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**Cobalt Blue- A Journey through Disillusionment to Self-  
Discovery**

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## Abstract

When unquestionable belief shatters, it brings disbelief, pain, agony and distressing memories. Sachin Kundalkar's Cobalt Blue translated in English by Jerry Pinto, sketches the main protagonists Tanay and Anuja. The novel picturizes the ecstatic as well as lugubrious plight of both brother (Tanay) and sister (Anuja) throughout their journey. It portrays the unexpected transition in their life with the entrance of PG in their family. The one who drastically changed their lives through perilous ground of tangled hidden relationships. My research paper brings the outcomes, how the siblings tugged their life after the PG haunted their hearts and how they brought their life back from the clutches of mournful past. It was their psychological strength that brought them back to life. The cultural and traditional aspects of the Marathi Brahmin family are portrayed in the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Joshi (Baba and Aai). The interdependencies of their lives as well as secure private lives of the characters is another characteristic of the novel. Jerry Pinto has wonderfully translated the inbuilt feelings and emotions of the characters. His expertise in portraying psychology of characters made him won the Sahitya Akademi Award, and the Windham–Campbell Literature Prize for his debut novel, EM and the Big HOOM. He also edited, A Book of Light- When a Loved One Has a Different Mind. In both the works, his grasp of voice of conscience and deep rooted pain gets live before the readers. In Cobalt Blue, the monologues of Tanay and Anuja's diary vindicate the readers, the inherent theme of the novel.

**Keywords:** Monologue, Drastically, Psychological, Magnetic, Cordial, Marathi, Culture.

Cobalt Blue, a brief novel written originally by Sachin Kundalkar, in Marathi, in 2006 and it was translated in English by Jerry Pinto in 2013. Sachin Kundalkar is a famous Marathi play writ, film director and screenplay writer. He also won the National Award for Nirop (2007) and Gandha (2009). Kundalkar has written this novel when he was just 20. According to Kundalkar Cobalt Blue "is a tale of rapturous love and fierce heartbreak told with tenderness and unsparing clarity". In the Joshi family there are five members. Baba, Aai, Aseem (elder son), Tanay (Younger son) and Anuja (daughter). Aseem is the most favourable child of the couple while Tanay and Anuja are rebel. Tanay is a gay and the family is unaware about it. The twist in their life starts when a paying guest enters the family with no



address, no caste, no home, no family and even no name. He frames love saga first with Tanay and later on with Anuja. But this interpretation appears with the first reading of the novel while in real the PG loves neither Tanay nor Anuja. He only loves himself and his desires. And this was the hidden fact or reality that Tanay and Anuja could not guess about him. This fact of him brought both the brother and sister to grave sorrow and pain. The monologue of Tanay marks the first sentence of the novel. In his loneliness he still tries to find him (PG). A PG, but much more than that. For Tanay, he was no less than his soulmate. Tanay kept preserved each and every moment spent with him. He recalls when the PG entered the house and changed Tanay's life drastically. He felt in love with the PG at one glance and one after another he changed most of his habits. He started spending most of his time in the upstairs room with the PG.

The room where the PG<sup>1</sup> stayed was the room of Tanay's grandparents' illness. The smell of "Amrutanjan"<sup>2</sup>(balm) stayed everywhere in the room even after washing it many times. But the PG liked the smell immensely. During the conversation between PG and Tanay we find the love of spring. Tanay perceived his smell to his soul. When the PG observes the room to stay Tanay's monologue express his inner thirst, "That's when I realized that smell is a matter of mind. What smells you brought with you! Rum and cigarettes, your sweat and macaroni cooking on the hotplate, and then, because I loved it, attar of khus. And the smell of you, a unique personal smell of your own. When I think of you, that smell comes flooding back". (11) Tanay got fascinated by his life because his own life was quite ordinary, secure and comparatively comfortable. While the life of PG was full of struggles and challenges. The PG<sup>3</sup> lost his parents when he was in 10<sup>th</sup> standard. He spend most of his life in hostels and as a PG. His uncle molested him when he started living with his aunt. Tanay found the PG's life more magnetic and thus he deeply moved towards him.

Tanay's deep attachments to the PG melted his heart when the soul connected to his grief, "midnight in the window, just you and me. Even then you didn't cry. At these times, I felt I should be your mother, your father, your brother, your friend, everything. But you had

<sup>1</sup> Nameless Paying guest abbreviated as PG

<sup>2</sup> Amrutanjan- Specific brand of Balm used by the grandparents of Tanay and Anuja.

<sup>3</sup> Nameless Paying guest abbreviated as PG



long reached the point at which you decided you would never cry again.” (12). Tanay had a deep curiosity to know each and every detail about the PG. Whether he loved someone or how did he managed alone in life? He had a lots of questions in his mind and he is eager to resolve them. Soon they started sharing everything and had intense relationship. Tanay was on cloud nine. He dreamt of having permanent relationship with him. They both have participated in the secret gay meetings where the gay couple could share their feelings. They formed a cordial bond with the Aashish and Samuel who were another gay couple. In fact it was an overwhelming experience for both of them. Tanay, as a soulmate lashed himself with each of the tiny interest and likings of PG. During their routine conversations he got to know his liking about a French woman writer and her writings.

Although Tanay remained in relationship with other men also yet the entry of PG created an aura of love around him. A complete psychological change came across him and his mind completely devoted to him. He perceived a perfect image of the PG in his mind where he was his lifelong partner. After the PG ditched Tanay and eloped with his sister, Tanay reminds himself the times when, “For hours on end, I sat in that upstairs room, staring at you while you went about your life, unaware of my attention. You would be squeezing paint out of tubes, hanging your clothes out to dry, wiping your stained hands on you T-shirt, blowing on the milk as it bubbled over, lifting vessels off the hotplate, or sucking on a singed finger. I’d be staring at you and thinking, I should ask, I should ask, I should ask: do you want to be in a stable monogamous relationship for the rest of your life? Even if we’re not going to have children, even if we don’t have to worry about guests, even if we’re going to end up sleeping on two single beds, separated by a table on which there’s a copper vessel containing water, I want us to be together.”(26-27)

The memories of PG imprinted deeply on Tanay’s mind and he had learnt living amidst them. His love for painting, literature, cooking and for Tanay blossomed his life. In first reading the reader’s focus arises as it is an LGBTQ based novel but it’s not. The times when the novel was written originally in 2006 in Marathi it could be assumed as an LGBTQ novel. But the motive was quite different. Sachin Kundalkar himself says about the theme that he kept in his mind about the novel, “ Thank fully, no one calls it a gay novel anymore. That term is so passé. Now about 12 years later, I feel the brother and the sister are not two



people but masculine and feminine sides of the same person. And the book is thus, in turns, a feminine and a masculine monologue.” (Goodreads).<sup>4</sup> Although we can't ignore novel's gay aspect yet the inherited value of Cobalt Blue lies in the broader psychological roots of its characters.

The PG impressed everyone in the family, Baba, Aai, Anuja and Tanay moreover he became an initial part of the family. He was also interested to know more about the cultural heritage of the city. He asked about the “Ganeshotsav<sup>5</sup>” (32) celebrations, “Laavni<sup>6</sup>” (32) and traditional dances at mass meetings. Tanay explained him in detail about the culture of nine yards saree, people acting in television serials based on classic novels, bridges in the city across the river and the colleges of the city. The PG loved the family culture in the city. The family is deeply connected in loving knots. Each member of the family have love and care for each other but still they have walls around them. Tanay, Anuja and Aseem, all have different perspective of life. Their interests, habits and life goals are unmatched. The eldest son of the family, Aseem, is the most favourable child and has own detached goals in life. Tanay and Anuja are considered as rebel children who don't care much about family.

The favourite colour of the PG was Cobalt Blue, it was the colour of his canvas also. Blue, the colour of loneliness, which he poured into the lives of Tanay and Anuja. He always kept an option in his life. Tanay and Anuja were also like the substitutes for him. Throughout the novel Tanay finds similarities between the PG and him but infact it was Tanay who adopted his lifestyle and habits. For Tanay he was a man who could be found in the novels, he was completely influenced by his ideology. Sometimes he got angry out of love. He even could not expect his life without him. Tanay adopted his routine in his own habits, his fond of Coke with a pinch of salt, sitting on the compound wall after a bath, riding over the hills outside and what not. After the departure of his soulmate, Tanay tried to recollect the broken pieces of his heart and remembered his upbringing. In Maharashtrian family there is a psychiatrist in every person of the family. Everyone provides a ray of hope in despair. Kundalkar's observations on life are sharp and witty. There is a hilarious passage that talks

<sup>4</sup> An excerpt quoted from Sachin Kundalkar's statement at goodreads.com

<sup>5</sup> Auspicious Hindu festival celebrated for ten days especially in South India.

<sup>6</sup> A famous dance form of Maharashtra



about how domestic counseling happens in a Maharashtrian family. Everyone has an inner psychiatrist within them that emerges with some home-made mottos and a few lines from a Jagjit Singh ghazal or a Tukaram quote, and finally the ever popular phrase: Whatever happens, happens for the best. (74)

But what was the best that had to happen? Or it was worse to happen? Was it Anuja's affair? Everyone was cursing the Anuja and the PG for diminishing family's reputation. Tanay made himself lost in his solitude. He reluctantly admitted that the PG loved his sister Anuja. In contrast the reality was excruciating and shocking. The other half of the novel contains the memories of Anuja in the form of her diary. She eloped with the PG as she thought he loved her. She found charm in him that she couldn't see in any other boy of her age. She had written her experience with the PG in the diary after her psychiatrist, Dr. Khanvilkar suggested her to do so. Her diary provides the fact how Anuja found herself being robbed and endangered. Her condition was pathetic. She lost her charm due to the side effect of the chemicals and drugs that she took. She was shifted to her Maushi's<sup>7</sup> home where she tried to gain her lost confidence.

But is it so easy to come out of the sea where you willingly dived, sea of love, belief and faith. Anujatried to kill herself but couldn't. She had to face her mother, family and society. Her mother scolded her and said, "You want to die? If we can hurt you so much, why did you come back? Go now, find some other man and elope with him." (10). Anuja's grief is more visible. Her bowing and depression expressed her pain to everyone. On the other hand Tanay's grief inherited him and hold with clutches. He can't share her situation with anyone not even with Anuja. A person who betrayed both the siblings and what an irony that they can't share their feelings. Tanay's family assumed that he is lost due to Anuja's elopement and he was missing her sister. No one could even guess what the hell he was facing inside.

Anuja as a girl in our Indian society faced many crucial situations especially due to the fact that she left home with someone without even letting her parents know. After she returned home she faced the prejudiced family and society. Although her parents were willing to see her

<sup>7</sup>Anuja's Aunt- Sharayu Maushi- Marathi word Maushi is used to call her.



happy but still they had grudges against her. All that Anuja needed was the love and care of the family but instead family wanted a quick recovery from the memories of her past. According to Anuja her parents even don't want to hear her grief. "They want it wrapped up, put away, forgotten. As you might take a car to the garage, I was brought to Sharayu Maushi's house. To be repaired." (112). For Anuja, her family kept punishing her with their silence. The evocation of PG haunt her every moment. She roamed to find him missing but he had not returned. In a flurry she searched library, seashore, streets but all she got was disappointment. He left for never returning back. Her memory lane brought her to find the reason of his leaving but could not find anything. He took all his stuff along him, his bag, clothes everything, like he had planned it before. The darkness spread before the eyes of Anuja. How will she face the world now? She felt that everyone must be laughing at her. She kept crying until her breath began to catch her throat. She reminds herself when the memories of home swim onto his mind, "I'd put my head in his lap and stay there. As for him, he might well have been born the day he arrived to stay with us, for he never talked about his past." (204). The source of pain is same for both siblings but the expression of grief is totally different. Anuja is free to cry, she has the reason and society approves it but for Tanay what could be the reason to cry? He could not express that he is broken as his soulmate treasured him. Yes he could not, because it will bring disaster in his family. It will reveal her identity as mere a gay. He would be considered guilty. No one is going to console him. That's the hidden treasure of Tanay where he kept all his grief hidden from the narrow minded society.

\_\_\_\_\_ Anuja was more deeply connected to her Maushi. She could open up before her without any hesitation. The thoughts of her Maushi influenced her most. After all she was a girl who loved and faced challenges in her life. She had volunteered for Green Earth Organization after the tenth board exams. She got a chance and went hiking to Nepal. There she met "Green Earth Volunteers" (129) at Jalpaiguri. In her diary she had mentioned the thoughts of her Maushi on generation shift and its consequences on coming age, "We had been given the freedom to choose how we want to live and behave. We were lucky to have parents who felt blessed in having children and were willing to take all the responsibilities that came with it. And so our sense of freedom is only a rehearsal. The next generation will have to pay the price."()



Anuja doubted herself for taking wrong decisions throughout her life. She couldn't cope up with the standards of the society where marriage and having children considered as the evidence of successful life. But Anuja imprinted that she messed up her life. The industry and mass media culture, the advertising boards on roadsides and smiles on the faces of models made her feel like a real survivor. Now she could easily differentiate between the real humans and socio-cultural life. A human being is totally different from inside that he pretends to be. She felt embarrassed at her brother Aseem's engagement ceremony where the house was full of relatives. "Everyone came up to me, to stroke my face solicitously, in the hope of extracting some juicy details."(218). It is obvious to human psychology that it has a sole desire of acceptance. Anuja was feeling the same while facing her first love, Anubhav<sup>8</sup>, who still loved her after rejection. He promised Anuja that he will wait for her. She felt devastated. She finds herself unable to express to the world. A fear of negligence covered her desires. All she wanted was acceptance. But she felt bound to the thought pattern of the society. She reminds herself of the days when she was a school girl, "I forgot to take my lunch box to school. If anyone forgot, Anubhav would immediately tear his poli<sup>9</sup> into two and share. So I ate his poli. I knew there was always a crunchy red apple in his bag and I seized that too and ate it. He never complained." (180)

The saga of sufferings first told from the perspective of Tanay, followed by that of Anuja, Cobalt Blue pairs interior monologues addressed to the same person, the beloved who came and colonized two young lives before vanishing without any explanation. Tanay is left numb with shock when his sister elopes with the man he loves, and has been loved by, unknown to the rest of the world. On returning home after being abandoned by the same man, Anuja suffers a nervous breakdown and acts out a prolonged ritual of mourning that only the young, burning with the intensity of their grief, can sustain with such fierce devotion. (Ghoshal).

The journey of comeback of the siblings enliven and energize the readers. Tanay planned to go to Mumbai and search for some work. He was going to translate one of Manto's stories

<sup>8</sup> A college friend of Anuja who loved her deeply, but Anuja did not accept his love due to her ego.

<sup>9</sup> Maharashtrian Puran **Poli** is a sweet flatbread savored on almost all the occasions in India. Served piping hot with a dollop of ghee, it is flavorful and filling. It is just like paratha, but it is stuffed with a sweet filling of chana dal, jaggery and ghee(Wikipedia)





and turn it into a play with his friend. Now as Anuja returned home he understood well that the loss of his love was nothing as that person loved no one. Now he had no tears, but only memories that surge him back still he was firm. Anuja determined that she will do something for herself and live the life on her terms. She decided to join Green Earth, started preparing for job interview and joined the training session. She wanted to pour herself into the life where there will be no signs of sorrow. She wanted to vanish every sign of disappointment. She rediscovered herself. She found herself valuable after a long time, “Someone needed me, my eyes, my intelligence, my hands and legs. I wiped my eyes on my T-shirt and said that I was.”(187).

Anuja originated herself as a free spirit and independent thinker now. She rediscovered that lost Anuja, who was crazy, brave and enthusiastic. Her influence is delineated with the monologue in her mind where she encourages herself to seek independence. She decided to earn and save. And then, she recalls and perceives the magnificent quote of famous writer, Virginia Woolf, to have a room of her own, however small.

Hence, Cobalt Blue, bestowed its readers with the realm of society. The sufferings and grave ridden psychological trauma of the siblings who drifted themselves for an unknown, fascinating person without existence. Cobalt Blue is also a legendary novel that shows how sufferings and obstacles give the shape to human character and make him rediscover his true strength and power. In the last both the siblings get rid of the materials and memories lied in the upstairs room, “rolls of canvas, an easel, the two paintings on the wall, a tattered lampshade, a mat, a bucket, a bundle of clothes, a hotplate, a broken strainer, two glass plates, spoons...thick with dust, they were brought down by the workers. The glass jar broke on the way down; shards flew everywhere.” (219). And with the broken glass jar, vanished the illusion of fascination and devotion, which brought trust, self- confidence and freedom from restrained cultural trends.



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