

Indian Village Milieu in Raag Darbari

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Abstract:

Raag Darbari was published in Hindi to cosmic acclaim in the year 1968 and since then it has been translated into more than fifteen languages. The novel is a saga of a fictional village Shivpalganj located in the district of Rae Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh during 1950s. Through the story of the village, this novel underscores the degradation of ethics in post-independent India. Comical, Nihilistic, and grimly satirical, Raag Darbari delineated the corrupt social and political system that had taken sturdy roots in the villages of post-independence India. The novel vividly presents a rational portrayal of Indian village life. Raag Darbari is lodged in the village called Shivpalganj. The action takes place over a period of 6 months during which Rangnath; a research student comes to stay with his uncle to recuperate after an illness. This work exposes the helplessness of intellectuals in the face of a powerful and corrupt nexus between police, politicians, criminals and businessmen prevailing in the society.

The novel is a sardonic take on the predicament of a common man as society is made deferential by the corruption of people in power. "Vaidyaji is the power-center of the village, from the college to the co-operative to the panchayat, and the darbar in the title is his Darbar, though the darbari's often worn a vest and underpants". The author unlike other Hindi novelists does not prate about the agony in villages or espouse a sympathetic tone but he uses a satirical tone to foreground raging corruption in politics, education system and bureaucracy of the village.

Keywords: Political satire, Power Politics, Corruption, Indian Village milieu, Satire.

Introduction:

Raag Darbari by Shrilal Shukla is the story of a young, educated man, Rangnath, who, after completing his MA, goes to the home of his maternal uncle Vaidyaji in Shivpalganj, a village in Uttar Pradesh for rest and regeneration. The novel is an enactment of everyday life with its deep ironies, its contradictions, the medley of characters and criss-crossing narrators that together dismember a linear, utopian description of an Indian village. Exposing in a very refined way social and political dynamics of rural life particularly in the country in the period immediately following Independence the author ridicules the whole system in totality for its funny deceptive strategies for fooling the common people. In Raag Darbari, Shukla attempted to satirize the post-independent India, which is too proud of her new found freedom, democracy and scientific progress. Winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award, this novel evolves in the form of a comedy, a major trait of Indian writing in all geographical and linguistic areas: a deep gap between government and population and the deriving sense of estrangement from the worldly affairs.

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The romanticization of rural space is universal not only in English literature but also in Indian literature. Shukla also in his novel sketches a galling portrait of Shivpalganj depicting a conflicting canvas of past where the village was inspected through rose-tinted glasses as a serene setting for writing poetry. In comparison with past idealizations, Shukla showcases the village with extreme realism, focusing on the lurid physical environment where dogs, pigs, and men co-exist and life is perpetually an infernal hand-to-mouth existence. “In the days when white man ruled India ...reach them” (Shukla 329).

Elections are vital in a post-colonial democracy. And we uncover its travails with Raag Darbari, Vaidyaji realizes that his power can only be amalgamated through a triangulated control over schools, cooperative unions and village panchayats and he sets about manipulating the panchayat elections by putting up a proxy candidate. As soon as he took an interest in the panchayat, he ‘realized’ that some people had grabbed the village wasteland, and the pradhan had definitely taken bribes. The council had no money and the pradhan had definitely embezzled it. The police had prosecuted several people on complaints from the pradhan, from which one could only conclude that he had now become a police agent. (Shukla [1968] 2012: 106–107)

Shukla in deadpan prose reveals the hollow slogans of expansion with which its leaders dazed the villagers. The election schemes being reported in the narrative ridicules the idea of democracy and self-reliance and exposes it as a façade. In Raag Darbari, Vaidyaji, a sort of feudal lord, employs the Mahipalpur trick to knock the Nevada trick, the modern scientific philosophy to combat the winds of change. When Vaidyaji registers that things aren’t working in his favor and he is losing control of village panchayat, he vehemently molded the situation by making Sanichar the head of the village committee. Sanichar’s promotion shows how vacant the government incentives about strengthening panchayat raj are. As the recital proceeds, it shows the real facets and incentives behind this posturing. Also, Vaidyaji’s winning college election through gun and muscle power for the post of manager mocks the government set at the micro level and summons introspection of such viability at the macro level as well. With his power, he knows how to rule and make his subordinates bow and work. This conviction never let his rivals like Khanna master, Ramadin outrule him.

In the novel, Langar is a character who is illustrative of the miserable common man who has to bow to the venal government system to get even small things done. His contiguity in the narrative is all prevalent, with his ‘Dharamayudh’ resolve. Battling a case for 7 years, Langar has been laboring for months to get a copy of the declaration. “He fails to get the copy, but the oath both he and the court clerk swear to neither take nor give becomes the basis of this Dharamayudh. And there’s only one reason for this that the ordinary people don’t get easy victories”. His presence simultaneously vocalizes the major issue of caste hierarchy embedded in the Indian caste system where the lower caste is pushed to the margins surviving with minimal reputed existence.

The dubious education system is distinctly visible from the condition of the college and the teaching staff. A reader through the description in the narrative can anticipate there lays zero environments for

serious study in the classrooms and students are more grasped in useless shit. This is also the real condition of the Indian education system in rural areas. The abode of animosity is pervasive in the chronicle. In the rural area, police protection is deemed as a fictitious glitch, the police force are not given appropriate weapons and they take matters into their hands as they are the sole judiciary. In Shivpalganj, the police functions as a puppet in the hands of the power-apex man Vaidyaji. Family values are also distorted in this narration where youngsters bear minimal respect for their elders and give the least ear to their parents. This book exuberantly deals with the stance against committees, planning commissions, the education system, and rants against the notion of the idyllic rural environment.

Raag Darbari becomes a classic example of dystopian fiction portraying a village detached from all idealistic convictions of tradition and innocence. Rangnath, by the end of the novel, discovers that the notion of village life being pristine than city life is a myth, that's been smashed with the incursion of trivial politics, turf clashes, and obscure morality into rural life. He finds himself doomed in the face of rapid degeneration of values. Not only the moral bankruptcy, political setback, and corruption in the backdrop makes Shivpalganj hideous and grotesque, but also the nominal existence of women characters highlights the roots of patriarchy deracinating their individuality and existence. "Shivpalganj turns out to be a land of hopelessness; of feudalism, corruption, and politics; of disease, desperation, and deceit". The deception in Shivpalganj characterizes the microcosm of the macrocosm India and it is implied at the end that this dreary dystopian state is inevitable and unchangeable.

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Conclusion:

Raag Darbari won one of India's most prestigious literary awards – the Sahitya Akademi Award – in 1970, and is widely considered to have taken the satirical genre to new heights within the context of Hindi-language post- Independence literature. The novel is a picaresque comedy that draws readers in through a series of inter-linked stories that are in turn satirical, ironic, and tragic, making witty use of vernacular wordplay and caricature, and providing rich, fine-grained descriptions of post- Independence rural small-town India. "Shivpalganj also turns out to be a land of hopelessness; of feudalism, corruption and politics; of disease, desperation and deceit" (Sidharat). Rangnath after complete disillusionment 'felt sick and tired'. You are an average human being, and are stuck in the mud of humanity. You are surrounded by mud and mud alone. Don't extol mud. Don't be under the illusion that lotuses grow from it. Only mud flourishes in mud. Mud spreads mud, and throws up mud. Save yourself from the mud. Leave this place. Escape (Shukla 340).

It exposes Indian democratic ideals, the hollow notion of rural innocence and beauty and portrays a very depressing picture of Indian bureaucracy and 'poignantly represents the extent to which the disillusionment of the era penetrates deeply into the Indian Psyche'. At the end Rangnath escapes to, "Live in that world, where many intellectuals lie with their eyes closed." He is made to, 'Run, run run! as he is "being pursued by reality"(Shukla 341).

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