

Glimpses Of Historical Representation In Reputed Novels Of Ramesh Chandra Dutta: A Brief Analysis

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Abstract: Ramesh Chandra Dutta was one of the great stalwarts of 19th Century Bengal enlightened by the aura of cultural renaissance. Ramesh Chandra, with deep knowledge in Sanskrit, English, French and German languages as well as literature and influenced by novels of Sir Walter Scott, a renowned litterateur, produced four famous historical novels in Bengali namely *Bangobijeta* (1874), *Madhabikankan* (1877), *Maharashtra Jivan Prabhat* (1878) and *Rajput Jivan – Sandhya* (1879). According to Dr. Shrikumar Bandopadhyay, the author's four novels could be classified into two categories – first two were primarily imagination oriented but the third and the fourth one had been based on historical truth. In Bengali literature, Ramesh Chandra was the only author who produced unadulterated truthful and fact-oriented historical novels. But in sphere of imaginary history he was not at all an excellent litterateur like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. In depicting scenario of warfare Ramesh Chandra became able to express his expertise but he was not a wonderful artist in describing psychological complexities while depicting man- woman relationship in historical backdrop. He skilfully depicted historical characters such as Shivaji, Aurangzeb and Maharana Pratap Singh with utmost perfection. In his historical novels he tried his level best to avoid melodramatic language and upheld objectivity as his best weapon. Ramesh Chandra collected his materials for *Jivan Prabhat* and *Jivan Sandhya* primarily from *Tod's Annals* but many incorporations upheld these novels as wonderful explorations of a national identity in the making. In colonial Bengal he was a pillar of revivalist nationalism which flourished through the images of valiant sati (predominant practice in Rajputana) and the equally dauntless widow for dismissing the charge of effeminacy imposed by the colonial rulers especially on Bengalis.

Keywords: Nationalism, Patriotic flavour, Historicity, Ancient heritage, Cultural difference.

I. INTRODUCTION

Eminent scholar Ramesh Chandra Dutta's four famous novels entitled *Bangobijeta* (1874), *Madhabikankan* (1877), *Maharashtra Jivan- Prabhat* (1878) and *Rajput Jivan- Sandhya* (1879) were primarily history – centric but the third and the fourth one had obtained the place of real historical masterpieces in arena of Bengali literature. Dr. Shrikumar Bandopadhyay in his book namely *Bangosahitye Upanyaser dhara* had rightly opined that – "Ramesh Chandrer charikhani oitihasic upanyaske shuloto duiti shrenite bhag kora jaite pare. Pratham upanyasdwoy 'Bangobijeta' o 'Madhabi- Kankan' 'ek shrenir antorgoto; sesher duikhani upanyas – 'Jivan- Prabhat o Jivan- Sandhya'- ke apar

shrenite phela jaite pare. Ei dui shrenir madhye probhed ei je, pratham shrenite kalpanar adhipatya; dwitiyo shrenite satyanishthar adhik pradurbhav – kalpana oitihasic satyer anugami hoiachhe. oitihasic upanyaser khetre Ramesh Chandrer gati kalponikata hoite satyanishthar dike; pratham upanyasdwoye je itihasic apradhan chilo, sesher upanyas duikhanite taha pradhan hoiachhe. Ihar karon bodh hoy Ramesh Chandrer oitihasic jyaner prosar ebang Rajput o Maharashtra itihasic biraotva kahinite ekta parabol, prachur rasadharar abishkar"

Bangobijeta was a reflection of Mughal – Pathan conflicts in Bengal and the author skilfully described role of local zamindars in that particular era of political turmoil. *Madhabi- Kankan* depicted the War of Succession occurred during the

reign of Shah Jahan and family- story oriented social history was loosely connected with the political history of the Mughal Empire of Indian subcontinent. *Maharashtra Jivan – Prabhat* explored history of conflicts between the kingdom of Bijapur and Shivaji as well as between Shivaji and Aurangzeb. *Rajput Jivan- Sandhya* was undoubtedly an excellent picture of long-lasting conflicts between the Mughal emperor Akbar and Maharana Pratap Singh besides conflicts between the house of Rathors and Chandawats of Rajputana. According to Sudipta Kaviraj, the author of the book entitled *The Unhappy Consciousness*, two novels namely *Jivan – Prabhat* and *Jivan – Sandhya* had been crucial and significant moves towards an undoubtedly authentic Indian nationalist history. Partha Chatterjee also gave thrust on anti- colonial nationhood building procedures in Indian History.

Mrinalini Sinha in her book entitled *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly’ Englishman and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the late nineteenth century* stated that the burgeoning dynamics between colonial and nationalist politics in the 1880s as well as in 1890s in our motherland could be thoroughly captured via the logic of colonial masculinity. Another prominent scholar in the field of gender and identity politics, Indira Chowdhury skilfully showed that Bengali Hindus, awefully disturbed by the notorious charge of effeminacy and moral degenerateness, found safe shelter in images of valorous Rajput Kings, dauntless and guerrilla warfare specialist Maratha warriors, imaginary history based on courageous widows’ voluntary self- immolation in burning pyres of their husbands to earn the status of valiant Aryan women who were worshipped as goddesses in their contemporary household according to statements of renowned ancient Hindu scriptures. Ramesh Chandra cleverly utilised the glorious history of fights of Maharana Pratap Singh and Maratha hero Shivaji against the Muhammedan emperors like Akbar and Aurangzeb besides scenario of self- immolation (Jauhar) of thousands of brave Rajput womenfolk to avoid insult in hands of *Mlechhhas* to uphold the spirit of patriotism against the imperialist British colonisers. It should not be forgotten that Ramesh Chandra Dutta was the individual who produced the legendary work *Economic History of India*, a significant text of anti- colonial political economy.

II. OBSERVATION ABOUT HISTORICITY OF RAMESH CHANDRA DUTTA’S FAMOUS NOVELS

Bangobijeta was the first historical novel (1874) produced by ardent nationalist author Ramesh Chandra Dutta but it was not at all a mature creation of him like the second one namely *Madhabi- Kankan*. According to Shrikumar Bandopadhyay, this novel lacked connectivity with real life’s ups and downs but explored historical truth expressing honest mind of the litterateur. Raja Todarmal was depicted as central historical character in the novel. His activities could have been explored with much more vivacity by author like Bankim Chandra. Even Ramesh Chandra’s skill which had been effective in his later creations such as *Maharashtra Jivan- Prabhat* and *Rajput Jivan- Sandhya*, was miserably lagging behind in case of *Bangobijeta*. Indranath, Nagendranath, Satishchandra, Bimala, Shakuni and all other characters were

completely conventional excluding the character of Mahashweta, full of vengeance. Sarala and Amala’s friendship had been depicted with adequate warmth by the novelist. He upheld his expertise in depicting scenes of battlefield in this particular novel. His capability in describing beauty of nature had been flourished in this novel though he was much behind Bankim Chandra and Rabindranath Tagore. Shrikumar Bandopadhyay opined about the novel that –

“ *Ekta aparinoto haster chinha ihar sarbotroi birajmaan. Ihar oitihask ansha Ramesh Chandrer swabhavsiddho satyanishthar sahit likhito hoiachhe sandeha nai. Kintu iha ekebare sushko, niras o pranhin; manaber sadharon jivan o manab- moner guro rasadharar sahit ihar kono samparko sthapito hoy nai.*”

Mughal- Afghan conflicts for predominance and hegemony on Bangodesh during the era of Mughal emperor Akbar , last Pathan king Dayud Khan’s effort to keep control on Bangodesh against Mughal power’s aggrandisement and ultimately defeat and death, rebellion of newly recruited Mughal commanders as well as jagirdars against Akbar, Raja Todarmal’s arrival in Bangodesh to crush rebellious spirit against his master Emperor Akbar in 1580 A.D., his rule in Bango- Bihar- Orissa for two years etc. had been utilised as historical backdrop of this novel. Mahashweta, the leading lady of the novel, was widow of Hindu Zamindar valiant Raja Samarsingh, who fought with Todarmal against Pathan king Dayud Khan bravely but later was falsely framed by traitor Satishchandra as rebel and was brutally murdered as outcome of the horrible plot. In the end of the story villain Shakuni who instigated Satishchandra had to face wrath of Raja Todarmal and ultimately committed suicide. Samarsingh and Mahashweta’s daughter Sarala was blissfully married to courageous Surendranath (Pseudo name Indranath), son of Nagendranath Chowdhury, zamindar of Ichhapur and former friend of Samarsingh.

Madhabi- Kankan (1877) was in a much higher level than *Bangobijeta* in sphere of artistic beauty and creative spirit. Its plot was primarily family drama- oriented which was connected with political turmoil created by War of Succession during the reign of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. Ramesh Chandra had shown enough capability in historical novels like Walter Scott. Darbar of Sultan Suja, Subadar of Bengal, in Rajmahal, scenario of prosperous city of Delhi, palace and andarmahal of Mughal emperors, love story of Narendra and Hemlata, Zelekha’s obsessed passion for Narendra and its tragic outcome, Narendra’s aggressive nature and tranquility of Srishchandra’s character, Hemlata’s psychological crisis after her marriage with Srishchandra due to her unrequited love for childhood sweetheart Narendra had been skilfully depicted by the litterateur. Shrikumar Bandopadhyay opined that description of love story of Narendra and Hemlata could be compared with the saga of Pratap and Shaibalini of the novel entitled *Chandrasekhar* written by eminent author Bankim Chandra.

In the book namely *History of Medieval India*, Satish Chandra stated that- “*The last years of Shah Jahan’s reign were clouded by a bitter war of succession among his sons. There was no clear tradition of succession among the Muslims or the Timurids. The right of nomination by the ruler had been accepted by some of the Muslim political thinkers. But it*

could not be asserted in India during the Sultanat period. The Timurid tradition of partitioning had not been successful either and was never applied in India'.

J.F. Richards also in his book entitled *The Mughal Empire* described importance of War of Succession during the last half of Shah Jahan's reign as a long-standing political and intellectual conflict in the empire of the Mughals as well as a bloody struggle fought by formidable opponents. This power – struggle among four brothers namely Dara, Suja, Murad and Aurangzeb as well as participation of Shah Jahan's two daughters namely Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara in fratricidal war undoubtedly was the historical background of *Madhabi-Kankan*, where the hero Narendra after his failure in love with Hemlata, left his village, tried his best to restore his ancestral property through prayer in darbar of Suja, one of sons of Shah Jahan but failed here also and later tried his luck for earning name and fame as a warrior by participating in War of Varanasi (1657 A.D.), War of Ujjain (1658 A.D.) etc. At last he accepted the life of a *sannyasi* by discarding all luxuries of life. Hemlata finally enjoyed a blissful domestic life with Srishchandra, her husband, deeply respected by her from a very tender age.

Maharashtra Jivan- Prabhat (1878) was one of the best historical novels of Bengali literature. Shivaji and Aurangzeb were two main historical characters of that particular novel where the author was able to depict with utmost perfection the political sagacity, deep knowledge about human nature, administrative expertise, ruthless approach to crush all kinds of rebellions, herculean endeavour to obtain control over forts of Bijapur like Rudramandal, shrewd plotting to get rid of Aurangzeb etc. several attributes of Maratha hero Shivaji, besides cunning and cruel nature of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, symbol of diplomatic acumen. Here one can quote from *The Mughal Empire*, written by J.F. Richards –“*Shivaji's unexcelled strategic and diplomatic skills – based firmly upon timely access to information- were also widely admired and feared. In this respect he was a worthy match for Aurangzeb, his greatest enemy.*” Stewart Gordon's renowned book entitled *The Marathas: 1600-1818* can also be remembered.

Love story of Raghunathji Habildar and Sarajubala was beautifully expressed in the historical backdrop of Maratha-Mughal and Maratha- Bijapur conflicts. Shivaji trusted Raghunath who was a warrior in his large army and adored him for his bravery but later Raghunath lost his master's confidence in him due to the treacherous plot of Chandrarao Zumladar, murderer of Raghunath's father Gajapati Singh and also husband of Lakshmi Bai, sister of Raghunath, forcefully married to Chandrarao as a victim of circumstances. When Shivaji became imprisoned in Delhi for the cunning plot of Aurangzeb, Raghunath helped him a lot to escape the clutches of the cruel Mughal emperor. As a result Shivaji showered affection on Raghunath again and Chandrarao committed suicide facing wrath of Shivaji due to his rebellious activities against the Maratha king. Lakshmi adopted the path of self-immolation after death of her husband Chandrarao as a chaste Rajput woman and Sarajubala was happily married with her love interest Raghunath. Actually the custom of Sati became symbol of formation of heroic and valiant nationhood.

Indira Chowdhury and Sudipta Kaviraj tried their level best to uphold the importance of historical novels like *Mahashtra Jivan- Prabhat* where heroes such as Shivaji was depicted as great and glorious as ancient Hindu mythological figures, epitome of bravery and steadfastness. Indira had rightly declared in her essay *Writing History, Making Manly* that –

“*The vehicle of history became in the hands of nineteenth-century Bengali historians an analogy for militantly driving out the British. This would be achieved by the reassertion of Hindu heroism which had proved itself against the Mughal.*”

Rajput Jivan- Sandhya (1879) was a fantastic historical novel written by Ramesh Chandra in backdrop of long-standing conflicts between Mughal emperor Akbar and Rajput king Maharana Pratap Singh as well as between the Rathors and Chandawats in Rajputana. Shrikumar Bandopadhyay praised this novel in his famous book entitled *Bangosahitye Upanyaser dhara-*

“*Kintu jadio charitra- srijoner dik diya 'Jivan- Sandhya' apekksha 'Jivan- Prabhat' sreshthataro, tathapi anyo ekti bishaye prathomokto upanyaskhani apon sresthatar parichay diyachhe. Ramesh Chandra Pratapsingher jivanbyapi swadhinatasangramer samasto vishanata jeno marme marme anubhav koriachhen.Upanyaser kathopokathaner madhya diyao ekta bahulyabarjito, purushochito chhanda bohia giachhe.Gabhir bhabgato oikya 'Jivan- Sandhya' te jerup spashtobhabe anubhab kora jay, 'Jivan- Prabhat' –e tatodur nohe.*”

Tej Singh, valorous Rathor hero of *Jivan- Sandhya* was adamant to take revenge because Durjay Singh, leader of Chandawats snatched his ancestral fort Surjyamahal with treachery by murdering his mother, the heroic widow of Tilak Singh who sacrificed his life for trying to defend the fort of Chittor against ruthless attack of emperor Akbar. Tej Singh was also annoyed because his enemy, the Chandawat king tried to forcefully marry his childhood love interest Pushpakumari. He joined the army of Maharana Pratap Singh against the Mughal emperor's policy of aggrandisement in Mewar and saved family of Maharana also. Pratap waged a life-long battle and lost many of his near and dear ones in wars such as War of Haldighati etc.; their family was also ruined in twenty five years' struggle and women had to adopt path of mass- suicide through self- immolation / Jauhar. Satish Chandra in his book namely *History of Medieval India* had rightly stated that- “*Rana Pratap's defiance of the mighty Mughal empire, almost alone and unaided by the other Rajput states, constitutes a glorious saga of Rajput valour and the spirit of sacrifice for cherished principles*”. Finally Maharana became able to restore a large part of his kingdom but later his son Amar Singh was compelled by circumstances to agree for subsidiary alliance with Mughal emperor Jahangir, son of the great Akbar and thus the outstanding conflict came to an end during the era of Jahangir and Nurjahan. Tej Singh obtained fort Surjyamahal after a bloody fight and death of his enemy Durjay Singh. He later was happily married with Pushpakumari who once lost confidence of her lover Tej Singh due to the rumour of her affair with Durjay Singh. This rumour was on purpose created by a bhil woman, who was

obsessed with Tej Singh and whose father gave shelter to Tej Singh during his tough days of wretched condition.

One can find in this novel that Ramesh Chandra was devoted enough for creating an authentic nationalist history which could be utilized as a strong weapon against the colonial rule and Sati, the gendered nationalist icon of chastity, fortitude and steadfastness had been used in this oppositional cultural revivalist history to uphold spiritual as well as moral qualities to get rid of the notorious charge of moral degenerateness raised by the British imperialists. The image of valiant Sati and equally valorous ascetic widow could withstand the burden of cultural nationalism which flourished on the theory of essential difference between the Hindu traditions and the promiscuous Occidental culture. The spirit of self- sacrifice upheld through the stories of bloody battles fought by the Rajput warriors and the self- immolation by thousands of Rajput women later inspired our dauntless revolutionaries to adopt the path of death against the colonisers.

III. CONCLUSION

Ramesh Chandra Dutta was undoubtedly an eminent stalwart in field of historical novels in Colonial Bengal as well as India as a whole. It was true that the legendary Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay was a far better artist in imaginary history and his expertise in using language with rhetorical frill was much more effective in sphere of historical novels. Bankim was at his creative best while depicting psychological turmoil in exploring emotional history of man- woman relationship and sometimes his creative world was full of lyrical beauty which was not predominant in Ramesh Dutta's novels. Ramesh Chandra got opportunity to show his creative talent while describing scenes of bloody warfares and violent scenario of Jauhar performed by several ladies of Rajputana to get rid of insult and molestation in hands of enemies and to uphold the indomitable spirit of chaste womanhood capable of withstanding the burden of cultural nationalism in 19th Century Bengal. Ramesh Dutta tried his level best to avoid melodrama and depicted historical truth with unadulterated perfection. While discussing about Ramesh Chandra's creations, Indira Chowdhury in her essay entitled *Writing History, Making Manly: Politics and Gender in Nineteenth – Century Bengali Historiography* included in *Reading the Nineteenth Century* edited by Sheila Lahiri Chowdhury rightly showed to all that readers of the author's novels had been provided with adequate guidance to relate the undaunted Maratha king Shivaji and Rajput warriors with valiant heroic figures reconstructed from Hindu mythology. Those images / figures were utilised by extremist and revolutionary leaders in the days of anti- colonial nation building process of Bengal and here lies real historical importance of writings of Ramesh Chandra Dutta.

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