

Fulfilment of Individual Rights is the Fundamental Component of 'Nation Building'- A Socio-Political Study of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's Selected Novels.

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ABSTRACT: Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, a Bengal born Indian novelist the greatest 'Kathashilpi' of his time was popularly known for his artistic excellence in weaving the words to depict the life stories of the extremely downtrodden section of the society. In Saratchandra's very own words-

"Those who have given their all to this world, and got nothing in return, the deprived, the weak the oppressed.... Their pain has unlocked my lips. "

Sarat Chandra was a social rebel and he penned against the social evils like casteism, economic and gender inequalities etc. of the contemporary Bengali society. Time and again Sarat Chandra Chatterjee through his writings tried to portray the limitless miseries of the poor Bengali natives and projected the needs of improvement of their conditions from sufferings rather than achieving a bigger goal of so called 'Building a Nation'. And directly or indirectly Sarat Chandra Chatterjee conveyed in his writings a message that the process of nation building remains incomplete until or unless the lives of the commons of a country in general and the lives of those of the underdogs in particular get improved by being provided with their basic needs and individual rights to lead a dignified life.

KEY WORDS: Individual Rights, Nation, Nation Building.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The later part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century experienced an accelerating bloom of Indian novels with varied themes. Amongst those the theme of growing nationalist consciousness and the awakening of national pride possessed a major place in the writing of the contemporary novelists. Bankim Chandra Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra these three 'celestial sentinels' were the prominent names in this line. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee planted his thought deep into the ground level aligning with the lives of people living in the lowest strata of Bengali society. His profound perception of the problems and sufferings encountered by the underprivileged section and a deep compassion for the redemption from these intricacies to uplift them up-to a dignified level was the main theme of his writings and struggles. Sarat Chandra had never been much ambitious about making a nation of global scale. The small scaled problems related to the minute emotions of people and their dissatisfied family or social life coupled with the suppression by the then government's policies attracted much of his attentions to bring out those suppressed faces from the vicious circles of endless suffering and reckless poverty. Regarding the inspiration of Sarat's writings he once said:

"They (depressed section of our society) made me start to speak. They inspired me to take up their case and plead for them. I have witnessed endless injustice to those people, unfair intolerable indiscriminate justice..... This poverty abounds in my writings".

The problems of women in the rural Bengali society was another facet of his interests. Being very empathetic for the social status of women he somehow kept similar thought as that of Bankim Chandra but his understanding in this regard was much more realistic than the latter. Thus the epicenter of Sarat Chandra's writing encompassed the achievement of individual rights and his thought had revolved around the desire of upliftment of the grassroot sections that includes whole of the underprivileged irrespective of caste and gender.

Hypothesis

The present study proposes to examine Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's some selected novels that indicates his view that to build a 'nation' it is primarily important to fulfil the basic individual rights to every common in general and more specifically the downtrodden.

Argument

Sarat Chandra wrote twenty-two novels in total. Most of these novels deal with the theme of rural socio-economic problems. His first novel *Bordidi*, (*The Elder Sister*) is based on deprived theme and the other subsequent writings did also follow the similar theme.

However, since the focus of this study is primarily targeted towards the point of a deprivation and the endeavor to attain the individual rights and its role on the process of nation building it would be more convenient to discuss on the selected novels of Sarat Chandra that have direct or indirect relations with the above said theme. In this connection this project shall be trying to provide brief description of a few novels of Sarat Chandra as follows.

The first one is '*PalliSamaj*' or '*The Home Coming*'. This is one of the best social critique made by Sarat Chandra. Unveiling the harsh truth of the Brahmin ruled rural society of Bengal was the main theme of this novel. BenyGhoshal, GobindaGanguly, Poran Harder etc. are the chief opponents who are the 'lords' of this society. Ramesh and Rama, on the other hand, the main characters of this novel are oppressed members of this society where Ramesh is playing a role of a social reformer. Here oppression is in terms of love relationship and the obstacles coming in the way of his idea of reformation. This novel, overall, depicts a complex narrow minded clash between the 'lords of the land' and the 'reformers of the society'.

The second one in this line is *Devdas* where Sarat Chandra Chatterjee portrayed the crookedness of the family life and the orthodox social taboos that creates a complexity and prevents individuals from achieving their desired objectives. Here in this novel he showed that how an anulom love story did not succeed due to the social clash of class. *Devdas*, the hero of this novel is the son of Narayan Mukherjee an affluent zamindar and Parvati, the heroine of this novel who belongs to a lower class family are in love. But the glamour of Zamindari and the Raibahadur title of *Devdas*' father does not accept the affair of *Devdas* and Parvati due to socio-economic class differences and *Dev*'s intense love for *Paro* remains incompetent till the end of the novel.

The third one is *Parineeta*. It is a story of an orphan girl *Lolita* who is being brought up by her uncle *Gurucharan* who himself has five daughters and become a prey of impoverishment in providing dowry while marrying his daughters. *Shekhar*, the hero of this novel who belongs to a wealthy family eventually gets secretly married to *Lolita*, a girl of 13 years old, before departing to a tour to west. A few years later a series of dramatic events followed by *Shekhar*'s denial to accept *Lolita* as his wife due to many socio-economic and religious complexities. *Girin*, another supportive character in this novel had been a well-wisher and a helping hand to the ups and downs of *Lolita*'s life though out the story.

The fourth and the final selected one is '*PatherDabi*' or '*The Way of the World*'. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee in this novel describes *PatherDabi* as a secret society aiming at bringing up a revolution in the class, gender inequalities, government oppression and caste ridden society. Being ambitious to make India free from British rule it has structured its activities accordingly. *Sabyasachi*, the hero of this novel is the leader of this organization *PatherDabi*. *Sabyasachi* being a highly educated rational citizen does not believe in the caste system and at the end of this novel pleads for the destruction of 'all that is eternal, ancient and decaying---- religion, society, tradition' on the basis that these are all 'enemies of the nation'. Another major character here is *Apurbo*, a member of *PatherDabi* keeps deep rooted hatreds at the colonial rule. Among the women characters *Sumitra* is described as a beauty with brain having nationalist feelings in heart. She makes an impassioned argument for the oppression for a woman to live a loveless marriage.

The indepth study of these selected novels of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee enables an inquisitive reader to harness the fact that by and large there is a basic similarity in the themes of his novels. His novels primarily try to display universal socio-economic and cultural oppressions and sufferings of a definite group of people. To say for example, '*PalliSamaj*' or '*The Home Coming*' is a glowing document depicting the unequal combination of human groups and the unjustfull treatment of higher classes to the lower one where the former group very often tends to snatch the fundamental social rights of the later by force. *Devdas* on the other hand is a portrayal of man-made barriers that is gradually thickening and creating a virtual boundary between the unequal economic classes and in every day's life the right of individual wish of the majority of population get slaughtered by the powerful sword of the towering social status of the higher class society. This is how the poor people or the comparatively lower class people are always victimized by being thrashed under the pride of so called superior. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee in his novel *Parineeta* has again repeated the theme of the plights of the poverty ridden only with a different way of storytelling. The different taste of *Parineeta* lies in the fact that it deals with some other major issues like child marriage, curse of dowry, orthodox religious foundations etc.

In 'PatherDabi' or 'The Way of the World' 'the story touches upon contemporary issues ranging from untouchability, orthodoxity and faith to rich-poor divide, the status of women in the society criticizing British policies and also India's inherent customs and social structure with the same intensity.'

II. CONCLUSION

Though Sarat Chandra Chatterjee has been criticized many a time in the way that he has only pointed out the social evils and the underlying sordid mentality of our society but never tried to bring out a solution to eradicate these social issues in his writings. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee actually placed a big question mark before the rationale intellectuals of the society to think over these ancient problems of the whole India besides Bengal and provided an indication that they have to fulfill the basic rights of every individual to unite them for the purpose of India's independence. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee was a virtual supporter to uproot the caste, creed or class systems including unequal status of women in the society. In a mute form he envisioned a revolutionary task that plays a major role in unifying the society aiming at the genesis of long nourished dream of 'nation building'.

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