance. The path that Bhumiputra, the Grand-father, the Professor, Shani, and Shailja's brother adopt is one of resistance and all of them in one way or the other resist the Grand Master is taking in order to gain more power. The resistance of the victims presented in the novel is broadly of two kinds: passive and active. Those who do nothing to counter the measures of the Grand Master but at the same time refuse to surrender can be called passive resisters and those measures can be called active resisters. The Grand-father's resistance is an illustration of the passive resistance as he does nothing to counter the moves of those wielding power but only keeps Bhumiputra at his rose-farm and puts a few obstructions in the way of the Police Commissioner and his son when they come to arrest Bhumiputra as a result of which he gets his house destroyed and loses his life along with Bhumiptura. The active resistance presented in the novel is again of two kinds: physical and intellectual. The resistance of those who take up arms against the oppressor is physical active resistance while the resistance of those who simply educate people and explain to them what is wrong

with the Grand Master's policies is intellectual active resistance. For instance, the resistance of the boatmen who take up arms to fight oppression and defend their way of living is physical active resistance. But the resistance of Bhumi Putra, who tells people the symbolic story of the naked king, is intellectual active resistance. Since this form of resistance is the most effective one, it can be safely concluded that the novelist stands for it more than for any other form. This novel embodies the view that one who misuses political power cannot escape undergoing punishment for it even if he succeeds in eliminating all his opponents. In the novel, punishment comes to the offender from nature. Even though none of the men rising against the Grand Master succeeds in removing him as the Headman is blinded and later, deserted by her own followers, Bhoma's telling people that the king is naked comes to a stop when he comes to stay with the Grand-father and, later on, dies when the Son demolishes the Grand-father's house in an attempt to arrest him, the Professor dies as a result of his fast unto death in prison, and Shailja's brother immolates himself. One feels that when human beings have failed, Nature used water, one of the elements, to punish the guilty. The fact signifies that the novelist posits his faith in, what has come to be known as, the Divine Justice. Now the question comes whether the novel provides a solution to the problem as to what kind of political system is safe for the people. Since the novelist is exposing how a democratic establishment can be misused and replaced by dictatorship, it is evident that he stands for neither dictatorship nor democracy. The courses of incidents included in the novel signify that the novelist likes to have a political system in which the ruler does not oppress people, as when the Professor is lying on his death bed he has hope: "There will be no Grand Masters. There will be a new world; a new race of men will be born." Besides call as to what kind of political system is better than a democratic system. It signifies that the novelist does not suggest any alternative political system but wishes to have one in which there is no oppression. This novel has few weaknesses. This prophecy is an embodiment of the view that the incidents are occurring in the novel because they are destined to occur. But if the incidents are destined to occur the persons who appear to be making them, occur cannot be held responsible for them and so deserve neither rewards nor punishments for them. One cannot lie at the door of the authorities as one knows that they are destined to grow dark and the "shadow's mark" is destined to reach the walls of the city. Likewise, since the prophecy includes the prediction. "The hermit, the parrot, the teacher die," the sacrificial sufferings of the persons opposing the king's ways fail to become pathetic because one knows that they are instruments in the hands of fate and are destined to die. One deserves punishment for a misdeed only if one has chosen to do it of one's absolutely free will. If an incident has already been prophesied, it is evident that one is doing a deed as an instrument rather than of one's own free will with the result that none of the characters deserves either any praise. Another weakness of the novel is the novelist's showing what the Grand Master is not peculiar to him alone but is a phenomenon that occurs again and again when the Great Yogeshwara tells his disciple. One gets the impression that the fault lies not with a person but with the chair because if the fault had been with a particular person, there would have been no repetition. In other words, this reminds one of the popular sayings that power corrupts everybody. And if everybody occupying the position of the Grand Master and behaves like this Grand Master, who makes himself king in the novel, cannot be regarded as guilty. And if he is not guilty at all that he has to occur whoever comes to the chair of the Grand Master, there is no point in blaming him for it. A hero or a protagonist has to have free will and is to be presented as facing misfortunes on account of having chosen a wrong path rather than the right one. Unless this is done the hero cannot be charged with having done any wrong. Such utterances as this bring order where disorder has been prevailing. Another such passage is the following one: "So let not fear show confusion in your heart. Whatever happens the Lord will not forsake you, nor will work be fruitless. Of this you can be certain." Such utterances as those give people hope and enlightenment and the readers of English literature are not likely to let them die.

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