

Premchand's Thakur's Well: A Mosaic of Realism and Untouchability

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Abstract

Forming one of the tributaries that feed the main stream of Indian English Literature, short story has added sumptuously to the ocean of World Literature. Story telling is not an alien art to an Indian. But the historical evolution of the short story in the modern sense can be traced back only to a memorable recent past. Though its active development took place in the century that followed the novel, this young genre soon gained momentum and ever since its inception it has continued to attract the attention of the readers as well as writers. "It is an amazingly protean form of literature that it frustrates all attempts to encapsulate it in a neat and flexible definition"¹ It is the simplest and easily apprehendable form of literature, whereby a writer can articulate the ways of life he intends to convey in a short shrift. Further, unlike the huge tomes it does not demand long hours of leisure for the perusal from the readers. The form has claimed affirm footing in the world of literature so much so that some people have gone to the extent of announcing that it becomes a domineering form of literature dethrones the novel. This fervent statement is based on the idea that the artistic enjoyment provided by this form is in no way less than that of a novel. "The brevity of the short story, the comparatively less taxing demand that it makes on the time of the reader and the possibility of its including all aspects of life and society which the novelist cannot always pay attention to has made the short story popular among our readers of fiction also."²

Key words Forming one of the tributaries that feed the main stream of Indian English Literature.

Introduction:

On unearthing the antiquity of Indian short story we come to know that it took broadly two forms namely the fable and "popular tale or folk tale". They bear the features like rousing and satisfying the curiosity, providing useful knowledge in an interesting manner, reality and compactness of composition etc. Fable employs animals for its characters which symbolize human beings. Such a narrative reached its zenith with *The Panchatantra*, *The Katha Saritsagara*, *The Jataka Tales* and *The Dashakumaracharita*. But they were more didactic intone ethical in theme. "Taken in bare outlines and the basic feelings that motivate the actions on part of the various characters the stories in *The Dashakumaracharita* are surprisingly down to earth"³.

With the introduction of English Education System in India a new wind—the wind of change—began to blow. The young Indians who studied English Literature came under its influence and attempted to write in English. During the course of their study they came under the influence of French and Russian short story writers like G.D. Maupassant and Anton Chekhov respectively. They were the leading luminaries in those days. H.E Bates

rightly remarks about these “Camps”. Indian short story writer seems to side with Maupassant as far as his realistic presentation and grim style of narration are concerned. As a result, the pot falls into the well with a “loud splash”⁷ After all this when she comes back to home she sees Jakhu (her husband) drinking the same smelly water. Here we can compare good water to the independence of the low born and illness of Jakhu to the untouchability and the attempts made by Gangi to the struggles of the untouchables to free themselves from the clutches of social cruelty. As we have discussed already seen Premchand is the realistic writer. He takes the theme of the Indian society of his time. During those days untouchability was there in practice. So, he chooses this untouchability as the theme of his story which was there in vogue. Premchand himself says, “I never write a story for the sake of describing the incident and event. I write for only one reason to present human truth or to show new angle of looking at common and obvious things.”⁸ Thus we find Premchand presenting the social realism and the inherent social inequality in the society of his days. So, we can say that the story “The Thakur’s Well” is the mosaic of realism and untouchability.

But he learnt little from these masters of the West. Any his sense of Naturalism and Realism was whetted and his understanding and interpretation of Human predicament underwent a proper training. He had a hoary tradition of story telling before him. Now that he came across the foreign short story he keenly observed it and synthesized the best of both. “A short story”, according to Isvaran, “can be a fable or a parable, real or fantasy, a true presentation or a parody, sentimental or satirical; serious in intent or a light-hearted diversion; it can be any of these, but to be memorable it must catch the eternal in the casual, invest a moment with the immensity of time.”⁴

Premchand is a great short story writer of Hindi and Urdu languages. He has written more than twelve novels and two hundred and fifty short stories. He was a good translator too. Premchand is his pen name. he was as Dhanapat Rai on 31 July 1880 in Banaras state. As one of his novels says “life makes you to do what you don’t want to do”⁵. It was his personal view about the life because he wanted to become a lawyer but he became a teacher. Later he entered journalism and ran two papers.

Realism is one of the most important features of Premchand’s works. SO, what is realism? It defined as the “faithful representation of reality” and it is also a technique used by the writers to present the problems of a common man in day today life. Premchand was the pioneer who used this technique of realism in Hindi literature. This literary technique turned into a weapon against social evils like untouchability, zamindari system etc.

Untouchability is also a main theme in the works of Premchand. During Vedic-Age Indian society was divided into four Varnas as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. In this hierarchy the Brahmins were considered as the priestly class, the Kshatriyas as warriors, the Vaishyas as tradesman and Shudras as the laboring class. From the Vedic age the Shudras kept themselves away from the village and they were meant to serve the other class people. But there was no respect for them and they were bound by some restrictions. But did not remain the same. When people got educated they started opposing this practice of untouchability through various ways. Writing was one of them.

Short story is one of the literary forms which discusses a single theme and gives a perfect opinion of a particular person on a particular subject. It consists of various formative elements like plot, character, setting, technique etc.

Here in the short story entitled “The Thakur’s Well”, the author Premchand offers before the readers the poignant predicament of the low-caste people and their struggle to get pure water which is a basic need for a man to survive. In this short story the author depicts the humiliation of the low born and how they were dominated by the upper caste society. Gangi the protagonist tries to get pure drinking water for her ailing her husband as he demands for glass of water she gives the water from the pot wherein it was stored in the house. The water was stenchy then he becomes angry and scolds her, “What kind of water is this? It stinks. It is not drinkable I’m parched and all you can give this awful smelly water!”⁶At this point of time she goes to get a potful of fresh water from the well that belongs to upper class people but alas she fails to do so. She goes to the well in the night to pull a potful of water from Thakur’s well when nobody is there. Untouchability is also a main theme in the works of Premchand. During Vedic-Age Indian society was divided into four Varnas as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. In this hierarchy the Brahmins were considered as the priestly class, the Kshatriyas as warriors, the Vaishyas as tradesman and Shudras as the laboring class. From the Vedic age the Shudras kept themselves away from the village and they were meant to serve the other class people. But there was no respect for them and they were bound by some restrictions. But did not remain the same. When people got educated they started opposing this practice of untouchability through various ways. Writing was one of them.

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Conclusion:

The people of Thakur’s family when they heard the sound at the well they attempt to open the door. When Gangi hears the sound of the door she leaves the rope that was on the pulley and runs away to save her life. As a result, the pot falls into the well with a “loud splash”⁷ After all this when she comes back to home she sees Jakhu (her husband) drinking the same smelly water. Here we can compare good water to the independence of the low born and illness of Jakhu to the untouchability and the attempts made by Gangi to the struggles of the untouchables to free themselves from the clutches of social cruelty. As we have discussed already seen Premchand is the realistic writer. He takes the theme of the Indian society of his time. During those days untouchability was there in practice. So, he chooses this untouchability as the theme of his story which was there in vogue. Premchand himself says, “I never write a story for the sake of describing the incident and event. I write for only one reason to present human truth or to show new angle of looking at common and obvious things.”⁸ Thus we find Premchand presenting the social realism and the inherent social inequality in the society of his days. So, we can say that the story “The Thakur’s Well” is the mosaic of realism and untouchability.

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