



Chandra Prasad Saikia's Novel Uttarkaal: A Relevant Document of Present Times

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Abstract

When the writer Chandra Prasad Saikia's life is taken into consideration we come across some significant aspects which may speak a lot more about the theme of his novel Uttarkaal. He was born in the year 1927 at Aamguri, Sivsagar district in Assam. He was born to Durlav Chandra Saikia and Durgeswari Saikia. He was sent to prison twice during the Quit India movement in 1942. He was a teenager then. He had to serve prison terms twice –one for four months and the other for nine months. He cleared the Matriculation examination in 1945. In 1950 he completed the Bachelors' Degree examination from Cotton College. In 1954 he completed M.A. in English from Calcutta University. Returning back to Assam he took to journalism. He was an ace journalist who brought about novelty to this profession. He was the founding editor of Asom Batori and Natun Dainik. He was also the founding editor of the literary journal Gariyoshi and editor of the two literary journals Axamiya and Prakash. He was also the pioneer behind organizing Annual Book Fair in Assam. His sojourn to Germany and experience at the Frankfurt World Book Fair was the inspiration behind his novel idea of a Book Fair in Assam. He was the recipient of the Sahitya Academy Award for his novel Maharathi(1995) and recipient of the Assam Valley Literary Award (2003). Until he breathed his last in 2006, this untiring litterateur and editor enriched Assamese literature and the field of journalism.

In creative endeavor it is not always easy to reproduce the times that one has lived giving it a distinct colour. The autobiographical aspect often comes in the way of such creations. It depends on the writer's choice which aspect to project in full and which to minimize. It is also a fact that at times there exists a thin line between the persona and the person(individual). Considering all these the Assamese novel Uttarkaal may be an interesting reading as far as the post-independence era is concerned. The writer of this novel Chandra Prasad Saikia has encapsulated the social reality of the fifth and sixth decade of the twentieth century Assamese society in this particular novel. Within limited sphere Saikia tries to portray the society of those turbulent times. By then colonialism had left our country, but the socio-economic disparity remained. The nascent nation has still a long way to go. All the stagnancy, the hesitance, dissatisfaction, dormant fury is being projected in this novel in parts. The title Uttarkaal itself, which literal meaning is Future Time, describes a situation that is incomprehensible. In this Paper an attempt is being made to explore a past whose relevance can be felt even today. The farsighted novelist Chandra Prasad Saikia was far ahead of his times. This is the life force of the novel Uttarkaal.

Keywords: Significant, ace, journalism, creative endeavor, choice, encapsulate, colonialism, disparity dormant fury, relevance.

Introduction

Man is always conscious of his existence, of his identity in society. In order to assert this, man sets some goals for himself. Through these goals and objectives, man asserts his presence in society as a useful human being. For

this, man fosters high ideals and try to realize those ideals in practical life. In this process, he often stumbles upon hurdles. These hurdles try to prevent individual from attaining his noble goal. A distinguished Assamese litterateur cum journalist Chandra Prasad Saikia, tries to explore such an idea in his novel Uttarkaal on the backdrop of the mid part of the twentieth century. An individual constructive idea can bring about positive changes to society. Society recognizes his selfless contribution and regards him unconditionally. Then his social responsibility increases. It is here that the struggle and inner conflict begins.

Conflict between the individual and society, conflict between existing value system and changing values, man becomes literally confused at such cross roads. Even a person of high ideal is bound to stumble if he doesn't take well thought steps before embarking on such a mission. In Uttarkaal too, four characters are trying to understand society from different standpoints. They are the press owner Jeevan Kakati, the doctor Abinash Chakravarty, the faculty of political science department of a university Parag Hazarika and the enthusiastic young man Binay Kumar Barua who was a M.A. pass-out who had completed his Post Graduation in English. It is through the trials and tribulations of Binay Kumar Barua that one can understand the complexity of changing value system.

Objectives

This Paper intends to explore the changing value system as depicted in the novel Uttarkaal. It also portrays the mental conflict of the educated youth of the post-Independence era.

Methodology

This Paper is based on available primary and secondary source data. Henceforth, the descriptive and analytical approach has been adopted.

Main Discussion: Uttarkaal - Documentation of Changing Times

In the novel Uttarkaal, four major characters are delving deep into the matter related to social changes in the post-Independence era. Causes of change may be diverse. They are more concerned about the value system guiding these changes. When we talk of values, we can say that values are individual beliefs that motivate people to act one way or another. They serve as a guide for human behaviour. Generally, people are predisposed to adopt the values that they are raised with. People also tend to believe that those values are "Right" because they are the values of their particular culture. The older lot portrayed in the novel believe this and stick to this idea. For them, the changing equation of society are nothing but erosion of the value system.

The Secretary of the college governing body Bidur Barua represents this lot of the older generation. He had been a teacher and also a freedom fighter. He was a dedicated man who regarded his times greatly. In the novel, his ideological confrontation was with Binay Kumar Barua - a representative of the new generation. Their personal opinions differed in relate to the critical assessment of the outcome of modern education. At this point, it is worth mentioning that this novel was published in 1972 which was quite a significant period as far as the social history of Assam is concerned. Liberation from British Colonial rule brought drastic external change to the new nation – India. This change could be seen everywhere. But a deep insight into this change will make us understand that deep inside the complex social setup, changes were slow. This, in the long run, created hurdle in the spread of progressive ideas which wanted to renovate the thoughts and ideas of the people. Binay Kumar Barua belonged to this lot of progressive thoughts and ideas.

As it has been already mentioned that this novel was written twenty-four years after India gained her independence. This novel depicts the aspiration of the people of India who have been liberated from Colonial rule. But here a question arises. It gets reflected in the words of the protagonist who is pessimistic about the state of affairs in society. The freedom fighters sacrificed their lives for a noble cause. They, wholeheartedly, wanted to free the country from British Colonial rule which they did at the cost of their lives. The disheartening fact is that some of their representatives and followers have taken to the wrong path. They are the ones who have corrupted the society through their unacceptable, evil deeds. They are the ones who are exploiting the masses. In the novel, the politician Bangshidhar Tamuli is one such character. The novelist has described Tamuli's notion of politics –

According to him (Tamuli), there is no significant value of long-lasting friendship, nor gratefulness or loyalty in politics. One should utilize someone and make him work until one's need is fulfilled. As soon as one's need is fulfilled, then he should destroy his aide, otherwise there is fear of the aide going against his master. It doesn't matter whether that person is one's near one, blood-related distant relative or someone not related to him.

(Chandra Prasad Saikia Collection, p. 461, Translated from Assamese)

The above-mentioned lines are a clear indication of eradication of value in society. The political being is part of the greater social being. If seen from this standpoint, the novelist has touched upon a sensitive issue that is kind of a malady in present day society.

The society's health determines the sustainability of its novel value system. Here "Health" refers to the overall positive and constructive ideas practiced by the members of society. There must be a positive mode of motivation to realize this in practical life. The protagonist Binay Kumar Barua doesn't see any such motivation in his assigned site of experiment i.e. Arjunpur town. As a fresh appointer in the department of English at the college in Arjunpur, Binay Kumar Barua takes upon himself the task of imbibing values into the mind of his students so that they may grow up as useful members of society and help the society to progress in all spheres. Unfortunately, he was not successful in his sincere attempt. Being a novice in his profession, his experience was only limited to bookish knowledge. As a young man, his worldly experience was limited too. Henceforth, his idea about the complexities of the society was inadequate. He had this firm belief that he could motivate the student community and through their help bring positive changes to the otherwise stagnant society of Arjunpur. But he was mistaken. It was experience gained from his failed effort in Arjunpur that Binay realized no drastic change is possible in society unless and until the root cause of its malady and setbacks are identified and cured. For that, practical experience and thorough knowledge of the gradual evolution of society is necessary.

Conclusion

Outlining social malady is a common feature of fictional writing. Focusing on ills of society and analyzing its relevance is a far more challenging task for a fiction writer. For accomplishing this task, the writer must have adequate knowledge of the background of the society he is going to explore in his writing. In regard to the novelist of Uttarkaal, it can be said that Chandra Prasad Saikia lived through those days of Freedom Struggle against British Colonialism in India. He took active part in the freedom movement as a youth. In the year 1942, he played prominent role in the Quit India Movement in Assam. He was imprisoned twice in that year. The first time it was for four months. The second time it was for nine months. So, he had first hand experience of the freedom struggle of India.

The changing social dynamics of his times during the post-Independence era gave enough scope to the minute observer within Chandra Prasad Saikia to observe the changes taking place in society. It is worth mentioning that the material condition of society changed noticeably. But it was the inherent qualities of the social setup, mental attitude of the individuals residing in society that matters. By mental attitude we may refer to the complex mental state involving beliefs and feelings and values and dispositions to act in certain ways. Here, the investigative eyes of the journalist in Saikia comes to the forefront. He was a dedicated journalist too. This profession taught him to penetrate deep into a matter with justified data. So also the protagonist in the novel Uttarkaal produces useful information and data while deliberating on his viewpoint on the affairs of society. The protagonist's concern towards the ills plaguing the social life of Arjunpur is justified. But, the remedial measure chosen by him was inadequate and lacked practical planning. He ought to have made a close study of the complexities in regard to the background of the social life there. In that ideological battle he faced defeat, but it also taught him a valuable lesson. One cannot bring overnight change to age long beliefs and customs in a conventional society. One should have thorough knowledge of each and every aspect related to social life. It is through study and serious deliberation that such a feat can be made possible.

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