

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology
of Egypt / Egyptology

PREMCHAND'S KARMABHOOMI IN A POST-COLONIAL EYE

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Dr. Harpreet Kaur Arora, Premchand's Karmabhoomi in a Post-Colonial eye-Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(6), ISSN 1567-214x

Abstract

Premchand the emperor of novels used literature for the important purpose of arousing public awareness about national and social issues. He was a great social reformer who wrote about the issues faced by the urban middle class including exploitation, prostitution, widowhood and the freedom movement and thus worked to generate patriotism and nationalistic sentiments in the general populace. In Karmabhoomi (arena of action 1932) the focus is on the nationalist struggle of the country, it is a beautiful fusion of vision and reality based on human emotions. The novel gives us a glimpse into the freedom struggle led under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

Keywords: exploitation, prostitution, widowhood, sentiments, nationalist

The novel of colonial consciousness draws attention to itself and to literature in general as a political and politicized activity. Immediate and direct involvement in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural productions is the task it stakes out for itself. Ashcroft Bill says:

“We use the term ‘post-colonial’ to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression”.

One of the features of all the post-colonial writing is its commitment to the societies which produces it. We can see a post-colonial view in Premchand's Karmabhoomi. Premchand the emperor of novels used literature for the important purpose of arousing public awareness about national and social issues. He was a great social reformer who wrote about the issues faced by the urban middle class including exploitation, prostitution, widowhood and the freedom movement and thus worked to generate patriotism and nationalistic sentiments in the general populace.

In Karmabhoomi (arena of action 1932) the focus is on the nationalist struggle of the country, It is a beautiful fusion of vision and reality based on human emotions. It gives us a glimpse into the freedom struggle led under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

Larson argues that the most significant characteristic which distinguishes the third world novel from its Western counterpart most is its situational plot.

“Ideally defined as a narrative in which the central character's importance is replaced by a collective group of people undergoing a commonly shared experience “

We see the same situation in Karmabhoomi where Amar is the central character's role is replaced by a collective group of people from his village.

The colonial elite is conscious of his role potential leader but Western liberal education teaches him to reject the norms of traditional society and to accept egalitarian values of the colonizing society. The very first chapter of the novel throws light on western education which was regarded as a model education but could not remain a model for the Indians. Due to poverty if any student was unable to pay fees on the due date, he was expelled from school. The result is mass illiteracy of Indian society.

The novel 'Karmabhoomi is mainly based on Amarkant whose mother expired in his early childhood and his foster mother did not give him the same love and care. He became obstinate and the relationship between father and son also became poor. Amarkant was physically weak and not

highly educated but still he was married at nineteen with 'Sukhda' the daughter of a wealthy widow. They didn't have a happy married life as both had opposite ways of thinking and behaviour. Amar's foster sister 'Naina' was to an extent, able to fill the gap left of his mother.

Premchand in this novel exposes an example of Britishers oppression as a lady named 'Munni' is brutally raped by three white soldiers. Amarkant, his friend Saleem and professor Dr, ShantiKumar together tried to get justice for this lady.

On Sukhda's request because she is pregnant, Amarkant tries to take on his family responsibilities and sits in his father's shop. There he deals with three Britishers, two men and a lady after taking the money, they are attacked by a beggar woman who kills both the men and on inquiry she says: "I am not a murderer"

She doesn't know how she has killed them? All she knows is that three white men had raped her and whatever she did, it was in trance. Because of the joint efforts of Amarkant, Dr Shantikumar and Saleem Munni gets justice and freedom.(38)

Unable to follow his father's footsteps and become a businessman, Amarkant leaves home and from here thus begins his work for the freedom struggle in which he has always been interested and which has been the root cause of the dispute with his wife.

The poverty seen in Pathanin's house introduces her to the state of the masses who were facing the same condition at that time. Neither Sakeena's poverty nor her religion could prevent Amar from falling in love with her. Both the ladies Sukhda and Sakeena have a control over his life. The only difference is that, Sukhda wants to rule over Amar as her right and Sakeena rules over him through love and submission and this is the main thing which binds Amar with Sakeena.

We can see Amar's view on society and religion when he speaks to Saleem and Sakeena. He says that he is willing to forgo both religion and society to get married to Sakeena. Amarkant feels that every religion teaches the same

goodness and to marry Sakeena, he is willing to become even a Muslim. By himself working as a labourer he tries to teach dignity of labour to his fellow countrymen. We see in Karmabhoomi, Amar with his revolutionary ideas has joined the congress and is unsatisfied with British rule as he says-

“We are bounded by chains we must follow what they wish whether we want to accept it or not because if we try to oppose them we would be killed.”(258)

Based on the exploitation of natural and human resources of the colonized nation, colonialism perpetuates itself through oppression and aggression. In Karmabhoomi we can also see the examples of the suppression of the untouchables. They are prevented from entering the temples and on one occasion they are thrown out by the Brahmachari. Dr. Shantikumar fights on their behalf and paves the way for Karmabhoomi. He shows that “Man’s arena for work is his character. The basis of religion is truth and a good character. None can be separated on the basis of religion.”

Dr Shantikumar in Karmabhoomi, teaches them the meaning of self-respect and fills their heart and mind with confidence and prepares them to revolt against untouchability. In anger he says

“God is not the property of everyone. Nobody can put him in his box. Today this matter should be solved forever.”(140)

Sick and tired of the bondage at home as well as that of British, Amar leaves Sukhda and moves us to a village where he meets Munni and gets totally involved in the freedom struggle and works for the welfare of his fellow brothers. The school which Amarkant had started had become a success in the village- People of all ages from far and near attended the school in which he taught politics and sociology and it was because of his efforts that untouchability and killing of Cows, not only vanished from his village but also from the surrounding villages.

In this novel Gandhiji’s freedom struggle is seen through the character of Dr. Shantikumar who has opened up a Seva Ashram and its branches are

widespread. He and his followers declare a boycott of Western goods and education.

Sukhda wanted to start a great strike for their rights so that the pride of the members of municipality would have a fall. After getting involved in struggle Sukhda realises, Amarkant's opposing to wealth in his fights for truth and reality and she also realises "What the slavery of the Britishers' for 150 years had given to the Indians?"

Later on it is seen that Renuka Devi is also arrested but she also tries to make the people realise how the East India Company was misusing them. One by one all the leaders in struggle end up in jail and Amarkant's sister Naina assumes the leadership but her husband 'Maniram doesn't accept it and shoots her up in public.

Women characters in Karmabhoomi are not marginalised as non-entities. We can see through Sukhda who when jailed refuses to fight for her release. The freedom struggle was started by a women who joined hands with Dr. Shantikumar and the Karmabhoomi of freedom struggle ended with the death of another lady Naina.

The post-colonial world that Premchand reveals in the novel is, as it is in his earlier novels a debilitated impoverished one. It is a multilingual multicultural country where heterogeneous people are throw together with a common goal binding them i.e. the struggle for freedom. In the end of Karmabhoomi we see the softening of the Britishers and the way is gradually been paved for independence. Thus in Karmabhoomi i.e. the arena of action which was visualized by Premchand seems to be accomplished.

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