



Study Of Premchand's Novel *Godaan* From The View Of Socio-Cultural Aspects Of Migrant Labourers In Colonial India.

Sona Sharma

Independent Researcher

ABSTRACT-

With the onset of COVID-19 the plight of labourers has seen many suns .This has also adversely affected the scenario of development in all walks of human life.In this paper the famous novel *Godaan* by Munshi Premchand has been thoroughly studied with emphasis to migrant labourers of colonial India.Issues like poverty, development, culture adoption and conflict has been studied. India has seen many phases of development. However,The balance of rich and poor has always struck disparity today and in the then colonial India.In this paper study of the migration of labourers to cities and their transforming life styles with the urbaners has been delved into .Also how developed was India then and how at ease or troubled were the migrant workers.Keeping this viewpoint of socio-cultural conflict with the city dwellers and their own alike the paper attempts to reopen the cause of disparity and at the same time their development in the slowly urbanizing world

Key words- development, socio cultural impact, disparity, migrant labourer

INTRODUCTION

India is a diverse country.With the population of 300 million as in colonial India , it was a hot bubbling broth for development. However this development was at the cost of resident Indians of the country.In these turbulating times , one of the celebrated writers of Indian Literature Munshi Premchand or Nawab Nawab Rai wrote *Godaan* , his last complete novel in 1936.

Later Translated by Gordon. C . Roademer into English language in 1968 , the novel presents poverty , caste conflict, social conditions of peasants in colonial India very aptly. Also it touches minorly at the migration of villagers to urban cities of India.

Novel synopsis

The story revolves around many characters. Hori and his wife Dhaniya are shown caring for their cow in the beginning of the novel. In its due course Heera, brother of Hori poisons the cow out of jealousy. This causes Hori to go in serious debt. Jhuniya, a widow becomes pregnant by Gobar , Hori's son out of wedlock and comes to stay with Hori's family. In the meantime Gobar goes missing from the village and after he returns , it comes out that he has earned a good sum from working in the urban city of Lucknow. Gobar tries to ease out his allegations charged against him for impregnating Jhunia and also tries to make peace with money lenders. However seeing all his efforts go in vain ; he leaves his parents and takes Jhuniya along with him to the city.Hori holding onto his traditional customs and values dies at the end. When the priest daatadin asks for a cow as part of the last rites Dhaniya refuses and becomes unconscious unable to bear the loss.

Man-made poverty

An issue of rising socio- economic disparity has always been poverty. Poverty has its roots in differential treatment, exploitation and ignorance. In pre-independence times India was a storehouse of such menace.In the present novel an insight into labour conditions has been analysed. Keeping in view the times of colonial India labourers such as gobar migrated to cities for a better , fruitful living. However the age old mentality of exploitin the labourers does not hold back its grip and it is seen that Gobar too is exploited , however thankfully in little amount as compared to his father Hori.

Hori was terribly exploited at the hands of money-lenders of the village.

“ Even though Hori had to pay the entire barn of the crop, there was still a loan of three hundred rupees remaining , and an addition of hundred rupees as interest. Five years ago he had taken sixty rupees to purchase a bull, he had paid it , but the sixty rupees is still remaining because of the interest added. Hori had grown potatoes with the money thirty rupees taken from Pandit Daatadin . The potatoes were dug up by thieves , and completed paying it on installments , in the three year period a hundred rupees had been added as interest.”³ (pg. 39)

Thus Daatadin makes him his worker and takes 200 rupees for a loan of 30 rupees .

Gobar, son of Hori is a veritable rebel , he is against the fatalistic nature of his father and desires equal treatment.

Mr Mehata, a philosophy Professor in the novel proposes a model where people work for the service of others.If someone is poor , it is due to the indifferent attitude towards materialistic prosperity , mechanical pace of life, loss of identity and emotional degradation.

To escape poverty Gobar flees to the city of lucknow for a respectful and prosperous life.

GOBAR AS A MIGRANT LABOURER

Gobar goes to the city Lucknow to earn a better living as a migrant labourer . Gobar feels that earning in the city is almost quadrupled:

“In city migrants get five to six annas as daily wage, he had heard of it. if he gets six annas everyday and saves one then five annas would be the daily saving. In a month it will be 10 rupees and in a year almost one twenty five¹.” (Pg. 196)

He stayed at Mirza Kursheed’s house at luknow and worked as a gardener , but was often exploited . Mirza Khurshid was a drunkard and was indifferent to Gobar’s needs:

“²If you have any money, please lend it to me . My last bottle is finished and this is causing me tension” (Pg. 259)

After taking Gobar’s money , Mirza hardly ever returned him the sum.

Gobar after entering the city also had a different air around him and the changed culture affected him:

“He had his hair cut in English style, took to wearing a fine spun dhoti, and fine shining leather shoes and bought a red shawl. He started smoking cigarettes and chewing betel.”² (Pg. 258)

Gobar started lending money, opened a tea stall, a stall for ice and sharbat, and later did many odd jobs for a stable living.

Towards the end of the novel, Gobar works as a chowkidaar at Dr Malathi’s house . Unlike Mirza Khurshid she is benovelent and kind not only to Gobar but also to his wife and son Mangal. She breast feeds his child at the absence of his mother and takes him as her own.(Ch-35)

CONCLUSION

Through this novel it is asserted that migrant labourers of colonial India migrated due to poor conditions in the village .Also this novel presents both light and dark sides of migrant labourers in cities in colonial India and thus history proves the point that the urban dwellers as well as migrant labourers can ease out their helplessness by a change in attitude and by being kind and thoughtful to each other’s needs. Nothing can give birth to the fangs of ignorance in the eyes of awareness, literacy and contemporary , broadened thoughts.

References

1. Premchand, "Godaan". 1936
2. Wikipedia contributors. "Godaan." Wikipedia, 22 Oct. 2024, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godaan>
3. Kantharia Meghna. "Plight of Indian Farmers Depicted Through Premchand’s ‘Godaan’". IJRRSONLINE, 10.5958/2454-2687.2020.00002.7
https://ijrrsonline.in/HTML_Papers/International%20Journal%20of%20Reviews%20and%20Research%20in%20Social%20Sciences__PID__2020-8-1-2.html
4. Priya Tamanna . "Premchand’s Social Realism in Godaan", Vol. 8, Issue1, ISSN: 2454-3365, 2022 <https://tlhjournal.com/uploads/products/36.tamanna-priya-article.pdf>