2.

The Other Side of the Rainbow: A Tragedy of Misreading and Silence

Deepshikha Routray

Nayak, Niranjan. *The Other Side of the Rainbow*. Notionpress, 2024. Pp. 248. Rs. 299/-

The novel, *The Other Side of the Rainbow*, is an attempt to chronicle the inner tumult of a young man scarred by poverty, trauma, and emotional isolation, and to do so with honesty and psychological depth is not at all an easy feat. Yet Niranjan Nayak, in this debut novel, manages it precisely through a fictional account that has its roots in his deeply lived and intimately felt experiences. As Pati remarks, "A private emotion arising out of a lived experience of Nayak's has, with the years, snowballed into a story so huge that it clamours, as it were, for a public appearance" (Foreword, p. vii). This 'clamour' takes form in a compelling, emotionally layered narrative that defies easy categorisation. The novel doesn't cover a full developmental arc typical of a bildungsroman.

What clearly defines *The Other Side of the Rainbow* is its focus on friendship though it steers clear of sentimental portrayals of college camaraderie. It is a profound excavation of emotional terrain where friendship is liberation, limitation, salvation, and suffocation. The novel explores identity, class, belonging, psychological trauma, and the irreparable gaps between perception and truth through the intertwined lives of its two protagonists, Arun and Rajiv. In the words of Rajiv, their friendship was like "a continuous affair of loving, unloving, fighting and then compromising, envying and admiring a bunch of youngsters within whom, someone like me with a lonely childhood had discovered the meaning of living a life that had always been tardy slow, dull and boring" (61).

Dual Narration: Two Voices, Two Truths

One of the most striking features of Nayak's novel is his narratological experimentation. Told through alternating first-person perspectives, the story unfolds in the voices of both Arun and Rajiv. Nayak cleverly uses different font styles to differentiate the narrators, thus helping readers switch seamlessly between these two internal worlds. This formal device mirrors the core tension of the novel: the inability of even the closest of friends to inhabit each other's pain truly. With his privileged background and innate charm, Rajiv provides the lens of a reflective, often guilt-ridden observer. On the other hand, Arun carries the burden of lived suffering; his voice is anguished, introspective, and filled with unhealed wounds.

Arun's narrative begins in the crucible of poverty. The youngest in a struggling family, his life is marked by deprivation, loss, and a constant yearning for dignity. His father's death plunges the family deeper into economic hardship. Arun's escape into education is not a luxury but a lifeline. His mother's desperate plea – "You must survive, my son. Not for yourself but for all of us" becomes a refrain that stays with him (9). This plea haunts the novel, returning with devastating irony at its conclusion when Arun takes his own life. The boy who is supposed to survive for everyone else becomes the one who cannot survive. Arun is intellectually brilliant and emotionally intense. His entry into Ravenshaw College marks a turning point in his life and the beginning of his unravelling. There, he meets Rajiv, and their bond forms the emotional spine of the novel. Nayak aptly describes their bond: "two different entities with two completely different backgrounds, outlooks and ideologies, bound together in an inextricable affiliation, wrought by a capricious destiny, landed that day in their land of youth and dreams" (81). Rajiv's life is the antithesis of Arun's. Though not particularly ambitious, he is buoyed by a relatively stable upbringing. A hypochondriac and emotionally cautious, Rajiv is both fascinated and unsettled by Arun's intensity. Rajiv, who has nothing to hide, and Arun, who hides everything, form a contrasting yet complementary pair. Rajiv's reflections on love are particularly telling: love is a fleeting, ineffable state for him. "Love to me is a premature foetus that gets aborted a few days after it is conceived" (115). Friendship, in contrast, is enduring and sacred, perhaps because it requires less vulnerability. Into this fragile balance

enters Ruby, the "dark butterfly," who acts as a catalyst and a mirror that disrupts Arun's emotional equilibrium. Ruby is enigmatic, intelligent, and self-assured, while Arun, starved of affection and acceptance, misreads her intellectual curiosity as a romantic interest. Rajiv views Ruby as a threat to Arun's stability, and his apprehensions come true with Arun's humiliation at a high-end snack bar with Ruby and her elite friends, which becomes a pivotal moment. Arun recalls, "Standing isolated in one corner and watching Ruby and her friends having fun was so humiliating" (132). His rejection by Ruby, though respectful, becomes unbearable, triggering a deeper descent into despair.

The tragedy of Arun's suicide lies not just in the act but in the slow, unnoticed erosion of his emotional strength. His inner demons, fuelled by childhood trauma, class anxiety, and unreciprocated affection, remain invisible to those closest to him. "Being reclusive was not an option for me; it was a compulsion, deeply psychological" (156), he admits. Rajiv's guilt is profound. Despite his intuition, he fails to prevent the catastrophe. Arun's final note, in which he confesses to delusional psychosis and absolves others of blame, offers little solace. The pain of misreading Arun's silence lingers.

Saswati is a poignant figure whose forgotten voice dominates at the end. She is portrayed as a sensitive, intelligent girl deeply in love with Rajiv, but the latter fails to reciprocate her feelings. Her presence serves as a counterpoint to Ruby's. Unlike Ruby, Saswati offers unwavering support. Yet Rajiv's evasiveness causes her pain. Thirty years later, she confronts Rajiv, a happily married man with a son. She vents out her suppressed angst: "That was the first and the last occasion I had lied to my father and slipped out of my house to be with you" (198), she tells him, recalling his indifference after Arun's death. Her quiet fury and long-suppressed declaration of love become a moment of closure and reckoning.

Nayak's prose is lyrical, meditative, and emotionally resonant. The novel is packed with philosophical reflections, particularly on love, suffering, and the human need for connection. The statement "A man's destination is not his destiny" (89) encapsulates the existential undertones of the book. Nayak doesn't romanticise suffering rather he exposes it, especially the suffering that festers in silence. Arun's

story becomes a commentary on how structural disadvantages shape emotional outcomes, while Rajiv's reflections force readers to confront their own complacencies. Though set largely on a college campus, *The Other Side of the Rainbow* transcends the genre of the campus novel. It is a philosophical meditation on class, memory, and emotional inheritance. Prof. Himanshu Mohapatra rightly observes that the novel is "a serious engagement with the labyrinthine alleyways of the mind" (Mohapatra). The alternating narration allows readers to inhabit two contrasting interior worlds and shows how events are interpreted, misinterpreted, and reinterpreted across time and perspective.

The title of the novel is metaphorically loaded. A rainbow is often seen as a symbol of hope, but Nayak asks us to consider what lies beyond it: beyond joy, beyond reconciliation. For Arun, the other side of the rainbow is not salvation but silence. Arun embodies the paradox that portrays the desire for glorious living, which is marred by the desire to die. He is brilliant, kind, and full of promise but ultimately undone by a storm no one else could fully see. *The Other Side of the Rainbow* is a stunning literary debut. Honest, unflinching, and emotionally intelligent, it refuses easy answers or sentimental resolutions. It demands that readers confront uncomfortable truths about love, friendship, class, and the cost of silence. Niranjan Nayak emerges as a talented storyteller and a chronicler of the soul. His characters don't just live on the page, they bleed, ache, and endure. This novel will stay with readers long after the final page, whispering truths that most of us are not ready to face.

Works Cited

Nayak, Niranjan. *The Other Side of the Rainbow*. Notionpress, 2024.

Mohapatra, Himansu S. "Book Review: A Redemptive Tale of Losing and Finding." Odisha Bytes, 29 Nov. 2024, odishabytes.com/book-review-a-redemptive-tale-of-losing-and-finding/#google_vignette.

Pati, Debasisha. Foreword. *The Other Side of the Rainbow*, by Niranjan Nayak, Notionpress, 2024, p. vii.