



A BURNING DESIRE FOR THE LIBERATION FROM OPPRESSION IN MEGHA MAZUMDER'S NOVEL : *A BURNING*

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ABSTRACT:

'*A Burning*' is a riveting novel. It is interlaced with three unforgettable characters Jivan, PT sir and Lovely. Jivan is a slum area girl who is accused of executing a terrorist attack on a train because of her thoughtless comment on Facebook. PT sir is a gym teacher who is discontent with his life and hitches his life for a right-wing political party and finds his own upswing is linked to Jivan's fall. Lovely, a hijra is fervent to become a successful actress. Though she has the capability to set Jivan free, it costs everything that she holds dear. This novel is a story of the powerless who face frightful obstacles yet try to crack their big dreams in a country spinning towards extremism.

KEYWORDS: Poverty, Injustice, Oppression, Inequality, Exploitation.

Megha Mazumdar, the author of the novel '*A Burning*' was born in India. She left for America to study at Harvard University. She did her post graduation in Social Anthropology at John Hopkins University. While working as an editor at Catapult she produced her first novel '*A Burning*'. Her study of social anthropology impelled her to express her views on India in the form of a novel. She projected Indian life as it is. Those who go through this fiction can easily estimate Indian communities and differences that exist among them and how lower classes are oppressed by the elite of the society.

"Power corrupts" is the message from Megha Mazumdar, the author of the novel *A Burning*. It uncovers the gloomy reality behind India's rosy picture. The novel's principal theme is the pursuit of dominion among the dispossessed, and the threat that ensnare those who have the audacity to strive for equity in a society predicated on exploitation. In fact, *A Burning* offers a sharp witted vision of what happens to the individual in a nation where corruption is the coin of the realm, where violent bigotry and calculated prevarication are essential political instruments, where social media become the apparatuses of foment and surveillance, where social justice is seen as sedition, and where the acquisition of fame and power make the conscience expendable. The novel sheds light on three characters in contemporary urban India: Jivan, a 22-year-old Muslim woman who works at a cloth store; Lovely, a transgender beggar woman to whom Jivan tutored in English and PT sir, Jivan's former gym teacher who is a dissatisfied person. This paper is a study about suffered voices of protest who are the victims of caste, class, communal disharmony and poverty. It also examines the different sects and castes and the differences in the ideologies amongst the Indian community that ultimately lead to the oppression of minorities.

In the words of Karishma Jobanputra "What does it mean to be free? Free to pursue dreams, free to say anything, or even simply free to live every day without fear? Megha Majumdar's debut novel, *A Burning*, flares with these questions, illuminating a harsh world of politics, power, and the heavy weight of a corrupt society on those less privileged."

The action of the novel is unveiled through the accounts of three major characters Jivan, Lovely and PT sir. One night Jivan was on the platform of Kolbagan train station near her home, and a train was set on fire by the terrorists. She is the one among the many people who criticised that incident. Thinking that she is free to speak, she made a comment and posted it on Facebook 'If the police didn't help ordinary people like you and me, if the police watched them die, doesn't that mean that the government is also a terrorist?(pg.5). She realises that it is "a dangerous thing, a thing nobody like me should ever think, let alone write"(pg.5). On seeing police van the boys simply leave the nightclub without any fear because they have influence in higher authorities. But Jivan compares herself with them. Having no connection with authorities like them, feels . Their fathers knew police commissioners and members of the legislature, figures who were capable of making all problems disappear. And me, how would I get out of this? Whom did I know?(pg.15). This comment resulted in her arrest by the police the next morning. Many others also make similar comments but her lower status attracted the government for speedy imprisonment. So her bold comment ruined her poor but peaceful life.

Another protagonist PT sir learns about Jivan's sad plight and is stunned. He remembers how he loved her as a student with a promising future. He trained her while teaching physical education at a girl's school but he lost touch with her after board exams and never saw her again. He felt she was ungrateful. Now he is involved in politics having connections with Jana Kalyan political party and attending the rallies.

The third major character, Lovely, one of Jivan's close friends, also heard Jivan's case and could not believe it and was shocked. Being Jivan's friend at Kolbagan slum and received tuition in English from her tries to help if the police approach her. She also felt that her words may not be taken into consideration because she is a hijra. When Lovely says that she is an actress the court laughed at her again. The judge simply says; 'we have the word of a hijra, an individual who begs on the streets for money "(pg.200).She always attended acting classes seriously with Debarnath to become a famous actor ,thinking that it may free her from poverty-stricken life and may earn dignity in the society. Thus Lovely is busy with her training. After so many acting classes Lovely's video goes viral and she becomes a success. Karishma Jobanputra is of the opinion that "sometimes those that without correct words or identity can overcome society expectations and preconceived notions' ". So we can conclude even less privileged classes can be elevated based on the situation if they work hard. It is a hope for depressed people.

Jivan is arrested on the ground that she has connections with the terrorists, actually she is not a terrorist but innocently made that comment. Now she wants to tell this to the world through an interview with a reporter, Purnendu Sarkar. After receiving a bribe from Jivan, the prison guard allowed the journalist. She expects that the police and the public will come to know that she is not with the terrorists but after all she is a simple Muslim girl living in slums. But she was shocked to see the article published against her as her story was completely changed. Her hopes of proving innocence in this case through the interview disappeared.

Lovely tried to support Jivan's innocence saying that she is not a terrorist ,during her trial. PT sir, thinking that she is ungrateful to him, gives a negative report about her. "Maybe she got involved with criminal elements after leaving school it happens"(pg.199).So the people with whom she spent her life for long and who knows about her well could not save her from death sentence. Being denied her mercy plea, Jivan is executed by hanging. That's how Jivan meets her tragic death. Jivan's mother's words "you smell like smoke"(pg.3) have come true.

PT sir and Lovely can save her but to meet their selfish ends they simply allowed her to meet her fate. PT sir felt that his political future may be destroyed if he supports her. He wants to guard his career in politics. So as not to damage his name in the public he kept quiet, though he finds an opportunity to save her regarding her mercy plea.Lovely also fails to support Jivan:" she was my neighbour but I am understanding now that maybe I was never really knowing who she was"(pg.266). About PT sir," nobody can say that PT sir is not an ethical man"(pg.286).

Ron Charles of The Washington Post wrote Majumdar demonstrates “an uncanny ability to capture the vast scope of a tumultuous society by attending to the hopes and fears of people living on the margins. The effect is transporting, often thrilling, finally harrowing”. In the words of Amitav Gosh "The interconnected stories seem to leap from the headlines and the picture is often horrifying – yet somehow Mazumdar also succeeds in capturing the boundless energy and starry-eyed hopefulness of the country’s youth. A Burning signals the arrival of a new voice of immense talent and promise."

George Orwell attacked Marxism in his *Animal Farm*[2004]. In his opinion,Marxism also can't settle conflicts between the upper class and the lower class, in other words it is a kind of replacement and an exchange only for the roles between the dominating power members.when the oppressors reach the chair of ruling they will practise the same kind of injustice inequality and maintain the social and economic privileges of the political elite that controls the community.one corruption will be replaced with another and the political elite will ignore calls for justice and equality.

So, one may feel the same case with India or any other country elsewhere. This kind of discrimination and oppression of the lower class people in any form;caste,creed,colour,etc. exist.If we want to eradicate this kind of humiliating attitude there must come change in the moral fabric of human mind, then only it can be solved otherwise it may appear in different forms in different times."Ultimately, Majumdar’s debut is a piercing series of questions concerning the life we are born into and the situations beyond our control. A haunting portrait of a country and city steeped in nationalism, A Burning splits open society and presents it, three ways, for our consideration".says Karishma Jobanputra.

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