



Short Review Paper

Gobar and his mate in the environment of Lucknow city, India

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Abstract

This paper maps, within the framework of Premchand's literary masterpiece Godan, how a row villager experiences the city life in Lucknow and gets transformed in the process. It thereby explores city-country link or relationship through the journey of a character from Belari village to Lucknow.

Keywords: Gobar, City, Lucknow, Subaltern classes in city, Marginal man, Ruling classes, Congress, Colonial state, Law court, Value of money, Nationalism, Politics, Fortune, Mobilization.

Introduction

The present paper discusses how Gobar, second important protagonist of Mushi Premchand's masterpiece Godan, after having left the Belari village, reaches Lucknow. Here he learns about new ideas and institutions and the idea of nationalism as well. This paper explores how he becomes thrifty, starts learning about the value of money in a city where elites and subalterns both cohabit and interacts with people of his own kind. This paper is a part of my PhD awarded in JNU 2015.

Entering the city

Mirza Khurshid's compound was located in the outer part of Lucknow city. Mirza had invested lot of his effort in converting this place into a centre of multiple activities. It had started functioning as a law court, as club, and also as wrestling arena. No longer had it looked deserted, this place had started acquiring a busy look and people could be seen here busy performing many activities throughout the day. This locality came to be inhabited mostly by the people who had migrated from the country side. In other words marginal population lives here. Search of fortune had brought them here. In this new environment they were engaged in many petty surviving businesses like a street vendor of various sorts, Tanga driver, rickshaw pullers and so on. Not completely uprooted in this new environment of the city, the traits of rural consciousness was significantly present in their consciousness. They were different from the upper stratum of city society. Their common experiences had constituted them into community. The physical space of this locality differed sharply from that of the residences of upper stratum. The distinction between lower and upper constituted the significant feature of the morphology of the city all over the world¹. Helping poor and playing was Mirzaji's mission. There existed no other space for wrestling arena in that locality and Mirzaji quickly constructed one for them in his compound.

He participated equally in the wrestling with 100 of competitors who had bout with one another. The place also functioned as law court and arbiter justice. There the Panchayat of locality had its meeting here resembling much with that of functions of Chopal in the country side. Quarrels between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, between brother and brother all found easy settlement here. The place also functioned as a strong centre of local politics, political meeting became very frequent here and leaders of various ideologies delivered their speeches here. People came to listen to these speeches, exchanged their views and raised slogans. In this way, they came to learn first lesson of modern politics here. Volunteers of various Seva Samiti also chalked out their scheme here and strategies of wider political movement of the city also had its epicenter here. Last meeting was attended by huge gathering and was surcharged with much festivity and Dr. Malti was elected as a president of city's congress committee. With her becoming president of the city congress committee the place had acquired added popularity.

Gobar found himself rooted in such a context of city environment. He no longer was a simple village youth. He was about to complete his one year stay in the city. He has seen by now enough worlds around him. He also came to understand its ways of functioning. City air had transformed him a lot. Never the less, he still retained many features and elements of rural consciousness. He could not have afforded to lose them altogether. At heart he was a tight fisted and selfish. He had imbibed many elements of city culture which suited well to his mission of realizing fortune in shortest time.

Confronting the colonial modernity

In everyday life he found people making profit in atmosphere characterized by exchange relations. He too tried his hand in many petty surviving businesses, made switch over from one to the other and sometimes came to combine two businesses at the same time.

He worked as a laborer for few months, went half fed and earned few rupees. Later he became a street vendor and hawked Khomcha and found this business profitable. He left Mazdoori altogether and then came to combine his Khomcha with that of selling Sharbat and ice in the summer. By installing a small shop at Mirza Khurshid's place in winter he started selling tea. By churning through many businesses he succeeded in establishing his life and began earning two or three rupees every day. His goodwill also enhanced in his locality. This newly acquired fortune put its imprint on his lifestyle. He got his hair cut in English style, wore a fine dhoti and started wearing pump shoes, became fond of smoking cigarette and started chewing paan. He also became receptive to the various ideological current floating in the city society. The political mobilization was confined to the boundaries of city alone. Its presence was not felt in Hori's village. By listening through the speeches delivered by the leaders at many places on different occasions he came to understand the problem that country was facing during the time. He also started understanding the distinction between nation and class but this distinction between nation and class was never laid out in practice by any leadership in Gobar's life. Gobar only heard the speeches. He never knew how to bring changes in the society. It could never mature and blossom and never fructified in concrete action. Something like passive revolution was taking place during that time. The libertarian atmosphere of the city came to loosen the grip of the village institutions like caste, community and prestige over Gobar's mind. Modern institutions of judiciary and law court came to be concentrated in the city alone. While these institutions exercised powerful influences in the urban areas, in the village society the Panchayat controlled the lives of the villagers.

In city Gobar found people going scot free committing greater sin even after violating the norms of society and he saw no reason hiding himself all to harbor useless fear in the city. He emboldened. He came to realize the worth of money and had not remitted any money to home. In village, ethical norms prevail while city is characterized by exchange relations. He knew that his father and mother would spend the money as soon as they see its face. His father might contemplate of going to Gaya and his mother would run to buy ornaments. He learned the art of investing money. Money makes the money; this dictum had started in realizing its affect on his mind. He started dabbling in money lending and gave loan to Ekkawallas, Dhobi, Coachwan, etc in the immediate neighborhood. In this way he earned small name for himself in that locality and was managing his affairs very well. He could now contemplate of bringing Jhunias to stay with him in the city.

Mirza Khurshid was habitual drinker, had no money to buy wine that moment. He came running to Gobar. Gobar respected his past employer as before. He knew that Mirza was his mentor. In fact the place he lived belonged to Mirzaji. There still existed a kind of patron client relationship between Khurshid and Gobar. But money lending has its own rationale. It can't be dictated by relationship alone.

Gobar did not lend the money to Khurshid for the wine. Complicated working out of moral economy can be seen here. Then came Alladin Ekkawala. His daughter was going to her in-law's house and he badly needed five rupees. Gobar could be easily approached and he immediately gave the loan to Alladin on one anna rate of interest per rupee was to be charged. So even when the friendly relationship existed, the lending was not all to a philanthropic act as Peter Musgrave's article seems to suggest². In fact his argument appears absurd. Alladin expressed his gratitude to Gobar for having loaned him five rupees at a time of crisis. He then advised Gobar to bring his wife Jhunias to stay with him. In his opinion Gobar could manage and pull well in the city with Jhunias. But Gobar was hesitant. He possibly could not able to feed his wife in his limited income. Alladin showed him the way narrated his own experiences and removed his misconception. In his opinion Gobar could manage and pull well in the same expenditure that he incurred on himself. Further wife's presence was always auspicious and what worth the life is if one doesn't get comfort despite doing hard work. Gobar got impressed by his suggestion. It was viable economically too. His income might go up with Jhunias's arrival as she would also share the work. This argument appealed him all the more. He suddenly felt lonely and decided to go to village to bring Jhunias back to the city. He was reminded of Holi about to approach. The inherent tendency of a miser to spend more on festive occasion wanted to express in flooding manner. What better occasion he could have after all except this. He bought many fancy things, like dhoti and chadar for Hori, saris for Jhunias, Sona and Dhanias, hair oil and chappal for Sona, a Japanese doll for Rupa, a readymade frock and top for his son and makeup box for Jhunias. Many of his mates came to see him off from the street. There were Hindus and Muslims as well. They followed distinct faith but shared of happiness and sorrows together. They cracked religious jokes with one another. If Gobar branded Alladin's namaj as a mere physical exercise (Utha Baithak), Alladin in his turn made and reduced shiva linga as a mere piece of stone. These religious jokes had a function of making distinctions more tolerable. However, the jokes could well have acted reversely, if the political history would have constructed and given to them from the top in another context.

Never the less, in the normalcy the communal consciousness is not a part of subaltern classes³. They can't afford it either. It is only by the intervention from the top that they could be manipulated.

Gobar was going to home after almost a year and his mates wanted to see him off happily. Women were happy to imagine that they would have one more companion with Jhunias's arrival. Gobar greeted all of them. Meanwhile Bhuri Ekkawala came and loaded Gobar's luggage and took him to the station. When Gobar wanted to pay him Bhuri refused. He treated Gobar like a guest; he invoked countryside fraternity in him. "Dear brother I can even shed my blood for you" shows once again intervention of countryside fraternity which was active in them even in a milieu characterized by exchange relations.

Conclusion

This paper has explored what happened with Gobar in whole gamut of experiences that he lived and experienced in the city of Lucknow along with the people of his own kind and also with the protagonists belonging to upper class.

How newly acquired prosperity and knowledge affect the power relation in the countryside is something that I have explored elsewhere along with the ambiguity that entire process contains.

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