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The Depiction of Poverty in Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay’s Pather Panchali: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

In developing nations poverty is seen not only affecting the personal but also social life of an individual, because of which he remains deprived of all the amenities that he wants to enjoy. Poor and poverty goes hand in hand. Though both are different where poor means a poor person or family whereas poverty affects the whole community. Due to lack of fundamental government policies the developing countries are facing such crisis. This paper explores Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay’s major character and their struggle for upgrading their life.

Keywords: Poverty, lack of basic amenities, financial crisis, social phenomenon, vulnerable

Introduction

Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay is regarded as one of the leading writers of modern Bengali literature. He was born on 12th September 1984. Manipur village (present day in West Bengal) to a highly educated Brahmin family. His grandfather was an Ayurvedic physician, and his father was a ‘Kathak’ (storyteller) and a Sanskrit scholar; likewise, Bibhutibhushan was one of the gifted and talented boys among the five sons of his father.

From his childhood, he faced many hardships because of the poor financial condition of his family. In an economically unstable situation, he completed his schooling at Bongan High school which was one of the oldest institutions in British India. Further, he completed his undergraduate course in Economics, History and Sanskrit at Surendranath College, Kolkata. Due to the economic crisis, he discontinued his studies and took up odd jobs to meet his ends. At the beginning of his career before taking up writing seriously, he taught in the same school where he studied. Later on, he got the job of a secretary. He published his first short story in 1921, ‘Upekshita’ but it was in the year 1928 when Bibhutibhushan published his first autobiographical novel ‘Pather Panchali’ (which mean Song of the Road) gave him the acclamation of the people. The novel was later adapted into a film directed by Satyajit Ray. However, the language used by him is simple and realistic as most of his writing depicted the hardships and struggle faced by the author in his actual life. During his writing career, he wrote famous works like ‘Pather Panchali’, ‘Aparajito’, ‘Aranyak’, ‘Chander Pahar’, ‘Heera Manik Jwale’, ‘Adarsha Hindu Hotel’, ‘Ichhamati’, ‘Bipiner Sangsar’ etc.

For his novel 'Ichhamati' he was honoured with the prestigious award titled 'Rabindra Puraskar' in 1951. He died on 1st November 1950 after suffering from a coronary attack.

Objectives

1. The general objective of the proposed research paper is to emphasize the complicated social phenomenon, i.e. Poverty, and how the principal characters in the novel are greatly affected by it.
2. The study also presents that due to lack of resources the poor people remain deprived of all basic amenities. As a result, their children get vulnerable to many diseases.
3. To study the struggle faced by the characters for upgrading their life.

Methodology

The research work will be illustrated with ample samples from the primary sources – From the writings of Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay. The method of data collection comprises library resources and internet resources.

Discussion

'Pather Panchali' is not just a novel of affinity but a presentation of poverty and starvation. It highlights the fact that the poor are deprived of all basic facilities and amenities still they find pleasure in small things and enjoy every moment of life like dancing in the rain, picnic in the forest enjoying the Jatra and roaming around the riverside. The novel is a reflection of the author's own life as he faced all the hardships to meet his needs. We find admiration in it as we see the novel through the eyes of Apu and Durga:

"The events in the story too are separated from one another in time, in places by only an hour or so, in other by a lapse of years: but Apu and Durga still walk on, growing continuously in character and experience and the nature of their dreams and their hopes for the future. They encounter other travellers on their journey, some of whom go with them along with several stretches of the road, others whom they meet only once; but all leave their marks on the lives of the principals and strengthen the emotional

impulses which drive them on. (Page no. xiii)

The plot of the novel is set in a small village in Bengal named as Nischindipur. The story revolves around four principal characters Apu, Durga, Harihar and Shorbojoya. With its realistic image author has portrayed the day-to-day life of the rural people in Bengal:

The novel gives an account of Apu and his family. They live in an ancestral house which belongs to their old aunt, Indir Thakrun:

"He lived in a small brick- built house in the village of Nischindipur. It was the last house at the extreme northern end of the village." (Page no.3)

Harihar Rai, Apu's father, is a priest but not a man of practical affairs:

"He was not well-to-do. All he had to live was on the meagre rent from a tiny plot inherited from his father and some fees paid to him by a few households he served as a family priest. (Page no.3)

Further, he depicts a star grazer who is interested in making money someday through his poems and scholarly writings. Eventually, the responsibility of the family befalls on the shoulder of his wife, Shorbojoya. On the contrary, Shorbojoya is presented in a positive light. She is a woman with practical affairs who takes care of the family and tries hard to run the family with whatever is left in the house. To meet the end of her family, she sells all her personal belongings. Throughout her life, she never expected anything from her husband even Harihar himself never brought any gift or anything to his wife. Shorbojoya is a woman with high morale, which is an impoverished situation refuses to ask for monetary help from her relatives, who lived in the same villages. While Shorbojoya did not like the old aunt Indir even though they were living her house as she is overly offensive on her with whom they are forced to share their meagre rations:

"Twice a day at least she quarrelled with the old woman over some trifle or other." (Page no.9)

Due to lack of resources, the old aunt is considered as a burden on the family, also an outsider by Shorbojoya as she could not bear the sight of the old woman.

"To her Indir was an outsider- for no one could say how she was related to the family- who just sat there eating up half their food. Shorbojoya, turned

away from her, “So the old wretch has come back, has she’, she commented. ‘I suppose she’s nowhere else to go to. There’s no kitchen fire for her except this one.’”(9)

India is a very old lady who lives alone

“The road of her life was an old road. She walked along it since childhood”. (.8)

Because of her loneliness, she prefers to stay with Harihar’s family and also permit them to live in her own house. So that she had not wandered in search of food somewhere else. Not only had this but she had a deep affection for Harihar’s daughter. They share a bond of true love which is disliked by Shorbojoya. She feels that the old aunt is responsible for spoiling her daughter Durga. As there are several instances where Durga is caught stealing fruit from neighbour’s Orchard. As stealing fruit for her aunt becomes an offensive for which she is punished by her mother. As Harihar fails to make any income in the village, he decides to leave the village and moves to some other place in search of a good job. He promises his wife that he will come back soon with a good amount of money. He goes here and there, but nothings meet to his acceptance. Whatever he used to earn he used to send a small amount out of that to his family chores. To their bereavement, Durga fall ill, and cyclone hit them:

“The Hurricane as it pounded against the walls screamed like a horde of raging demons. With every blast, the house shuddered as though the next moment it would crash down and bury them in it ruins”. (285)

Due to lack of basic amenities and medical facilities, Durga fails to recover from the fever and on a strong stormy night she took her last breath:

“From time to time the hand of eternity breaks through the blue veil of the heavens and beckons to a child, and the little one, no longer willing to wait, tears itself away from the breast of Mother Earth and is lost forever down a road that knows no returning. In that dark evening hour of her sick and restless

life Durga had heard those summons, and leaving the paths she loved so well, she commenced a new journey, down a highway her feet had not trodden before.” (291)

Harihar who was unaware of all the facts come back to his village with lots of gifts and a good sum of money. He informs Shorbojoya that he got a good job as a family priest of a rich family. In deep sorrow, frustration, agony she breaks down before him. In despair, Harihar decides to leave the village to overcome the loss and shift to a new home in Benares to lead a better life.

‘ Pather Panchali’ opened the eyes of the world to the beauty that lay in the most unexpected of places- rural, poverty-stricken Bengal and in the lives of those struggling to live there. If there is something at the heart of Pather Panchali, it is the overwhelming power of life that asserts itself even in the face of poverty, misery and death.

Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay through his novel ‘Pather Panchali’ has projected the struggle and the urge to lead a better life. The novel ends with Apu staring outside the train memorizing his sister Durga and the memories of his village.

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