

G.V. Desani's Hali: A Drama of Passions**Dr. Siddhartha Sharma**Associate Professor of English
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MGCGV, Chitrakoot, Satna (MP)**Abstract**

As Molly Ramanujan remarks, "A work of art, for Desani as for V.S. Naipaul, is the imprint of personality." Hali is really the imprint of Desani's spiritual personality. Hali consists of a myth which owes its inception to Hindu and Buddhist sources. But there is much in it that is of G.V. Desani, the man. It seems that it has the same relation to the life of the author "as the dreamer to the dream in a dream analysis."

G.V.Desani had a tragic love-affair, which threatened to kill him. Hali is a monument to this tragic love-affair. This sorrow and helplessness made Desani wretched. He wanted to remain mentally peaceful and was in grave need of cleansing his heart of this tragedy. As he himself states, "Briefly, it was a question of cleansing my heart." Except for Hali Desani would have left his career and competition. In Hali the writer is more in the nature of a "meditative act to purge the last remains of possessive passion from the heart and cleanse the image of love in memory". It is through the character of Hali that Desani is trying to purge himself of the last remains

Hali is full of women characters and the intense passion of each one of them for Hali has been dealt with exclusively in the various sections. These sections are well united, the strong link being Hali himself with whom all the other characters are passionately attached. Thus, we see Desani rejecting the conventional structure of a play and introducing a new one in its place. This has enabled the play to have a better organic unity and compactness.

Keywords: Commonwealth Literature, Hindu and Buddhist Culture, Holocaust, Detachment, Renunciation.

As Molly Ramanujan remarks, "A work of art, for Desani as for V.S. Naipaul, is the imprint of personality" (Ramanujan 93). Hali is really the imprint of Desani's spiritual personality. Hali consists of a myth which owes its inception to Hindu and Buddhist sources. But there is much in it that is of G.V. Desani, the man. It seems that it has the same relation to the life of the author "as the dreamer to the dream in a dream analysis" (Ramanujan 89).

G.V.Desani had a tragic love-affair, which threatened to kill him. Hali is a monument to this tragic love-affair. Desani himself writes of it:

I had a personal tragedy ---- a serious love-affair. Hali is a monument to this affair and tragedy. I planned it so carefully as to make people moved to tears. I was then carrying a deep hurt in my heart and Hali was to be gesture of loyalty to the love I bore a friend. After this tragedy I felt so helpless that I would have been killed by the sorrow but for some kind friends in Amsterdam. (Vasudev 25)

This sorrow and helplessness made Desani wretched. He wanted to remain mentally peaceful and was in grave need of cleansing his heart of this tragedy. As he himself states, "Briefly, it was a question of cleansing my heart" (Vasudev 25). Except for Hali Desani would have left his career and competition. In Hali the writer is more in the nature of a "meditative act to purge the last remains of possessive passion from the heart and cleanse the image of love in memory" (Vasudev 23). It is through the character of Hali that Desani is trying to purge himself of the last remains of sorrow emanating from the affair.

Unlike Hatterr, Hali is immensely moral and like Desani, as Desani himself Points out, "Faced with sorrow and defeat, his search is after peace" (Desani 406). He further says.

Hali is my image of the excellent man. He is in every particular, the opposite of H. Hatterr. He is sinless. I do not find any moral or ethical lapses in him. (Desani 406)

For Desani, Hali is a unique and different work, and needs "very special sensibility, to understand Hali and its very special idiom." (Desani 406) Thus, every section of Hali is a presentation of passion. it can be termed, in all fairness, as a drama of passion.

In the very first section, Hali's passionate relationship with the other women is presented. Hali loved his mother greatly, his love for her being greater than even his mother's for him. He was as Molly Ramanujan says, "an emotionally gifted being." (Ramanujan 99) Hali's love for his mother was as great as Kipling's mother's love for her son. Hali also loves Rooh, his beloved, and Maya, his foster mother, with equal depth. One might travel to the highest peak and the lowest depths and never encounter such a heart as Hali's. Then the Gods "conspired and made him beautiful." (Desani 5) Mira prides in him, as some mothers do, a child prodigy. When Molly Ramanujan asked Desani's neice if he is an impossible man, she replies, "Desani had been a child prodigy." (Ramanujan 11) Then gods decreed an ordeal ---- as flies do to wanton boys.

From the foot of a hill Hali saw his mother climbing the rocks. He could see "a halo of amber mist around her, and he thought she was divine, deathless, and made of love." (Hali 5) Then suddenly he saw her fall. "The bright water of the river churned, the reeds shook, there was foam, the river was still" (Hali 5) and she was swallowed by the river. Then Maya, his foster mother, nursed him and Hali grew to be a man. Molly Ramanujan feels that "the theme of the play is death and separation." (Ramanujan 89) The dead Rooh is his beloved. Having offered Hali the most flawless woman, they take her away beyond his reach, and Hali is left to suffer intensely.

In the second section Isha, the Lord, comes into being, who says, "In me then sadness was born." (Hali 7) He takes no pleasure in his creation. In great agony, he cries out:

Curst am I, crust am I:

O hear ye, all mortals, all shapes, all forms curst am I, Curst am I: (Hali 7)

In the third section, the dead mother, Mira, passionately longs for Hali. Mira cries as if across a chasm, "canst hear?" (Hali 7) In Hali, the dominant aspect of life is separation and suffering. From Hali, all other characters separate one by one. At the end Hali himself committed suicide and Maya is left to mourn his death.

Rooh's intense passion for Hali can be seen in the fourth section. She is a Sita cut off before she could serve her god-man. She cries with lidless eyes and gives her lipless pledge. Longing beyond death, never ceasing to say, "Here I am: Come to me:" (Hali 8) Rooh sincerely regrets that she cannot serve Hali.

Hali's suffering and fate can be seen in the fifth section. The narrator tells us about the past life of Hali. In the past life Hali outlived his beloved, and in successive lives also he would suffer the same. Molly Ramanujan commits, "In Hali separation is the first step away from personhood as if relationship and connections with others defined Hali." (Ramanujan 90)

Then the narrator sets the scene for the appearance of the adversary, Rahu. Rahu appears and foretells an experience in which Hali will lose another beloved. Isha, Hali's God, will place all the flowers of the earth before Hali. This will tempt Hali into another snare of dreams. Hali will be a yellow rose. Hali's beloved will desire the yellow rose, and both will perish in a cruel end. Hali cries out in terror:

Shall she sob like a child. o spirit? would the curse upon her head be lifted by my anguish, so be it, let it be: Thy curse upon my head, Spirit: Thy wrath upon my head, let me be stricken for ever, for ever, and evermore: (Hali 9)

Hali's offer is an egoless effort to avert evil, where a man puts aside his own interests for a larger good.

In the seventh section, Rooh returns as the sea nymph, as the chosen one of Isha. In each reappearance, her life is entwined with that of Hali. Hali did not go to the ghats where they cremated her. Hali enters the temple of the Destroyer, where he sees a scene that is much like a play-within-a-play. A brahmin worshipping Shiva has the corpse of his dead child. He tries to revive the child but fails. The symbolic act is representative of man's inability to circumvent death. Hali goes out and sits by the funeral pyre of Rooh and is at peace. Then he undergoes an intermediary stage between attachment and detachment. Canonizing Rooh, he tries to detach himself from her. Hali wants peace, "I do not long to die, for death might deny me peace." (Hali 11) This desire of Hali, according to Desani, must have caused further agony to Rooh. He says,

A character of mine heard the ghost of her lover cry out to God for comfort. It was years after that I knew that the poor woman might feel an additional pang of regret that her lover did not cry out for her. (Narsimhaiah 402)

The voice of Rooh still has an attractive lilt to it when she asks him to "listen to the laughter of the sea:" (Hali 11)

The climactic point of Hali's physical and mental agony can be seen in the eighth section. Hali begs Maya to take him to the Magician who is the great healer and who is a skeleton of a man smeared with ash, his eyes fixed in a rigid stare. Maya's intense passion and love for Hali is revealed through her statement: "If thou wilt not sleep, Maya will die." (Hali 12)

Hali's relations with other women are also full of passion and love. As Molly Ramanujan remarks:

There is no dearth of love for Hali. Mira, Rooh, Maya, Isha's chosen one, as well as the sea nymph love him beyond common human experience of love. They are blameless women, just as Hali is blameless in their eyes. (Ramanujan 113)

Hali and Maya reach the magician. The Magician says, "Go thou to Gauhati: Thou seest the blue hill:" (Ramanujan 113) Hali does see a ridge, a red ridge --- and sees terrible visions:

Hali saw a ridge. A red ridge. Upon it a man. His face was pierced, fissured, full of holes. Holes, sweating wax. Adhering wax. There was no blood in him, but cozing wax. Adhering wax. His hair was like spikes. He was panting. Panting from pain. His eyes were orange, rust-like and half-seeing through torn and swollen lids. Upon his chest were the letters 'Hali' written in wounds. And he cried. He cried like an infant in pain. (Hali 12)

There is no distinction between man and man. When one suffers, all suffer. Then he sees a thorn fire. In the flare, Hali sees the procession of the living dead whose ashen skins and elongated breasts recall beggar women in India and the hairy skins are not different from that of apes.

Then Hali enters a cave and there is the temple of Durga, Enchantress. To enter a cave is to enter the unconscious and seeing Durga is seeing life. Then Hali sees, rising from a chasm, that beneath the "horns of fire" (Hali 13) of the sun is a terrifying image of manking, torn, and decapitated. The image of the groom leading his bride "to his home, to love, to cherish" (Hali 13) is the most delightful and suggestive illusion. Hali sees Durga or Kali in an awesome posture with the head of Sha (Mira's fawn) which makes him (Hali) terrified.

Hali does not wake Maya with his cry, but Maya wakes Hali with her cries. Such is the relation between Hali and Maya, which is full of love and passion, that Maya knows what Hali's feelings are.

In the ninth section, Rahu speaks to Rooh through a voice inside Hali has suffered terribly and thus wants to move beyond the summit city after renouncing Rooh. After reaching the "summit city" (Hali 14) of human achievement, Hali speaks of his passion for ridding the world of tyrants and turning the earth into an Edenic garden. But having failed, he feels "barren" (Hali 16) He has taken a risk and there is no immediate resting place. Rahu then expresses his wrath and prophecies holocaust. It is a prophecy of war of the type of the world war II. Said spirit:

Hearken, Hali: Hearken to the footsteps: The dread footsteps: The perilous footsteps? Affliction approaches: Awed, frenzied, thy brothers and sisters shall war upon one another, ... And their ribs shall break, ... Ants shall nest in thy brothers jaws and flies shall feed upon thy sisters breasts.And thou shalt seek flesh. Hali, seek and violate the flesh of thy chosen, thy chosen sister, thy chosen maid, and thy forehead shall be upon her forehead and thy lips upon her lips. Then thou shalt burn, burn from desire, the desire for her flesh, and she shall die of terror: terror: her horrified heart torn, torn of terror: (Hali 16-17)

Rahu's response makes the theatre of the war centre on the body and spirit of Rooh. And Hali would be no different from the worst tyrant in that war. Hali, greatly agonised and horrified, cries out, "Nay,o Rahu: oh may,o Rahu" (Hali 17).

Actually Desani and Hali are one and the same. What Hali sees was seen by Desani during the world war II. When Hali was published in London in 1950, T.S.Eliot said of it that "the imagery is terrifying." (Lal 21)

Hali is frustrated and angry. He says: "It is a sea of blood, Lord: and dead art thou to me and I to thee." (Hali 17) The vulture is king in this wasteland. The suffering Hali cannot bear this fact. Frustrated, he would claw his god, smite him, wound and gore his "fabled face." (Hali 18) It is only through detachment that Hali can alleviate his sufferings. Hali is on the way to detachment He gives up not only Rooh, but also his home and country along with his faith.

Hali is a personal tragic history which would give 'fear, remorse, agony, despair'. Hali, who has never known a father, whose mother died young, whose god failed him, sublimates his energies, through intense sufferings so he can say that he would be 'abandoned no more, Molly Ramanujan rightly remarks: "Hali's spiritual quest is for desireless love both for him as well as for others." (Ramanujan 124) Hali's passions show that true fulfilment in life is the acceptance of death, as nothing but a renunciation of all things that belong to the world of time.

Hali neither desires the living nor the dead: "I wish to be high, I wish to be nigh, as air, as air bearing love." (Hali 20)Then he would become omnipresent like a god.

Desani meant Hali to be a "personal statement about death." (Desani 207) There are many parallels between the life of the author, and that of Hali. We notice clearly a well-conceived movement from attachment to detachment, to seeking an ideal world, to living through a war. To giving up family, country and religion, to withdrawing from the physical world to a spiritual realm, and to being considered an incarnation by his followers. Desani wrote Hali soon after the World War II and Desani's personal experiences are the basis of this work. To quote Ramanujan, "The rest of Desani's life has been close to the script, a journey to detachment and renunciation." (Ramanujan 125)

Desani says of Hali that "Faced with sorrow and defeat, his search is after peace." (Narasimhaiah 406) Desani also wanted peace, and knew that renunciation and detachment are the ways to peace. Desani confides: "Spiritual knowledge has been my subject of investigation from the beginning ---- now, you may say, it shapes my way of life." (Lal 25) Hali is a unique work. Desani's distinction is not that he is the creator of Hali, but that the writing of it transformed the writer.

Hali's unusual structure is also worth mentioning. Unlike other plays which are conventionally divided into acts and sub-divided into scenes, Hali is divided into fifteen sections, most of which consist of one small paragraph. The work has six thousand words. Earlier it was much longer and was subsequently reduced to its essentials.

Hali is full of women characters and the intense passion of each one of them for Hali has been dealt with exclusively in the various sections. These sections are well united, the strong link being Hali himself with whom all the other characters are passionately attached. Thus, we see Desani rejecting the conventional structure of a play and introducing a new one in its place. This has enabled the play to have a better organic unity and compactness.

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