

Reclaiming the Past: Rediscovery of the Primary Self in Two Novellas by Rajinder Singh Bedi and Qurratulain Hyder

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THE notion that every human being possesses an essential character or identity, a kind of primary self which has been with him from his childhood and which somehow manages to resist the forces of change which throughout life mold a person into something new and even unrecognizable, is one which has been explored by many writers. Anita Desai, for example, in her acclaimed novel *Clear Light of Day*, writes of two sisters, Tara and Bim, who reunite at their childhood house, and despite having lived very different lives and being nothing like the children they used to be, realize that they have still somehow retained their essential selves and natures, a fact which binds them intimately together. Life has changed both significantly, but the characters which they possessed as children have remained intact and still form an essential part of their consciousness, and in fact have only been waiting to be recognized. The recognition and embracing of one's essential, or primary self often leads to a kind of personal salvation, for, as Urdu writers Rajinder Singh Bedi and Qurratulain Hyder note in their novellas *I Take This Woman* and *The Housing Society*, such realization and acceptance are essential for a person to move forward in his life and discover his true capabilities. His problems may not be magically solved by embracing his primary self, but life will begin to seem less like a confusing struggle and more like a coherent and meaningful whole.

Bedi's novella *I Take This Woman* chronicles the lives of people who find life a confusing struggle, so separated are they from any sense of a primary self. The two main characters, Mangal and Rano, have become

almost entirely estranged from the selves they were in their youth, and it is not until the end of the book, when they have, to an extent, rediscovered these selves, that they are able to move forward and to develop as human beings. Bedi does not give his reader much information as to the nature of Mangal's behavior as a young boy, but he evidently differed very much from the person he is at the commencement of the novella. As a child he appeared loving and full of acceptance, and Rano, his brother's wife, remembers fondly the time when she first arrived at her husband's house after her marriage, and Mangal, instead of acting resentful and suspicious, expressed a desire to feed at her breast, just as though he were her own child. Mangal, as a young boy who saw his brother bring an unknown woman into the house, might well have been sullen and angry about Rano's presence, but he instead quickly accepted and came to love her as though she were his own mother. The relationship between them remains the close, loving one of a mother and son, until Mangal becomes an adolescent, by which time he has changed from a loving and accepting little boy into, as Bedi states, "an incorrigible idler, a good-for-nothing drone, quarreling and getting into brawls, forever adjusting his *tehmat* around his waist."¹ Over the years, the combination of his brother Tiloka's constant drunken meanness, his sister-in-law's growing distance from him as she tries desperately to keep her house together, and of course, the family's extreme poverty forces Mangal to alter his personality and behavior in order to protect himself. He becomes an idler and a careless experience-seeker so that he, unlike everyone else in his family, will not be overwhelmed and sucked under by the poverty and misery of life.

This is indeed the state in which Mangal finds himself when he is first introduced to the reader. He is not by any means a totally unlikable man; it is he, after all, among the witnesses to his brother Tiloka's brutal treatment of Rano near the beginning of the novella, who has the courage and integrity to stop his brother from seriously hurting his wife. However, his laziness, idling, and general indifference to the needs of the other people in the household, probably brought about as a defense against the consuming misery of his life, are without a doubt the most noticeable aspects of his personality. Even the murder of his brother, which puts still

¹Rajinder Singh Bedi, *I Take This Woman*, trans. Khushwant Singh (Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1967), p. 10. Hereafter all references to this novella appear in the text.

more of a strain on the family and its living conditions, does not really shake him out of his indifference and make him aware of the responsibility he must now assume. When he is forced to take over his elder brother's job as an ekka driver, he does it carelessly and incompetently, with no real conception of its importance and no real desire to excel at it. "He had learnt how to put the horse in harness," Bedi states, "but had eluded the harness of responsibility. There was less money in the house than ever before. Mangal had been pitchforked into manhood and promptly lost himself in the jungle of desires" (p. 29).

Granted, the young Mangal labors under the misfortune of having been given a greater burden than he was ready to bear, but he goes through the motions of his job so indifferently, and pursues pretty girls like Salamat so selfishly, that it is hard to be sympathetic to him. The needs of those who depend upon him are still not as important to him as they should be, and definitely not so important to him as indulgence in selfish pleasures. Thus, when his mother and the village elders suggest that he take his brother's wife under his protection by marrying her, he is too blinded by the thought of what he will have to give up and by his own revulsion towards marrying a substantially older woman, to think of the needs of Rano, a woman he has loved as his own kin. Marrying her, he feels, would simply be too personally unpleasant for him, and he responds violently,

"I am not going to be called a mother-seducer I will rape the mothers of those elders of the village! What the hell do I care for what they say? Even if Lord Irwin or George V came to ask me, I would say 'No.' She's old enough to be my mother. I can place my head at her feet, but not bed her." (p. 45)

Although marriage to Mangal would be the best thing for Rano, and although he has, throughout his childhood, loved her very much, Mangal is not now willing to sacrifice his freedom or face the awkwardness of intimacy with an older woman. In fact, he must be beaten and dragged to the wedding, so unwilling is he to give up a life of careless pleasure-seeking and take responsibility for another. The passionately loving and easily accepting Mangal of childhood has been replaced by someone so involved with himself that he cannot see beyond his personal concerns.

Although at this point in the novella Mangal seems hopelessly selfish and indifferent, he begins to undergo a subtle transformation at about the time of his marriage to Rano, which allows him to reclaim the primary

self of his childhood. This marriage gives him a sense of responsibility which he has never had before. Somehow, simply being married makes the fact that he has significant and unshirkable duties completely evident to Mangal, and he changes his behavior accordingly. He rarely comes home with less than five rupees for his family, and he delivers these rupees into the hands of Rano, in recognition of her new status. Giving these rupees to his mother would suggest that he does not appreciate Rano's efforts and that he does not consider her worthy or competent enough to regulate the household, and Mangal has at least become sensitive enough to desire not to do that. He also ignores, in deference to his wife, the charms of other women, casting on most of them only a quick, cursory glance. Salamat is the only woman who still interests him, but even her attractions begin to lessen as Mangal starts to notice and appreciate the unique qualities of his wife. One night, he realizes how desirable she looks, not just because she has worked particularly hard at looking pretty that day, but because of some innate quality which he has failed to notice until now because she has always before been so worn down by overwork and unhappiness. Mangal recognizes that the change in her is "something a woman only becomes aware of when that something takes complete possession of her," and has a character "like the moon in the first quarter, which keeps most of itself hidden in darkness and on every night that follows dons a little more till it can burst out in all its silvery splendour on the fourteenth night" (p. 76).

That Rano is indeed a strong, beautiful woman Mangal realized and appreciated innocently as a child; and on this particular night, when he plans to have a rendezvous with Salamat, he rediscovers this youthful knowledge, as well as the passionate, accepting love he could feel so easily as a young boy. The pivotal moment of their evening together, and of Mangal's recovery of his old self, dawns after the two have had a fight over an old bottle of orange liquor from Tiloka's trunk, in the course of which Rano's skull is bashed against the wall. Asked by her mother-in-law about the racket, Rano responds that it was caused by a cat, thus awakening strong feelings of gratefulness and shame in Mangal. In a moment he seems to go back to the loving child of his youth as he staunches the flow of her blood with a cloth and clutches at her feet, almost with the eagerness of a child solicitous of his mother's happiness. As a result, Mangal is so effectively awakened to his love for Rano and to the sensations he has not felt since he was a child, that he completely forgets his planned liaison with Salamat, and he and Rano consummate their marriage with an eager passion never felt before.

The relations between Mangal and Rano are obviously no longer those of parent and child, but they have again acquired that quality of sincere and accepting love through Mangal's rediscovery of his primary self and of the person he was as a child before the combination of poverty and family troubles forced him to retreat into idleness and indifference. By the end of the book, Mangal has effected a complete transformation and has become not only an utterly adoring husband who does what he can to please his wife and make her laugh, but also a hardworking, industrious fellow, determined to keep his family together. Even Rano looks at him with wonder, thinking to herself how he "was not the same Mangal she had seen the day Channo had mentioned the possibility of her marrying him. Now he was silent, struck dumb and weighed down under the obligations of love" (p. 91). By rediscovering his primary self Mangal has realized who he should be; a man capable of passionate and dedicated love and of complete devotion to his wife and family. Mangal's life may have taken a long detour, but his primary self always remained the same and was only waiting to be finally recognized.

Mangal is not the only character to find himself during the course of Rajinder Singh Bedi's *I Take This Woman*; his wife Rano recaptures her youthful spirit as well. Bedi provides even less information about Rano's childhood than about Mangal's, but one can make a few inferences about her early character based on the little given in the narrative. During her early life Rano experienced great poverty, but also, it seems, love, and occasional girlish hopes for a better life. Of Rano's condition around the time she is married to Tiloka, Bedi states:

Rano's parents were destitute (perhaps that was why they had named their daughter dressed in tatters, Rani, or Rano). As Rano grew to womanhood her needs became a problem. So they sold her to Tiloka and simply disappeared from their village. This caused Rano great distress. However poor a parents' home, it is something every girl cherishes. For Rano, the past had simply ceased to exist. (p. 10)

The fact that, instead of feeling resentful or bitter over her parents' sale and subsequent desertion of her, Rano looks back with regret, tenderness, and even longing, suggests that her life in their home was not unhappy, but rather safe and comforting, despite its poverty. A girl whose name is Rano cannot help but have hopes of better things happening to her and feel that such things are hoped for her by others. And it is likely that very early in her life Rano nourished many fanciful girlish wishes.

Whatever sorts of quiet love and girlish enthusiasm and hope made up Rano's childhood or primary self, however, they are all but obliterated by her parents' sale of her, and their quick departure from their village, as though they could not bear to think about what they had done to their daughter. Soon after her marriage Rano's character goes through a definite transformation as she becomes a part of Tiloka's family and must deal with not only extreme poverty, but also an alcoholic husband and a nagging mother-in-law, along with her household duties and her responsibilities to her four children. Rano has more reason for despair than for hope, and she no longer has the energy for youthful enthusiasm. Now her nature is one of bitterness, resentment, and constant worry. She first displays this deeply ingrained bitterness when she picks a fight with Tiloka over his constant drinking and over his supposedly bringing another woman into the house.

Although a shrewder woman might have realized that baiting and fighting with a man who is easily angered and much stronger than she is constitutes a sort of suicide, Rano feels such despair and rage that she does not even care for her own life, and for a time she puts up a good fight. To people who might have remembered her from her hopeful, youthful days, Rano would be almost unrecognizable in her deadened and rage-blinded state. After Mangal has saved her from the hands of Tiloka she has so little fondness for life and so little faith in her own purpose, that she seriously considers killing herself. She muses:

If he brings liquor into the house again, I will swallow a mouthful of arsenic ... or stab my belly with the antlers of a stag ... or take some of the dog poison they gave to kill the bitch, Bori. Like that dog, Dabboo, this wretch will only sniff at my corpse and turn away Who the hell cares whether I am alive or dead!" (p. 18)

Rano's words show a striking mixture of hopelessness and rage, for at the same time that she wishes that she could kill herself and escape life, she bitterly curses her husband's indifference and his uncaring nature, comparing him to a mongrel dog, one of the lowest creatures she can think of. Tiloka is no better than Dabboo, a cur who showed only slight distress at the death of his partner before wandering away to forget about her. Rano is sure that Tiloka cares no more about her than this dog cared for his mate. Life is an ordeal, enraging and ultimately completely draining. It is a force capable of changing a person entirely.

Just as Mangal begins to rediscover his primary self after his marriage

to Rano, so Rano begins to transform as soon as the marriage is proposed to her. Though angered at first when her friend Channo and her mother-in-law suggest it, she soon feels the quickening of a desire unlike anything she has felt for a long while, and she thinks more of her passionate and fanciful girlhood than her current, despairing state. Before Mangal even knows about the possibility of their marriage, Rano has already, in the excitement of anticipation, begun to discover aspects of herself which she had forgotten existed. Bedi describes Rano at this moment of the beginning of her transformation:

Although she did not have the bashfulness of a virgin, she did have the pride of her sex and the longing to be desired. The desire had lain dormant for a long time; it had been submerged under the humdrum of life. Now it was bubbling over, bursting the bounds of discretion....” (p. 44)

The young girl she once was, the girl who possessed a passion and enthusiasm for life and had girlish hopes of love and of better things, begins slowly coming back to replace the bitter and despairing woman she has become during the years of her marriage to Tiloka. Suddenly she has new prospects in her life and her existence does not seem to be only a long stretch of unchanging nothingness.

Despite the fact that Mangal does not appreciate her efforts to please him during the first months of their marriage, Rano now feels that her life has a reason and her girlish tenderness and hopefulness begin to emerge. Her everyday duties have not changed, but she now cooks food for her husband with tender care and in hopes that he will like it, and she takes care of her physical appearance as though she were a young girl trying to find a husband, instead of a woman already worn down by a hard marriage. Her bitterness and despair seem, in fact, to have completely disappeared, which is evidenced by the fact that she remains shrewd and calm instead of allowing herself to become enraged and abusive during a fight she and Mangal have near the end of the novella. With these debilitating emotions gone, she recovers her youthful spirit and her love of life. The ending of the book, after she and Mangal have consummated their marriage and realized their love, finds her acting just as though she were a blushing, happy young bride. She teases her adoring husband freely about buying her clothes for a festival, and she has now become so fetching that she causes men all around to remark on her. The burden of her former loveless marriage has been lifted and she feels that she has something to look forward to. In spite of the fact that she is still a poor housewife, she

has changed dramatically. She has rediscovered the playful, hopeful girl she used to be, and her realization of her primary self has saved her from a lifetime of bitterness and despair.

The same theme of the necessity of recovering one's primary or youthful self is also present in Qurratulain Hyder's novella *The Housing Society*, though in a slightly different form. While in Bedi's *I Take This Woman* Rano and Mangal have changed and lost touch with their primary selves because of forces they are powerless to control, in *The Housing Society* Surayya and Jamshed consciously attempt to escape from these former, primary selves and become new people. Surayya Husain, or Basanti Begum as she was known as a child, is first introduced to the reader as a timid and frightened young girl, living with her mother in the village of Muhammed Ganj. Whether Surayya has always been timid and fearful is uncertain, for at the time we meet her she is dealing with the aftermath of her abduction by the Nawab Bhure and her brother's recent murder by masked dacoits. But clearly, nothing in her life has ever given her a sense of security. Her father has died, though whether before or after her birth is not revealed, and she has been raised by a single, widowed mother with the knowledge that she bears the name of a family which, though once influential and important, is now no more significant than any other. Thus, her life has never been easy, and the instability caused by her lack of a father and by her sense of an undeservedly low social status, has lent her a timid, overly thoughtful air which her imprisonment in the mud fort of Durgakund and her brother's murder transform into outright fearfulness.

Surayya is first introduced to the reader as a young girl who sits timidly behind her mother's palanquin to shade herself from the eyes of others, drawing lines on the ground. Surayya, however, has no real sense of security even behind the screens of the palanquin, and she casts constant fearful glances all around her. Indeed, her desire to be anywhere but where she is, to escape from her present situation and from the eyes that she feels would stare at her in judgment, becomes clear in her immediate attraction to the elephant ridden by the magistrate's daughter, Chhoti Bitiya, which goes past her as she waits tensely for her mother's testimony to be over. The elephant and Chhoti Bitiya represent a world of curiosities and delights far from Surayya's own gloomy and unstable world, and she longs to join it, a longing she expresses in her typically thoughtful and creative way by drawing a picture of the elephant on the ground in front

of her with her stick. On it she seats a princess and declares to herself, "I'm the princess. I, Basanti Begum."² As a young girl Surayya is a timid, deeply sensitive little person who has lived too long in a lonely, unstable world from which she longs to escape to better things.

The next time Surayya appears in the novella little has changed for her. She and her mother have won their court case but have been left nearly destitute by its expenses and now live in a wing of "Qasr-e-Salman," the home of the rich Mirzas where her mother does housework for a little money. However, during this time Surayya also becomes successful with her artwork and slowly gains a confidence and a self-respect that change her almost entirely. After winning a scholarship, passing her F.A. examination, and getting a job as an art teacher, she feels self-sufficient and capable, and, in an authoritative tone which is very unlike her, she informs her mother,

I've been tossed around since I was thirteen. We've lived in this mansion [Qasr-e-Salman] for seven years and I'm ashamed to be living on charity. I've found a job which pays 125 rupees a month, and will also give lessons in the evenings. I'm going to get a house in the city. Come on, Mother, pack your things. (p. 205)

The new Surayya is determined to be entirely self-sufficient, and to leave her past totally behind her. She is no longer timid and thoughtful, but ambitious, determined, and willing to go after what she wants, and her new character astonishes her mother who cannot understand why she would want to reject her home and move by herself to the city. Surayya, however, has become so inspired by the idea of working and being a true part of the "toiling masses of the country," that she bears little resemblance to the young girl to whom the reader was first introduced. Surayya has effectively refashioned her life and her character in order to escape from a world which threatened to stifle her.

The changes which begin to take place in Surayya's life after her decision to leave her childhood home and her past behind take her even further from the person she was as a young girl. Soon after her move she meets Salman Mirza with whom she had before had few dealings, and in

²Qurratulain Hyder, "The Housing Society," trans. Suzanne Schwartz Gilbert, In *A Season of Betrayals: A Short Story and Two Novellas*, trans. C.M. Naim (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999), pp. 177-266, p. 180. Hereafter all references to this novella appear in the text.

no time she becomes not only his friend, but an integral component of the Socialist Party to which he belongs. The once timid Surayya now speaks out and exploits the terrible experiences of her youth to inspire and gain the admiration of the young men of the party. She now has no qualms about putting herself forward and she becomes, for these young men, a sort of heroine who has managed to brave the odds and survive, a position of status which carries her even farther from the shy girl of Muhammed Ganj. The adoring Salman sees her even more as a heroine after she agrees to go to Pakistan with him and continue to work for their cause, a choice that changes the course of her life. Even knowing that her life will have no stability or security, that all she will have to fall back on is Salman's love, Surayya agrees to follow him to Karachi and thus dissociates herself from her home and her primary self. For by leaving her home country she is leaving behind all that is familiar and comforting, and entering into a situation where she will have to depend totally on her own strength and courage. The Basanti Begum of old is now no more than a shadow; for the new Surayya has proved herself willing to take on hardships as well as survive them.

As admirable as Surayya Husain has become, she is incapable of finding peace without first rediscovering and recognizing the significance of the Basanti Begum she once was. This, however, does not happen until Surayya reaches Karachi and establishes herself there alone, without Salman, who has been arrested and imprisoned. Though haunted by her memories of Salman, Surayya appears to be reasonably happy in her new position as an admired artist in Karachi. She seems to have totally escaped her old self and the associations that go with it until one night at a party at the new residence of Jamshed Ali Syed, a very rich Karachi businessman, who, unbeknownst to her at first, is also from the town of Muhammed Ganj. Near the beginning of this lavish party she meets Salma Mirza, Jamshed's so-called "social secretary," who is Salman's sister and whom she has always known as Chhoti Bitiya, the daughter of the District Magistrate of Muhammed Ganj. She freezes, as memories of her old life rush over her. The presence of someone who remembers her as Basanti Begum plunges her back in time, so that, in spite of herself, she is no longer able to separate her primary self as Basanti Begum from her current self. The sight of Chhoti Bitiya, who is living in the same city and has come as far as she has from her old home, shows her that her past is connected integrally to her present and that her two selves are inextricably linked. As the world she has constructed by denying her past begins to break down, Surayya has a vision of her old existence which imposes itself

in a frightening manner upon the reality of Jamshed's elegant mansion.

Surayya shuddered in fright and closed her eyes," [Hyder states]. This was not the ultra-modern Jamshed House designed by an Italian architect, glittering with cut-glass chandeliers from Belgium. No, this was the half-lit mud castle of Durgakund estate in Sultanpur where she, Basanti Begum herself, was imprisoned. Then, the mud castle of Durgakund changed into Jamshed House where Chhoti Bitiya was confined. (p. 248)

Although this image is frightening and plays havoc with Surayya's conception of what is real, it forces her to recognize the inescapability of her past and of her old self as Basanti Begum. No matter how unpleasant that past was, or how far she has come from that life, all of it is still a part of her and has been responsible for shaping her consciousness in a very dramatic manner. The recognition of her old self, which she has struggled so hard to get away from, does, however, bring Surayya a kind of personal peace and salvation, just as it did for the characters in Bedi's novella. Once she has accepted it, she has no further need to struggle against her nature by attempting to remake herself into an artificially glamorous personage. This acceptance of her old self also helps her to realize that she is not alone in the often difficult process of living, that she is connected to and has great sympathy with both Salma and Jamshed; and of the three she is the one who finally has the courage to speak the truth about their mutual connection and help them recognize each other as kindred spirits. The end of Jamshed's earthshaking party is strangely quiet and peaceful as the three former children from Muhammed Ganj sit together, singing old songs and reminiscing "as if the world had come to an end and they were the last earthlings alive" (p. 261). Through fully recognizing and accepting the importance of her old self, Surayya has found a peace she has never before experienced in her confused, displaced world; and she has discovered a sense of human connection which she has not known since her brief love affair with Salman. Although she had not realized it before, she was shut off from life and from true feeling. This isolation is remedied by her recognition of her link not only with her past, but with people like Salma and Jamshed who have shared it.

Another of the novella's main characters, Jamshed, faces a dilemma quite similar to that of Surayya. As a child in Muhammed Ganj, Jamshed is extremely sensitive and easily hurt. The reader is first introduced to him, in fact, during a chausar game played by the Nawab Bhure's nephew and some other good-for-nothing young men who take delight in teasing

him for being without a job. When he can stand it no longer, Jamshed slaps the nephew and overturns the playing board before running off to hide himself and cry privately. Jamshed is not only enraged by the insensitivity and malice of the other boys, he is also deeply hurt by their words, so much so that he is brought to tears. In fact, Jamshed seems to be the sort of child whom others might not understand, for he is a bit of a loner, preferring long walks to the company of other people, and he is also an imaginative and thoughtful young boy. For example, just like Surayya he is fascinated by the elephant that Salma, or Chhoti Bitiya, is riding one day, and he begins to follow it from a distance. When Chhoti Bitiya drops her silver-handled parasol, instead of ignoring it or keeping it for himself, he gathers up his courage to return it to her at her home. Once there he displays simple and sensitive pride by refusing to take advantage of the hospitality the Mirzas offer him in return for the favor he has done them, and he shows himself to be of a higher character than many other boys his age. In short, Jamshed is a unique and likable boy who has very sensitive emotions, as well as great pride in and great love for his family and a rare thoughtfulness towards others.

However, as soon as he begins the schooling that he hopes will turn him into a successful man, Jamshed's character undergoes a radical transformation. No longer is he a quietly sensitive, loving young man, but a hardened, ambitious, and even blatantly insensitive one. It is natural that an unappreciated young man from a poor and unnoticed family might have a great desire to succeed and to prove himself, but Jamshed appears to believe that in order to do so, he must leave behind his primary self and become an entirely different and much less likable person. Jamshed's transformation can first be observed in his behavior toward his cousin and new wife Manzurun Nisa, for whom he has always had much affection and respect. Although in the old days he was always moved by her steadfast devotion to him and was as affectionate as his sensitive, reserved nature would allow, as soon as they are married he becomes indifferent and unloving. Manzurun Nisa worships him and his family and does all of her household chores well and without complaint. Yet Jamshed never says a kind word to her and seems to lose all interest in her when she becomes pregnant and leaves for Muhammed Ganj to have her baby at her parents' home. The birth of his first child should be a momentous time to a prospective father, but Jamshed now cares so little for his wife, or for any other reminders of his past, that he sends Manzurun Nisa a letter of divorce without even seeing his baby daughter, effectively leaving her alone to her misery and dishonor. He has begun to attain the success

he has dreamed of for so long, and, for now at least, nothing else matters, especially a wife back in a town which symbolizes his penniless and often unpleasant childhood.

Jamshed's character remains much the same when the reader is again introduced to him after he has become a successful businessman in the trading world of Karachi. Indeed, Jamshed's desire to prove himself a man of consequence and to escape from the stifling world of Muhammed Ganj seems to have borne fruit, and he is no longer anything like he was in his youth. Although not as detestable and ruthless as he might be, Jamshed is now used to being in control and to manipulating people as it suits him. Though he has not inquired after his wife or his young daughter, Farhatun Nisa, for years, he is suddenly possessed with a desire to see his daughter and he returns to Muhammed Ganj with the idea of taking her back with him to Karachi. To Jamshed's credit, he does feel his own guilt and unworthiness before the good people of Muhammed Ganj very strongly, but at the same time he has no qualms about taking Farhatun Nisa away from her mother, whose only joy is most likely in taking care of her little girl. Jamshed also has no qualms about taking advantage of Salma Mirza, who comes to him, quaking with anxiety, to apply for a receptionist's job. At first glance he can tell that Salma, though perhaps useless as a receptionist, could be of great use to him as a sort of social secretary. She is an attractive and refined girl who could wine and dine his clients and persuade them of the advantages of doing business with him. Never mind that the young girl is obviously nervous and naïve and that this job makes her seem like a kept woman who is obligated to do his bidding, for Jamshed is too concerned with the advantages to him of having such a girl in his service to consider what such a job would mean to her. If he can exploit her need for money and her lack of experience, he will do so without shame.

Salma and his wife are not the only people Jamshed manipulates, and in a sense mistreats, after he has transformed himself. And perhaps they get off more lightly than many others who fall into his shrewd businessman's grasp. Soon after he meets and hires Salma, however, Jamshed's past and his old self begin to return to his consciousness. As he lies back one night, after a party for his clients, and thinks of Salma's beauty, he hears the voice of his father talking with some visitors about property claims and the ways in which one can deceive the government in order to get more money. Suddenly he feels disgusted with himself and the person he has become.

Suddenly, a dreadful realisation filtered through the dimness of his mind, [Hyder states of Jamshed]. It was he who had made a liar and a cheat of his father. It was he who had made a forger and a hypocrite of a simple old man who had been otherworldly and resigned to divine will. ... (p. 241)

Up until now Jamshed has been inordinately proud of himself and smug about his talent for manipulating people, but now he is filled with shame and self-loathing. By losing touch with his primary self and concentrating only on his own selfish ambition, Jamshed has let down the people he loves and has given them no choice but to become like him. His father is a symbol of the past life which he has scorned and turned his back on. No wonder his father's goodness and virtue have not been able to survive.

Jamshed's realization of the importance of his primary self and his past life becomes complete during his huge housewarming party, attended by most of the important and influential people of Karachi. The party is intensely symbolic of what Jamshed has become: successful and flashy, but curiously hollow and disconnected. There is no real emotion or camaraderie among the people there, only the emptiness of selfish people mainly concerned with appearing good in front of others. Jamshed, partly to lessen the shock of his realization that he has contributed to his father's decline, and partly because the reckless atmosphere of the party demands it, has become quite drunk. He enrages both Salma and Surayya before he is called away to read a letter notifying him that his former wife has died. The news that another person from his past, whose misery he was also in large part responsible for, has disappeared, takes much of the hollow pleasure of the night away from Jamshed. Though he did not realize it at the time, when he turned his back on his old, sensitive, and deeply-feeling self and abandoned his father and Manzurun Nisa, he lost his connection with life and with humanity. When he reads of Manzurun Nisa's death he begins to realize the significance of this loss. This slowly dawning recognition reaches completion when Surayya reveals to him the true identity of both herself and Salma, and of their mutual connection, having all been children in Muhammed Ganj. Suddenly Jamshed, like Surayya, feels a rush of memory and connection, a sense that his past has reclaimed him. Just as though it were yesterday, he remembers the time he returned Salma's parasol and he recalls the manner in which she softly mumbled her thanks. With his discovery of the identity of Surayya and Salma, and the realization of their mutual connection, Jamshed can no longer ignore his primary self and his past existence. They are right there

in front of him, pulsating with life. In agony, he kneels before these two people who have brought him back to himself and begs their forgiveness, and in spite of his pain he seems to have found a sort of personal salvation and contentment. He knows now that his past and his present are not mutually exclusive, they are intertwined, and he realizes that for years he has been denying his true character and shutting himself off from the world. In a letter to Salma, which he writes after his party, he shows a glimpse of the sensitive and thoughtful Jamshed of his youth who needed only to be reclaimed.

Rajinder Singh Bedi and Qurratulain Hyder do not present their readers with any illusions about the difficulties a person will have in realizing and accepting his past, especially after life has fashioned him into what seems like a completely different person. The process is a painful one for each one of their characters, and in the case of Jamshed and Surayya even threatens to overwhelm them and destroy their very conception of reality, but it proves necessary and ultimately beautiful. One's early, primary self is not an entrapping, disgraceful thing to be shunned and forgotten, but an entity which every person must come to terms with, accept, and hopefully learn to appreciate. Bedi and Hyder realize that every stage of a person's existence is significant, that each one leads into and is dependent on the other, and that a person's past is an inescapable part of his state of being. □