Intimation Of The Transition From Rural To Urban Life Hansuli Banker Upokotha

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Abstract:-

The Precursor of Bengal Red-Land, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay is arguably the most influential novelist of Bengali Literature after Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay. In his classic ‘Hansuli Banker Upokotha’ (The Tale of Hansuli Turn) historicizes the tragic fate of the Kahar tribe in the face of Colonial—Capitalist developments in the rural interiors of Bengal. Closely engaging with the complex narrative structure of the novel, especially his pitting of a social realist narrative “tradition versus modernity” and experimental style “Upokotha” or tale, Tarashankar’s literary peripherality is socio-ecologically aware and self-consciously political, representative of world-literary aesthetics. Tarashankar, in a Gandhian logic, first focuses on the rootedness and accommodative nature of rural-regional customs and traditions in the character of Banwari and the depiction of Bansbadi village, and then faces them off with the greed of technological modernity that is brought on into the village’s everyday life through the young Kahar, Karali.

Key words:-Suburban industrialization, capitalist modernity, rationality, urbanization.

Introduction:

Inherently humanitarian, Bandopadhyay ventures into the heterogeneity of human life and unravels it through the people he personally came across. In the novel, classic Tarashankar upholds the universality of human condition in relation to cyclical movement of history, political revolution, dissolution of a subaltern population, clash between tradition and modernity, and the exploitation as well as decline of Zamindari system and the traditions from rural to urban through his unadorned, yet rich and forceful languages. From his very first novel, Chaitali Ghurni in which a peasant couple, Gostha and Damini suffer tribulations in the severe conditions of drought, flood, and debt and eventually migrate to the suburban industrial belts where they undergo further troubles—Tarashankar’s (1898-1971) works have widely captured the impact that industrialization and capitalist modernity have had on humans, non-humans and their ecosystems, especially those that live on the margins. Hansuli Banker Upokotha follows these premises. It is a story of the Kahar tribal people whose lives are deeply affected by suburban industrialization and soaring prices during the World War II.
Transition from Rural to Urban life

At the heart of Hansuli Banker Upokotha, there is the clash between cultural traditions and capitalist modernity. Tradition is understood as “Pitibidhan” or “conventions from the ancestors” which are based on their enduring/protective nature against external hostile forces. The main protagonist and focalizer of the novel is Bonwari, Mataabbar of the Kahars. Much of the novel is vectored through his thought world, his imaginative universe and philosophy, which, along with the Suchad, exemplifies the values of the ‘old’ world. He is the protector of dharma (ethical and religious principles) to whom responsibility means a complex relationship of loyalty and subordination to the quasi-feudal masters of village and town, and adherence to the prescriptions of Gods and forefathers. He recounts the tribe’s mythological origin, the main God, Kalaruddu, the “proloy” or “apocalypse” from that Kalaruddu saved them, the conventions and everyday rules coming down from generations, the wrath of gods, and the various ceremonies that they should perform to appease the gods and ward off the fear of the dark. Situated at the turn of the river, Kopai (which resembles the beautiful tribal necklace Hansuli, hence Hansuli Turn), surrounded by trees and inhabited mainly by presents who still follow the ancient bartering system with landlords, this endogamous world of Bansbadi has developed a “tale” of its own. In this tale, nothing is allowed which is not done before: “That which is astounding in the world is a matter for fear for the Hansuli Turn”. Life is full of economic hardship, yet people manage to seek joy by either gathering at evening “majlis”, drinking, playing instruments, singing, and dancing or celebrating various ceremonies offered to different deities throughout the year. Most of these ceremonies are performed to protect them from the fear of the dark: The Kahars fear the night, the nocturnal creatures, and the supernatural ambience that surrounded them. Life, as the narrator puts it, is “primeval here”. The novel begins on such a fearful night as the people of Hansuli Turn huddle to talk about a recurrent whistle which Suchand frames as a warning of some ominous occurrence soon. The whistle turns out to be the hissing of a chandrobara (a python) that is later killed by Karali. The story hereafter explores the rivalry between Banwari, who secretly admires Karali, and the latter who does not believe in the “pitibidhan”, breaks laws, and persuades Kahars to work at the railway factory against the commands of their chief. What is worse to the existential threat is the emergence of the young Karali, an unruly sans-culotte, who challenges the tribe’s traditionalist attitude and indigenous rituals. Steadily turning Bonwari’s unifying efforts into some ludicrous jokes and predisposed to protest any type of injustice and ridicule any type of superstition, Karali urges his community to give up servile existence to the Babus (landlords) and seek jobs at factories in order to live a better lifestyle as real men and women. In short, in his inability to show sufficient esteem to the existing rituals and superstitions, he appears to be an outcast in the community, especially to the old Kahars. In reaction to a strife thus caused, he stomps at the ancestral practices and leaves for the nearby city, Channanpur, aiming to usher in a new profession for himself and the young Kahars. This creates extreme disappointment in Kaha elders to whom Karali’s renunciation verges on humiliation of their caste. What is even more threatening; his aspiration to bring in a new life in the promises of technological and industrial advancements has started influencing other young minds.

With the Kahar youths’ stamped to nearby cities, the novel reaches its climax. Believing that Gods and Goddesses have abundant them, they apparently baulk at the tribal orthodoxies. They are not in any mood to submit to the fate that has been manipulated by feudal lords over ages. Rather, they take up the gauntlet of going beyond the periphery of the village and seeking newer ways of life. This leads the whole community to a menacing division between the Bonwari-led elders and the Karali-led youths who are impulsively thrilled by the optimism of modernisation and industrialization. Bandopadhyay’s Hansuli shares stunning parallelism with his contemporary Chinua Achebe’s “Things for Apart”, especially as regards the authors’ anatomizing ethnic customs and prejudices Egwugwu in Things Fall Apart and Babathakur in Hansili is the same pivotal spirit. The distance between father Okonkwo and son Noibe echoes in Hansuli as a theme of “the Falcon cannot hear the Falconer”.
The question of capitalist (Enlightenment) modernity is raised in the character of Karali. His logic, rationality, and way of life are so different from the villages’ that Karali’s character becomes the key to understanding the phenomenon of colonial-capitalist modernity and the ecological reshaping of the peripheries. Killing the python, Babathakur’s sacred carrier Karali does not feel remorseful; he rather mentions the case of a Channanpur factory sahib who kills snakes because they are poisonous. A snake does not appear to him in its symbolic or tribal-mythological significance but as a venomous animal which should be quarantined at the earliest. When Karali resisted by Suchand, Banwari and the senior tribesmen for building a two-storeyed building defying the ancestral rule and declining Zamindar, Karali reports to the court of law and contemptuously dismisses; their resistance with “proofs” in his support. Just before this occasion, when Nayan, the ex-husband of Pakhi, who Karali marries, bites her for revenge, a virulent Karali tells Banwari that “Company law says ya go to jail for bitin’ a woman like that”. Here, too, Karali’s reference to gender equity is a corollary of colonial modernity. We are also told that he is familiar with the new merchandizing system of lending and borrowing money in the railway sections. In all of these instances, we see Karali is comfortable with the instruments of modernization-law, court, logic, document, usury, etc. This is a world that the Chandanpur people live and operate within and which the Banwari’s fear and hate, a world of monetary loans, documents, and forms of long-term “mysterious” exploitation. Allied with this Karali’s newly adopted “babu” culture, wearing urban clothes, combing hair, erecting a double storied house, and speaking Hindi and English.

Karali distances himself from the rural world because of its “ridiculous” rules, hedonistic customs, mocks its baseless religiosity, and sees the world from the psychologically urbanised lens of borrowed rationality. Being an orphan and tortured by Maito Ghosh as his widowed mother left him, Karali becomes an outsider and an angry young man who revolts and disdains with the instruments of borrowed modernity against the rural baseless tradition. He is thus both a symptom of the contemporary historical condition of unprecedented industrial and capitalist aggression in the rural frontiers and a representative of the attendant socio-ecological transformations. His monstrous “devouring” of the village bringing in the colonial sahibs to build railway factories is an attestation of the complex coeval character of rural modernity.

References: