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Abolition of Feudal System in the Stories of Manoj Das: A Brief Study of Indian Life in Transition

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on prominent facts of feudal system and its impact on Indian society. Feudal system is a challenging task for social reformers and a barrier to progress a nation especially, in education. It can also be understood in other senses as backward, severe, and unruled system of Indian society. Certain representative literary works may provide keen analysis and interpretation of matter, especially as somewhat macabre or reactionary feudal past in Indian contexts that do not belong to the particular tradition but that involve almost in concerning all categories and nominal rulers deeply merge in a specific conception of society. After inspecting all aspects, Manoj Das (1934--) surprises his readers greatly with his stories as a crusader in understanding the social evils and burning issues- like dowry, child-marriage, and Marxism a materialist interpretation particularly, feudal system and, the nature of which seems difficult for nation scholars to comprehend. This is absolutely true in many stories such as those in India, where the secular system is composed of difficult layers; regionalism, racism, philology and, the colour theory even in modernization and urbanization.

Keywords: Manoj Das, Feudal System, Marxism, Metamorphosis, Social Change.

With regard to abolition of the feudal system, the wrier unequivocally demonstrates the relationship of landowner and peasantry- the struggle of common man and dominating nature of aristocratic zamindar or royal family. Manoj Das, as a follower of Marxism theory has generally convinced feudal system to be mode of socio- economic grouping in which the landlords treat dependent peasants like slave and take work like machine from them. Though the feudal system had been abolished in the customary law and confined to the master-servant relationship. Not all but some stories of Manoj Das; “The Strategy”, “A Naked”,

“The Owl”, “The Gold Medal”, “The Concubine”, “The Birds”, etc, have been perfectly discussed with the same pattern of Indian life. In these stories, feudal system is defined as basically a crisis of peasants or servants rather than to complete the literary purpose of the writer. As the abolition of feudal system is a good sign for modern India and utmost effort to reform its old assumptions. Manoj Das defines the feudal system in his unique short stories collection *The Bridge in Moonlit Night and other stories*, as ‘Your Writer Speaking’ to the individual belongings:

The Indian society was steeped in feudal tradition since a remote past. The sudden end to the system spawned both visible and invisible hassles broadly at two planes: in the life of the princes and their puny variation- the Zamindars (landlords in a special sense) and in the life of the common people confronted with a system alien to their habits and mentality, namely a Western model of democracy that replaced the age- old feudal hierarchy. (Das xiv)

The abolition of feudal system is suggested in Indian life as the faces of transition, although Manoj Das does not fully involve in this aspect through his stories in which many individuals and small groups are discussed in deep sense. The stories are presented with a strong motive to awaken the readers about the true society of past India.

The Strategy

In the story “The Strategy”, Manoj Das lights on truly evil in Indian society as feudal system. Nevertheless, this story does not bind itself to analyze the feudal system but spreading a broad continuous range of life and describing Indian life in different types of changes from old to new social values that concern a nation with new ideology. A look put on old times when the landlord exploited the peasants and took much work from them. Thus the landowner or landlord, aristocratic person, powerful knighthood and peasantry are- the essential characters of the feudal system. The peasantry and another working person are used as service tenure and other retentates from high aggregate are the representative of strangeness and prosperity and such a people of unsophisticated society were treated like a slave. They had to work more on low salary in various jobs like; peasantry, snapper and caretaker. The setting of the story is purely rural and half part of it depicts the contexts of pre-independence. A widely acclaimed even to the common people that India had many turmoil faces of pre-independent and its condition was not satisfied. It was directed and geared by the British power. Gauri is a ninety- three years old widow woman. She is a prime character of

the story and a great observer of the nature- beholds a star at serene dawn in the eastern sky. There were many things in her mind as she was thinking about her past. On the journey of her life, she had met many troubles and tragedies in different ways. She thinks that man faces problems in his life as joy and sorrow but she spent her life in sorrow. Gauri had faced personal loss as her father before she opened her eyes and mother only at the age of three. After the parents had passed away, she also lost her husband only in seven years of her age, but there was one more downfall remaining to her as adopted son who also died in his infancy.

Life taught Gauri a lot of things to survive. She learned midwifery to serve the people by her grandmother for sixteen years only. To her, this was only to serve others, not the way to earn money. The times seemed to have changed. Gauri has sacrificed her life for the village people but despite this, they do nothing even in her old age. Das describes the self-seeking nature of village people as:

Attitude of the people were no longer the same- Gauri had been aware of it for a long time- and in their eyes she was perhaps in no way different from any other aged and useless women. (68)

Lifelong, Gauri has nursed as a practice of midwifery and gave her best service even to the zamindars. Most after the whole journey of her life, she had completed her ninety-three years. She afflicts now with paralyse, an old age disease that she had never experienced before but one more experience she had with zamindar's harsh behaviour to her. Once she went to the mansion and asked some helps from Zamindar:

'Gouri the Midwife. She says that she is going to die,' the servant said carrying his lips close to his master's ear not without some irritation.

Die? Was she alive? The zamindar shut his eyes in order to relish the gulped down smoke better. (70)

Das's analysis of decaying feudalism was mostly based on weaker society which has often been discussed to be the traditional form of past India. However, Das made special context of post-modern India as having a form of feudalism, and he looked upon the special feature of Indian history.

In the story "The Naked", Manoj Das has accounted for another burning story of feudalism of Indian society. Feudalism is a dark spot and a sign of uncivilized act for Indian society. Sapanpur- on- Sea, a village in the story showed no development, an abandoned part with unused few old buildings even decaying of the Raja's mansion. The writer described such a village as a stronghold for the feudal system. The story presents decaying feudal

conventionality as a major sign of late king. The only son in Raj family did not know his responsibility for erstwhile capital and he did not get a chance to ascend the Rajgaddi. The Royals at Sapanpur are well known for their dominating nature. They celebrate special occasions; like some kinds of conference and participate to be entertained. For this, they organize the similar kind conference in every summer with the men and women, attending as a guest in naked shape. This was an uncivilized act in Indian point of view but to the royals a great source to amuse or entertain them. It was customary that all guests weather men or women had to present without clothes or show theirs in the high rank. Here, Manoj Das does typically depict village people and royals' uncivilized conventionality, never easy to perform for an Indian:

All Bhanu Singh was required to do was to receive the visitors and to place himself at their disposal. The Rajmata had sent some money too, perhaps a little more than what he would require, to spruce up the mansion and buy some provisions. (8-9)

Rajmata has a varied and often unusual approach to her royalty and a great follower of western thoughts. She had completed her higher education in Europe and established herself as an insignia of dynasty in India. She designed costly letterhead with a conch of a pair of lotuses to show her dynasty. In Indian contexts, rural people are sensible for tradition values and they do not know about modernity or western ideas and easily prey by royals. The title of the story 'The Naked' has varied meanings in literature as; someone without cloth, or cloth less and for the royals it is a fashion of modern age. The writer defines it in an extremely knotty situation:

"Nudist" means one who goes naked! Not a baby, mind you! In other words, you are required to receive and shake hands with a group of ladies and gentlemen, all emerging absolutely bare from the lorry. (9)

Folk people are conservative and drain of all vitality and modernity for them like someone receiving a knock on the face. With such a predicament it is clear as the rays of sun or huge sounds of the ocean that make folk people in puzzled or confused state of mind. It was quite difficult to such a people covering theirs in dhoti and kurta and shake hands with guests wearing not a single piece of clothes. In golden age, late Raja Sahib had merely ruled over the village people for many years. He had no especial achievements in the battlefield and no-good deeds for his state. He was habitual of the alcohols and got the pleasure in making some of his officials undress and forced them to dance before him by some rhythmic lyrics of gramophone. Through this notable story, the writer attracts his readers to the social

evils and he also focuses on the venerable citizen of the village and royals or landowners' harsh behaviour and exploited nature for peasantry.

In the story "The Owl", owl is an omen for the villagers rather than an ordinary bird. They believe that it is the reincarnation of the God and consider as an oldest lineage of the village. Manoj Das has wonderfully depicted superstitious nature of folk people as well as cruel act of Zamindar's son by shooting to owl. The young people of village were familiar with the loud sound of the owl and they considered it good fortune for themselves. The main of family brought the pious bird up to his children as the symbol of the happiness but with the lack of practical wisdom nobody ever found the truth and no dare to come out from the superstition. The whole ideology of Vishalpur folks is accomplished with superstition, black magic, legendary reputation and charming environment of the nature. The writer put it as:

At Vishalpur the sunset seemed to follow a certain rhythm, and the birds which flew back to their old trees on the marshland at the western end of the village, did so beating their wings in time with it. (22)

The temple had become under the possession of village landlords who enjoyed it as a source of entertainment. After demolishing of land-lordship, the things changed for better; common people began to be educated and aware for their rights. In due course the temple had permanently become a resident of owl; however, it was the same creature of strange hooting that could be an indication or prophesy about cyclone, drought and noteworthy death. The owl looked upon as a horror creature but there was no sense of dark silhouette against the village people or to frighten them. Once the owl was frequently hooting and two hooting was clearly heard in which another, a gunshot interrupted them with some indecipherable sound of the owl. The people got the information about owl death and found the landlord's son guilty for unpardoned sin and they asked; "What more is left to happen, Zamindar Sahib? You shot the owl of the shrine dead!" (Das 24). At this, landlord's son replies and blames them to recite riddles again and again. He gets them to remember that he is the son- the only son of landlord and graduated in low. He openly threatens them and shows himself a superior person among all rustic people. The act; to kill the animal or bird is a reward and appreciation for the landlords. To the landlord's son, to shoot the owl was a game of hunting and when the villagers wanted to know the reason to shoot the owl, he spelled out:

What happened if I did? The young man made an effort to sound stern. He turned back and looked at them one by one, distributing his displeasure. (24)

A few days after the event, the villagers got the information of landlord's death and they had no difficulty to celebrate view of the dead young man as great occasion. They

declare that it is nothing but God's punishment to him. Manoj Das spills out the last moment of the young landlord and the old maid who ran behind the corpse vehicle but unable to follow it for long distance. All attendants in funeral sat silent and mostly gazing at burning pyre but in fact they felt happiness from inside. They have concluded this unbearable condition as; "It the rumour I heard in the market the other day, that the zamindari system will be scrapped, true? Someone asked" (28). Nobody needs to reply and they go back to their houses.

Manoj Das's stories easily are compared with Edger Allen Poe and O' Henry by burning issues of the society as abolition of the feudal system, a mark of salvation for human beings. The story "The Gold Medal", allows the readers to witness firsthand circumstances that took place during the era when the constitution of nation not permitted to the zamindari system which was passed over the centuries and quite amazing to see with the same eyes the genuine impact of such a reform. Krishnachandra is an actor in folk- theatre. Forty years ago, he had perfectly performed the role of Janaka- Nandini- the woes of the daughter of the king Janaka. It was first opportunity for him performing such a religious play in the public and acting before zamindar Rudra Chowdhury- was still alive to stir in the images of Krishnachandra. Zamindar felt happy and announced a gold medal to Krishna for such an outstanding performance. Krishna also got success to arouse the pity and fear in the heart of the audiences as:

... Tears drizzled in a thousand eyes when he had cried out, addressing Sita who, disgusted with the unworthy humanity, was about to depart into the cracking earth: O Janaka- Nandini, don't leave me forlorn- don't! (138)

To him it was a thrilling movement to get a prize of gold and honoured by zamindar. After covering a long journey of the life nobody knew besides winner that the promise would be proved nothing but only a hallucination to temptation. At the same time, this story highlights various other issues including decaying power of zamindari system, common people in subsequent to the mutiny and expanding knowledge. Krishna had not given up hope and he went to zamindar to reminding promise of gold medal to him. He requests him in a decent way:

Do you remember, huzoor? You had once promised a gold medal to this humble servant of yours! he had made bold to ask Chowdhury after ascertaining that nobody overheard him. (140)

Krishna's struggle as an actor in folk- theatre and his despair not to get gold medal examine a concrete literary example offered by Manoj Das in the story "The Gold Medal", in

which the story writer deals with debate about an artist; outstanding performances on village-stage and as a deprived man from fruit of labour or a victim of feudal system.

In reading Manoj Das's stories, the readers are obliged to consider the effect of the feudal system on India and in its progress, even the democratic system planned in constitution law. In "The Concubine", the writer puts another social evil and every kind of orthodoxy with a virtuous woman in the shape of concubine. Sati Dei is a prominent character of the story, from the palace and a concubine of the late Raja. She was the most trustworthy and accurate among all courtiers and it was even more concrete when Rani in her deathbed had handed over her only son to concubine and she said; "Sati, take care of my son!" No wonder, for anyone to see a lady as a concubine of late Raja nursing the little child well in her best effort. She understood her responsibility that's why she completed her task from her side. She went house to house and humbly requested to the people to vote for her son. The only son in royal family had grown a young prince. The people of Sumanpur state had expected him a perfect candidature in forthcoming election but some of them reminded about late Raja as the scion of the dynasty and symbol of a reactionary feudal past. In fact, late Raja was the icon of tyranny and exploited many people. In due course, the young prince proves himself an ideal and honest candidature by his flattery and becomes popular the villagers. P. Raja, a critic and one of the earliest research scholars on the fiction of Manoj Das states the prominent faces of past India in transition as:

Manoj Das records an era of transition in India in three fronts: its passage from a colony into a free country; the passage of feudalism (the Zamindari system in particular) and the metamorphosis of some village into hick towns. (Raja 69)

Cyclone is also concerned with a mixture of abolition of feudal system or transition in postmodern India. The readers open it as a first novel by a reputed short story writer. Das is witness to Indian psyche in turmoil by the colonial rule and partition of nation. This was sufficient material for such a curious person to shape his writing in a new world or producing Indian literature with a great deal. The novel is rooted from transition facts and dealing with decaying of feudal system of postmodern era. Prof. Shiv.K. Kumar reviewed *Cyclone* with the same point of view; "Cyclone is indeed a testimony to the novelist's sensitive imagination, moral perception and literary skill" (*The Hindustan Times*, 14 Feb, 1989). His story *The Poison Girl* exhibits a keen insight into the unpredictable condition of each character portraying with poisonous herbs and subsides. Heera is the prime of character of the story and a victim of feudal system. She had escaped from landlord's household indulge as slave in a distant village. She had understood people's intention and inclination towards her-

only seize the opportunity or exploit compulsion. She had no enough sources to remain alive or existed in life, so no other option left for her besides prostitution; “Heera, observes an influential customer, guzzling off a tumblerful of liquor brewed in the backyard of the houses. The customer then tries to grab Heera. She feigns annoyance”. (Das 108). She had conciliated with the condition and killed her soul, life means only despair for her. In the story, feudal system is rudely defined as a girl of physical advantage and a horrible face of exploitation than common discussion or social system.

Most Indian writers often follow a certain literary device for their writings to popularize them but Das’s stories are more than integration of theme, art and characterization; they are in few words of the tradition with its errors and flaws. They depict India’s remote past and its journey from the colony to a nation with democratic rule, abolition of feudal system, especially a rule by landlords or lenders and changing shape of Indian villages into towns and urban area. *Cyclone* and some other stories of Manoj Das portray every facility for rehabilitation in realistic and pragmatic tone. Dr. Nishamani Kar, in her scholarly work “*Indian Life in Transition: A Study of A Tiger at Twilight*” justifies and correlates the actual circumstances with writer’s work. She said; “it gives a clear insight into the plot and also meaningful hints at the lady protagonist- Heera, who is no less an enigma by herself so much so that she is as acrimonious and aggressive as a tigress.” (*Rock Pebbles*, jun 12, p- 202). In ‘The Poison Girl’, Heera is a sole representative girl and victimized by feudal-lords therefore, she has absolute reason to blame such a society people as feudalism.

At this point, again the readers are acquainted with another world of feudal system concerning and personifying the birds as the humans who live their life sometimes in hope and sometimes in despair. Das has acted out not only the landlord or dynasty’s exploitation over the weaker society but also adorable account for the animal or bird. In the story “The Bird”, Kumar Tukan Roy, a son of the late Raja Sahib of the state Mandarpur and a provoked huntsman for prey. As knocking of immune to pricks and pebbles he aimed to the birds as much as possible. Das observes:

He began feeling the tinge of the thrill he always experienced when his prey came down- its wings which had flapped over hundreds of miles, from horizon to horizon flapping desperately for the last few times fighting the gravitational pull.
(123-124)

After independence, Indian contexts have changed and the hoary system like feudalism becomes a task of discussion for new society. The old heritage of dynasty as palace of Mandarpur had been unused even for its masters and invalid in a few of observing and

turned into a residence for ghosts' activity at night. Through his writings, Manoj Das has presented a real Indian society with its faces of transition as abolishing the feudalism and new society with its enlightened practices and, old beliefs and customs to be forced to modern ways of life by the rapid metamorphosis. Das's valuable observation of Indian society is fulfilled by his short fiction which has an incredible contribution in English literature.

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