



## Think India (Quarterly Journal)

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ONE DAY NATIONAL SEMINAR

ON

**DISABILITY, REPRESENTATION AND LITERATURE**

held on 03 October 2019 and Organised by P.G. & Research Department  
of English

S. T. HINDU COLLEGE, NAGERCOIL-2, Tamilnadu, India



War, the Bridge between Humanity and Barbarism, in David Gemmell's *Lion of Macedon* and  
Janneker Lawrence Daniel's 'The Assignment,' of *21 Tales to Tell*.

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### Abstract

War has always been justified. And so has it been vilified, in all cases. The line of demarcation segregating the evil and the good has ever managed to be grey, and never black and white, when circumstances and instances have been looked at from different perspectives. If the Big Bad Wolf is easy to spot, it would never make a getaway from the spot of crime, or even be able to approach a potential prey. But the fact is that the wily predator is always in disguise, ready to gobble up unwary prey wandering aimlessly. In any war, the good can appear to be bad, and vice versa. Such is the nature of War. When there is no clarity as to the identification of the good and the bad, losses of monumental proportions take place, both personal and professional. If the losses are personal, they are irreplaceable. War takes no steps to hide these facts or even makes pretence to appear good. It acts as a bridge, a mute spectator, and a platform with no boundaries.

**Keywords:** War, bridge, evil, good

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Parmenion is half Macedonian and half Spartan. His birth status results in Parmenion being at the receiving end of the insults and beatings of the Spartan boys. Parmenion bears all this stoically. His Spartan blood refuses him to back down, and so does his strict training. His Macedonian soul bays for the blood of his Spartan tormentors. He has the misfortune to be the butt of all jokes and insults ever to be heaped on a boy in Sparta. In the midst of all this, there is

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one person who makes a difference in the life of Parmenion. It is his Spartan friend, his only friend, Hermias.

When the world shuns Parmenion, Hermias embraces him. There is nothing in Parmenion to attract Hermias physically. The bond of friendship is woven tight in the midst of sufferings and beatings that the half blood is forced to endure. This is best explained from the incident mentioned in David Gemmell's *Lion of Macedon*. They came at him silently from the shadows, faces hooded and masked, wooden clubs raised.

Parmenion darted to the left – but two more attackers ran into his path and a club slashed past his head, grazing his shoulder. His fist hammered into the masked face, then he cut to the right and sprinted towards Leaving Street. The cold, marble eyes of the statue of Athena gazed down on the boy as he ran, drawing him on towards her. Parmenion leapt to the base of the statue, clambering up to stand against the stone legs.

‘Come down! Come down!’ chanted his tormentors. ‘We have something for you, mix-blood!’ ‘Then come up and give it to me,’ he told them. The five attackers ran forward. Parmenion’s foot lashed into the face of the first, hurling him back, but a club cracked against his leg to knock him from his feet. He rolled, kicking out and sending an assailant sprawling, then he was up again and leaping high over them to land heavily on the street. A hurled club took him between the shoulder-blades and he staggered. Instantly they were upon him, pinning his arms.

‘Now we have you,’ said a voice, muffled by the woollen scarf masking the mouth. ‘You don’t need the mask, Gryllus,’ hissed Parmenion. ‘I’d know you by the smell.’ ‘You will not contest the Final tomorrow,’ said another voice. ‘You understand? You should never have been allowed to take part. The General’s Games are for Spartans – not half-breeds.’

Parmenion relaxed – his manner becoming subdued, his head dropping. The hold on his arms eased... suddenly he wrenched free, his fist thundering into Gryllus’ face. They swarmed in on him then, punching and kicking, driving him to his knees. Gryllus hauled him up by his hair as the others pinned his arms once more. ‘You asked for this,’ said Gryllus, drawing back his



fist. Pain exploded in Parmenion's jaw and he sagged against his captors. The blows continued; short, powerful hooks to the belly and face. Parmenion did not cry out. *There is no pain*, he told himself. *There is no... pain.* (6)

The statue of Zeus, Father of Heaven - twelve feet tall, majestic and bearded - stared out over the lands to the west of the city, seeming to study the towering Mount Ilias. Parmenion shivered once more and took a tentative bite from the dark bread, stifling a groan as pain flamed from his jaw. The punch from Gryllus had been powerful and, held as he was, Parmenion could not roll with the blow. He lifted a finger to his mouth. A tooth was loose. Tearing the bread, he pushed a small piece to the right of his jaw, chewing gently. Having finished his meagre breakfast, he stood. His left side was tender. Lifting the chiton tunic, he examined the area; it was an angry purple, and there was blood above the hip.

He stretched - then froze as he heard movement on the Climbing Path. Swiftly he ran behind the marble Sanctuary to the Muses, crouching to wait for the newcomers, his heart pounding. He picked up a sharp shard of broken marble; it had an edge like an axe-blade. If they came at him again, someone would die! A slender boy in a blue tunic walked into view. He had dark curly hair and thick brows. Parmenion recognized his friend, Hermias, and relief washed over him. Dropping the stone, he pushed himself wearily to his feet. Hermias saw him and ran forward, gripping him by the shoulders. 'Oh, Savra, my friend, how much more must you suffer?'

Parmenion forced a smile. 'Today will see the end of it. Maybe.' 'Only if you lose, Savra. And you must lose. They could kill you. I fear they will!' Hermias looked into his friend's pale blue eyes and saw no compromise there. 'You are not going to lose, though, are you?' he said sadly. Parmenion shrugged. 'Perhaps - if Leonidas is more skilful, if the judges favour him.' 'Of course they will favour him. Gryllus says that Agisaleus is coming to watch- you think the judges will allow a nephew of the King to be humiliated?' Parmenion laid a hand on Hermias' shoulder. 'Since that is the case, why are you worried? I will lose. So be it. But I will not play to lose.'

Hermias sat down at the foot of the statue of Zeus and took two apples from his hip-pouch. He passed one to Parmenion, who bit carefully into it. 'Why are you so stubborn?'



Hermias asked. 'Is it your Macedonian blood?' 'Why not the Spartan blood, Hermias? Neither peoples are renowned for giving ground.' 'It was not meant as an insult, Savra. You know that.' 'Not from you, no,' said the taller youth, taking his friend's hand. 'But think on it, you all call me Savra - lizard - and you think of me as a half-breed barbarian.' Hermias pulled away, his expression showing his hurt. 'You are my friend,' he protested.

'That is not at issue, Hermias, nor is it an answer. You cannot help what you are - you are a Spartan, pure-blooded, with a line of heroes that goes back far beyond Thermopylae. Your own father marched with Lysander and never knew defeat. Probably you have friends among the helots and the other slave classes. But you still see them as slaves.'

'You also had a Spartan father who came back on his shield, with all his wounds in front,' insisted Hermias. 'You are Spartan too.' 'And I have a Macedonian mother.' Parmenion removed his tunic, wincing as his arms stretched over his head. His lean body was marked by bruises and cuts, and his right knee was swollen. His angular face was also bruised, the right eye almost closed. 'These are the marks I bear for my blood. When they took me from my mother's house, I was seven years old. From that day to this

I have never known the sun to shine on a body that did not carry wounds.' 'I too have suffered bruises,' said Hermias. 'All Spartan boys must suffer – else there would be no Spartan men, and we would no longer be pre-eminent. But I hear what you say, Sav . . . Parmenion. It seems Leonidas hates you, and he is a powerful enemy. Yet you could go to him and ask to serve him. Then it would stop.' 'Never! He would laugh at me and throw me out into the street.'

'Yes he might. But, even so, the beatings would end.'

'Would you do that if you were me?'

'No.'

'Then why should I?' hissed Parmenion, his pale eyes locking to his friend's face.

Hermias sighed. 'You are hard on me, Parmenion. But you are right. I love you as a brother, and yet I do not see you as Spartan. I do inside my head – but my heart . . .'

'Then why should the others - who are not my friends -accept me?'



'Give us time - give us all time. But know this: whatever you choose, I will stand beside you,' said Hermias softly.

'That is something I never doubted. Now call me Savra -from you it has a good sound.'  
'I shall be at your side for the contest, and I will pray to Athena of the Road for your victory,'  
said Hermias, smiling. 'Now, would you like me to stay with you?'

'No - but thank you. I will remain here a while with Father Zeus, and I will think, and I will pray. I will see you at Xenophon's house three hours afternoon for the contest.'

Hermias nodded and wandered away.

Parmenion watched him go, then swung his attention to the awakening city. (10)

The world moves at an alarmingly furious pace for Parmenion and Hermias. The beatings continue. Hermias stands by his friend and protects him as much as he can by exerting his influence as a nobleman's son. But events far larger than that could be controlled by the friends force Parmenion to flee the country of Sparta. He leaves Sparta, thirsting for revenge against the tormentors, and invariably against Sparta. His only friend in the world, Hermias refuses to speak with him, believing Parmenion to have dishonoured a family's reputation. Then comes the war, the war that Parmenion plans for years and executes with a single motive – that of the destruction of Sparta. But though Parmenion achieves what he set out for in the first place, he loses Hermias, first as a friend and then as an enemy and a living human being. The *Lion of Macedon* has a beautiful description of the incidents. During the last year Parmenion had seen little of Hermias, for his friend had become close with the young King, Cleombrotus, and the two were often seen together in the city or riding in the Taygetus mountains.

Parmenion strode out to meet Hermias. He too had changed during their time at Menelaus and at nineteen he was strikingly beautiful, with no trace yet of a beard. Once a fine runner, he no longer had the inclination to exercise hard and was rarely seen at the training ground. Hermias had grown his hair long, and Parmenion could smell the perfumed Persian oil which adorned it even before his friend jumped to the ground. 'Well met, brother,' shouted Parmenion, running forward to embrace him. Hermias pulled back from the hug. 'I have bad news, Savra. Nestus, believing the lies about you, is on his way here now. He means to kill you.'



Parmenion sighed, turning to stare at the distant hills. 'You must ride away,' urged Hermias. 'Do not be here when he comes. Tell me the truth of it and I will try to convince him.' 'The truth of it?' responded Parmenion. 'What would you have me say? I love Derae. I want. . . need . . . her for my wife.' 'I accept that,' said Hermias, 'but he believes that you ravished her. I know you would never consider such a vile act, but Nestus is blinded by rage. If you go to the hills for a while, I will speak to him.' 'We made love,' said Parmenion softly, 'and we were foolish. He has every right to be angry.' Hermias stood open-mouthed. 'You . . . it is true, then?'

'I did not ravish her! We are lovers, Hermias. Try to understand, my friend.'

'What is there to understand? You behaved like . . . like the Macedonian you are.' Parmenion stepped forward, reaching for his friend's arm. 'Don't touch me! Nestus is a friend of mine, and has been since we were children. Now he carries a shame he does not warrant. I know why you did it, Savra: it was to revenge yourself on Leonidas. I despise you for it. Take a horse and ride from here. Go anywhere. But do not be here when Nestus arrives.'

Hermias strode to the gelding and vaulted to the beast's back. 'I gave up much for you, Parmenion. Now I rue the day I met you. What you have done is evil and much suffering will come of it. I loved you - as a friend and a brother. But your hate was . . . and is ... too strong.' 'It is not hate,' protested Parmenion, but Hermias swung the gelding's head and galloped away. 'It is not hate!' shouted the Spartan. Standing thunderstruck as Hermias rode back across the meadow, Parmenion heard footsteps behind him but did not turn. Instead he watched his friend riding into the distance. (112)

Cleombrotus cursed. His sword stabbed out, cleaving through the teeth of an advancing man and piercing him to the brain. Another Theban, then another, fell to the Battle King. A scream came from beside him and he twisted in time to see his lover and companion, Hermias, fall - his throat slashed open. A dark-bearded warrior with a death's-head grin leapt at him. Cleombrotus parried a thrust, then a second. But Pelopidas crashed his shield against the King, forcing him back, then dropped to his knees to ram his blade through Cleombrotus' groin. Still the King tried to fight, but his lifeblood drained away - and with it his strength. His shield arm dropped and the Theban's sword smashed his jaw to shards. As the King fell, the Spartan centre



buckled. Leonidas and his men finally forced their way to the front, gathering up the dead King and fighting a rearguard action back towards the defensive line of their night camp.

At last the battle petered out. Isolated groups of Spartan warriors were surrounded and destroyed, but Leonidas gathered the remnants into a strong defensive position on a nearby ridge. The Spartan allies, seeing the fall of Cleombrotus, fled the field without a fight. The Thebans gathered around Pelopidas and Epaminondas, hoisting them to their shoulders and carrying them around the battlefield, their cheers echoing to the Spartan lines. Parmenion, his horse dead, walked slowly over the battlefield, looking down at the twisted corpses. More than 1,000 Spartiates had died for the loss of 200 Thebans, but at that moment these figures meant nothing to him. He was dazed and emotionless. He had seen the Battle King fall to Pelopidas, but worse he had watched the Theban kill Hermias moments before.

Parmenion knelt by the body, looking down at the face of a man and seeing the face of the boy who had befriended him. He remembered the night when they had sat by the statue of Athena of the Road, when he had learned there would be no victory celebration after winning the Games. 'I will make them all pay!' he had promised. And Hermias had touched his arm.

'Do not hate me too, Savra!' 'Hate you, my friend?' he had answered'. 'How could I ever hate you? You have been a brother to me, and I will never forget that. Never! Brothers we have been, brothers we shall be, all the days of our lives. I promise you.'

He closed the dead eyes and rose to his feet. The surgeons were coming on to the battlefield now, moving to the wounded Thebans. Most of these men would die, Parmenion knew, for physicians with the skills of Argonias or Dronicus were rare. He gazed around him. There to the left lay Callines, the man who had admitted to being a poor swordsman. Further away was the body of Norac the Smith. Later he would hear of the other dead, like Calepius the orator and Melon the statesman. He looked down at his hands, which were covered in blood, drying now to a dull, scabby brown.

Crows were already circling above the plain. He recalled the General's Games, the cleanly-carved soldiers in the box of sand. No blood there, no stench of open bowels. Just a child's game, fought without pain in the sunshine of another age. 'I will repay them all,' he had



promised Hermias. And he had. But at what price? Hermias was dead, as Derae and now Thetis were dead. (295)

X is a fearsome soldier, a loving father and a caring husband. His reputation as a sniper is legendary. His country wins some battles only because of his skills with his sniper rifle. As the war comes to a close, X and many like him are without jobs. The war has shattered the economy and torn the country to bits, leaving no possibility of a job. Men and women are forced to steal. The strongest survive and the others go into hiding. X has a tough time keeping the proverbial wolf from the door of his house. It is at this time that X has a visit from two men. The men promise him twenty years' wages for a single job. The job is to kill an enemy. X hesitates as he hasn't killed outside of war. But the economy of the country, the dire needs of his family and the generous pay for the job makes him accept the offer. The good and noble soldier in him still protests, but the father in him overrules and the job is accepted. *21 Tales to Tell* has these mentioned in the story, 'The Assignment,' by Janneker Lawrence Daniel.

The men came inside and seated themselves on an old rickety wooden contraption that was an excuse for a bench. He had nothing to offer the men. He stood opposite to them with hands folded across his broad chest and looked at them. The man spoke again. "We all know of your skill with the gun and your killing methods. Can you take up an assignment?"

"What assignment can I finish with my gun, now that the war is over?"

"There are still enemies who have to be eliminated. "

"Enemies? Where? The war has been over for more than six months now and you still speak of enemies!"

The two men looked at each other. The man, the one who had been silent so far, gave a sigh, cleared his throat and spoke.

"We do not talk about enemies of the country. We have been sent by someone whose identity we do not choose to disclose. To put it plainly X, we want you to eliminate a particular target. Can you do it? Your woeful existence on this planet will become meaningful and you will be able to lead a better life" he said looking at the sparse belongings in the room.



X did not bat an eyelid as he listened to the man speak. At other times he would have outright thrown the men out and would have forgotten the incident. Now things were different. The lives of his family members were at stake. He stared balefully at the men, his thoughts running amuck. He had to make a choice. Would it be right to kill someone??? But hadn't he killed so many people before??? He made the choice.

“I will do it....but only this time. What will you pay me?” asked X.

“Here...take this bag. This contains warm clothes for you. You will also find some food inside to keep you alive for the week. Tomorrow morning you will receive enough food and wages to sustain you for years. Once you finish the assignment, you will receive twenty years' wages as a single payment” said the man.

X could not believe his ears. Twenty years' wages as a single payment was too good to believe. This was the kind of job a man would kill for! And he was going to kill....The thought suddenly froze him...He was silent for a while. But, who will feed his family???

“Who am I supposed to kill and where?” asked X.

“Everything will be relayed to you tomorrow” said the man. Then, both of them disappeared into the night.

X's wife came and looked at her husband. She had been listening to the conversation from the next room. She knew how desperate her husband was. She also knew that it was for her sake and her son's sake that he had accepted that job.

“Were you listening?” asked X.

“Are you sure you made the right choice honey?” asked his wife.

“I have no other option. You cannot go for work. I have no work anywhere and our son is so enamoured with his girl that he does not even come to our house for days. What would you have me do, my love? What else shall I do? How shall I save my family?” (78)



War, as usual, gives no indication to X of the way in which things would take a turn. It is a platform on which men with power play their games. X, being lured with the love and the necessity of money does the job he is asked to do, after steeling himself. His life is shattered when he learns of the identity of the person he has killed. He wishes that he has never accepted the job in the first place. The final scene in 'The Assignment,' of *21 Tales to Tell* is heart wrenching.

The night wore on. The number of people on the road became almost negligent. Now and then one or two came out stumbling, or were escorted to the cars by friends, walking in a similar manner. The bell in the tower chimed two. The door of the tavern opened and out walked three people. His breath caught in his throat as he espied a figure in red. He looked closely. There was a white scarf that had been used to cover the face. X waited to see the direction they would take. There were no cars and it would be easy for him to follow them if need be, and make the kill. Kill!!!! 'I am going to murder. I am going to commit a cold-blooded murder' thought X. Sudden perspiration flooded his brow. The image of his wife and his beloved son swam into focus. 'They must live at any cost' thought X, and again looked at the trio. They started walking in his direction. He took his gun and waited till they were out of the light streaming out of the tavern's windows. The shot took the unsuspecting victim in the forehead. There was no sound. The victim dropped dead. Of the other two who were there, one swooned and dropped down. The other took to his heels towards the opposite direction. X had no thought of making another kill. He vaulted out of the cart, arranged the hay in order and walked calmly towards the victim. He had got a job and had finished it. He now would be able to live peacefully for some years. He wanted to go home soon. He knelt down by the body. He pulled the scarf which had become stained with the blood streaming from the smashed forehead. The scarf refused to come. He bent down and pulled the scarf firmly. It came smoothly. X looked at the face which so far had been hidden by the scarf. A sudden bolt of shock pierced his entire body. He gave a bestial growl that screamed disbelief. An agony of pain caused his entire body to convulse. The victim was his Beloved Son.

(79)

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Both Parmenion and X are similar in many ways. Both are warriors of great renown. They fight for their country sacrificing all that they have. It is War that which provides the necessary platform for them to showcase their skills and to make a living. If not for War, they might have become farmers or even teachers. But War, the mute spectator, but generous stimuli of events and people, sets the grand stage for them to become what they are.

Are Parmenion and X right in their own ways? Perhaps yes. But from the Spartan view, Parmenion is a traitor. The Thebans celebrate him and the Macedonians worship him. Which view is correct? War is subtle enough to maintain a stoic silence on this. It sides not with any view. As for X, he is right as a family man to have accepted the job. He does this to feed his family. A deed that any man would do. But fate has evil plans for him. If not for the war, X would not have been forced to this situation.

The losses of Parmenion and X are of huge proportions. For both, the losses are unimaginable and can never ever be substituted. The guilty feeling that it was because of them that the loss happened weighs down their souls. Does War do anything to alleviate their pain? No. It does not. It cannot. For War is just a bridge to help people move back and forth between Humanity and Barbarism. Nothing more. Nothing less. Nothing else.

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