

Date: February 27, 2012

Re: "Selvi"

Dear Prof. Chou:

There are several parallels between the story of Selvi with that of Moses. Both come from humble backgrounds; both attain celebrity status; both are manipulated by persons close to them (Mohan, Nefertiri); both experience emotional trauma (loss of mother; discovery of true ethnicity); both renounce materialism; both return to their roots; both become spiritual; both are transformed. Indeed, it can be argued that the story of Selvi is about spiritual awakening. Yet, this interpretation in no way is meant to refute my original interpretation of the story, but rather is offered to demonstrate that the story is open to different interpretations, which, to me, is the mark of effective literature.

Another example of effective literature is "The Blind Dog." Here the author presents an incredibly complex relationship between a blind beggar and a dog, both vulnerable and both brutalized, who form an enduring bond.

Phillip W. Weiss

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Re: "Selvi" - An Alternative Interpretation

Dear Prof. Chou:

Selvi, a gifted and popular female singer from a poor background, has a relationship with a man, Mohan, a photographer, who had ingratiated himself into her life, becoming not only her companion but business manager too; in that capacity he controls every aspect of her life, to which Selvi acquiesces. Under Mohan's guidance, Selvi becomes a super star. In order to completely detach Selvi from her humble origins, which Mohan equates with "contamination," he arranges that Selvi have fewer contacts with her mother, and contact with her mother eventually ceases. Years later she receives news that her mother died. Selvi immediately cancels all her engagements and returns home and stays; she no longer listens to Mohan and gives up her singing career. Selvi explains that her mother was her "guru" and now she will live how her mother had lived. Mohan repeatedly tries to coax Selvi out of the house, but she sends him away; he calls her an "ungrateful wretch." What Mohan fails to realize is that Selvi has undergone a transformation; in the process of commemorating her mother she is has now become her mother. The punchline: "What was good for her is good for me too."

Phillip W. Weiss

