

Lives of the Labourers Depicted in Mamoni Raisom Goswami's Novel Māmare Dhorā Tarowāl

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An astoundingly talented and exceedingly humanitarian, Jnanpith Awardee Prosaist of Assamese literature, internationally acclaimed for her research on Ramayani literature, Dr. Goswami's work was a startling fusion of insight and creativity. The sensitive and sagacious prosaist acutely depicted the plights of the subalterns and marginalised people of the society through her novels and short stories. Her unwavering commitment to extricate people from oppression and exploitation persisted throughout her life. Stalwart expression of profound humanitarianism, compassion and magnanimity in her works appealed to a wide variety of global readers and established her as a critically acclaimed writer. The virtuoso in the world of Assamese literature, known for exposing harsh realities of her times, was also a steadfast and unwavering advocate of modernization. Her love, kindness and compassion for people finds expression in most of her notable works viz. 'Dātāl Hātir Uye Khowā Hāwdā', 'Māmare Dhorā Tarowāl', 'Sinnamastar Manuhtu', 'Nilakanthi Braja', 'Ahiran', 'Chenabar Sōt' etc. Goswami's creations are marked by acute observations stark realism, intellect, rationalism and solicitude. A sublime and unparalleled blending of imagination and reality embodied through her novels is what makes her stand out from the crowd.

Her Sahitya Academy Award winning novel 'Māmare Dhorā Tarowāl' is an extraordinary addition to the world of Assamese Literature. The writer's acute sense of realism befittingly depicts the plight of the workers of an aqueduct construction site on the river Saai of Rai Barelli district of Uttar Pradesh. Her novel is a stark testimony to the humiliation, violence and brutality inflicted on the lives of the labourers. She vividly portrays a myriad of sporadic events in the lives of the oppressed labourers. The novel entails direct and indirect criticism of the vested interest of the owners, sheer injustice and barbarism prevailing in the society. Those workers having worked in hazardous or dangerous conditions, demeaning to both their dignity and health, bereft of a minimum wage to earn a decent living, have no alternative but to accept all the excruciating pain, injustice, exploitation and humiliation as utter misfortune of their lives. Penetrating into the lives of the workers, the writer anatomizes the harsh truth that they, too have the desire to live as honest and decent human beings but hunger compels them to willingly indulge themselves in unfair means. Every single character viz. Narayani, Basumati, Jashwant, Shibu, Lichu, Lengera gradually succumbed to their endless cycles misfortunes. The writer describes the destitute and hunger-stricken lives of the labourers like this- 'As Jashwant was moving ahead, he witnessed another gruesome sight. Some sweepers' kids are fighting over some goat's intestine and skin they brought from a butcher's shop in Munshiganj. There is no distinction between them and the vultures sheltering in Saai for the last few days. A morbid form of starvation is exposedly prevalent here and there in the sands of Saai'. (Goswami, P. No. 45)

Those labourers are always deprived of their legitimate dues, despite toiling long hours in appalling conditions to satiate their hunger and live destitute lives. The fight between men and dogs for a handful rice exposes the misery of the labourers' lives- 'The sweepers' kids await anxiously for rotis offered to dogs at the khalasi anchor. Sometimes men and dogs fight for food...' (Goswami, P. No. 56)

The lives of all the labourers viz. Narayani, Jashwant, Shibu, Lichu, Lengera have witnessed dreadful circumstances. Plagued by despair and melancholy, at times they are entwined in the penumbra of bloodshed and violence and their lives become loathsome. In the very beginning of the novel the author portrays a living picture of a devastated world. 'Here the condition of a sweeper is not by any means better than that of a dog eating leftovers or garbage. Where will they go this time? Where will he go this time with this crippled leg? Where will Narayani go with her two months old infant? Her 5 years old child died homeless after the labourers had been displaced from Charengkhara Branch. Now where will she be hovering around looking for work? Where will aged sweeper Bhrigu go with his five daughters clad in blouses?' (Goswami, P. No. 9)

The author exposes the harsh realities of the conflict ridden and agitated lives of the labourers. Embodied in the novel through the conflicts and agonies, one of the central characters 'Narayani' is compelled to sell her body as a commodity to collect milk for her infant and medicines for her sick husband. Often subdued by abject poverty and destitution, at times her soul is awakened by a sense of self esteem and rebellion. Compelled to embrace a life of prostitution to earn a living, Narayani at last vents out the rage, despair and resentment that have been suppressed deep inside her for a long time by slaying her Saheb.

Even if the depiction of sordid realities and adversities of the labourers' lives is dominant throughout, instances of profound human connection is also prevalent in some parts of the novel. A labour who sacrifices his life for the greater good of his community and the workers raising funds to help his family after his demise are some perfect examples of a humanistic perspective manifested in the novel. The plight of the lives of the labourers is the central truth prevalent throughout the novel. A bunch of labourers starts agitation to protest against conservatism. But the rebellion ends up in failure due to lack of well organised effort.

With acute thoughtfulness and absolute sagacity, the author delineates a picture of miserable, brutal, filthy lives of subaltern and marginalized section of the society. Dr. Goswami was always affectionate towards the exploited, repressed commoners and that is why she was able to portray the characters with such magnanimity. As she has studied the lives of the labourers closely and minutely, her sensitivity is accentuated in the novels centred around the lives of the labourers.

References :

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