

SOCIAL MORALITY IN GODAAN

Dr. Vinita Virgandham

Assistant Professor of English
Bhiwapur Mahavidyalaya, Bhiwapur

HHH

Abstract

A litterateur is a visionary and reformer who tries to voice out his innate feelings of living a worthy life, and in this effort, he studies the prevailing conditions, analyses them, to point out where the people are wrong and what is the remedy thereof. During British Raj, people were socio-economically deprived, exploitation was rampant mostly in the rural areas which lead to unethical and immoral acts. Indian society was then in a moral chaos amidst poverty. Through the story, Prem Chand makes the readers see the problems faced by the peasant society during the colonial period. And thus, his pen felt the necessity of guiding the people to bar them from further degradation. He has set examples of good behavior, and has illustrations of bad behavior to communicate what is desirable and what is not.

Keywords: Morality, Wealth, Prejudice, Class, Philosophical

Godaan is justifiably considered as the best work of Premchand. It was originally written in Urdu, first translated into Hindi and then in English-by-English man Gordan C. Rodarmel. The novel has often been described as an epic, not merely for its volume, but also for the wide spectrum of social life and philosophy, of sentiments and emotions, and of ideas and ideals it presents. It does not tell the story of a heroic figure, a king or a prince, but of an unheroic hero, Hori. 'It is his endurance that makes him a real hero. He had no animus even against his tormenters, nor could his poverty turn him into a thief or a robber.' (Roy 38)

Hori's brother, Hira, felt jealous to see that Hori had got a cow, which was a symbol of prosperity. He poisoned the cow and ran away from the village. Hori knew for certain that Hira had done it, yet he would not allow Hira's house to be searched by the Police Inspector. Again, he thought that Hira's wife would not be able to plough her field. Therefore, Bhola ploughed and planted her field - "Hori couldn't get his own fields planted; but he couldn't very well neglect Punia's fields and he worked day and night transplanting rice. After all, he was now her only protector, and the world would mock him if any trouble came to her. The result was that Hori harvested only a meagre autumn crop, whereas Punia's barn was filled to overflowing"

Godaan 11). Prem Chand says with the help of this example that it is the duty of a brother to forgive the sins of a brother as Hori did and help his family in his absence.

Punia did not fail to take notice of Hori's benevolence. She was grateful to Hori in return. When Hori's family was left without food, she gave them grain liberally. It was a nice way to express her gratefulness. Punia said, "When times are good, we can afford to quarrel, but when times are bad, we can only get by if we share each other's troubles.... I have nothing to hide from you. It's enough for both our families"(25). Hori said to his wife that Punia was a good woman. It is not only a case of cooperation but also of regard for each other.

Hori got the cow from Bhola by making a false promise that he would get him a wife. Hori committed a sin for which he was to be punished by nature, if not by the court. This cow, which he got by fraudulent means, became a cause of trouble many a time. If Gobar had not gone to Bhola's house to take the cow, he would not have fallen in love with Jhuniya. Hori was fined one hundred rupees for killing the cow and Bhola took away his two bullocks which were like his two arms. Hori was not prepared to turn Jhuniya out of the house, so Bhola was not prepared to go back without taking the bullock. All these incidents are directly and indirectly the results of obtaining the cow by foul means.

But this incident makes it clear to the readers that Bhola ought not to have taken away the bullocks. 'It was certainly inhuman on the part of Bhola to ask Hori to turn Jhuniya out. The novelist argues that what is done is done' (Gupta 29). Bhola should have helped the family, not persecuted it. Bhola's family did not toe honour in losing Jhuniya; the family lost prestige by asking Hori to turn Jhuniya out. All the people in the village tried to dissuade Bhola from taking the bullock. Dhaniya was right to say that Jhuniya was a young widow. She was right in choosing to marry with Gobar - "You're an old man now, Bhola, and yet you are still in hot pursuit of another wife. And here she's still a child"(Godaan 41). Even such soul-less money-lenders as Datadin and Pateshwari considered it an act of inhumanity. Pateshwari said, "What right have

you to make off with the bullocks? He could file a complaint and have you locked up in no time" (63). These remarks contain the opinion of the novelist, who wants to say in unambiguous terms that action such as that of Bhola should be condemned in extreme terms.

Gobar's action in making love with Jhuniya cannot be decried, but he ought to have taken his parents in confidence. He left Jhuniya at his house without requesting his parents to take care of his wife. It is not approved by the novelist. He puts his words in the mouth of Dhuniya, "What a coward! Once involved with you, he should have stood by you instead of disgracing himself by running away. If he comes back now, I won't let him in the house." She further adds, "What a stupid thing to do! We are not his enemies. What is done is done -We have to make the best of it. By running away like this, he's only making life miserable for us" (49). The novelist clearly spells out the message that boys like Gobar should take the parents in confidence and stand by the girls they bring to their house.

In Govindi-Khanna affair, the novelist is obviously on Govindi's side. She was a household lady, not a raving beauty. Khanna was also a middle-aged man, not very striking in his features. But he wanted to flirt with Malti. "For years Khanna had thought of Malti as his sweetheart, but he has always looked on her as a kind of plaything. If she herself had proposed marriage to Khanna, he wouldn't have accepted" (57). He would call the prostitutes to his house to hear their music and was often rude and insulting to his wife. The novelist is of the view that a wife like Govindi is an ideal woman. Mehra expresses the novelist's view as he says, "Your patience, sacrifice and modesty and love are second to none, I can imagine no greater happiness in life than to be a servant at the feet of a woman like you. You're the living image of what I consider ideal woman" (64). It is certainly insufferable if a man chastises-, his devoted wife, runs after other women and goes to prostitutes. Persons like Khanna realize this truth when they fall on evil days. When he became penniless due to fire in his mill he found that his wife was the only person that could give him comfort, and that his wife loved him truly, whether he was rich or poor. She said to him, "What happiness did that wealth bring us? Just one problem after another from morning till night - running our lives" (53). The novelist takes this opportunity to speak against the fair-weather friends, and advises people to value those who stand by them, in adverse circumstance. "Yes, there was, since the world still goes on worshipping wealth, but it had nothing to do with you. As long as you have money, tails wag in front of you." (62)

The novelist says that - "Wealth is root of all evils." To prove the verity of this statement, he records the evidence of Khanna who admits that one has to resort to all kinds of underhand methods to collect wealth - "You have no idea, Mr. Mehra, how I have sacrificed my principles - how many bribes were given, how many bribes were taken, the kind of men I hired to weigh the farmers' sugarcane, the false weights that were used" (66). People make such confessions when they think that they have been punished for their wrong doings. It is in a way a sermon of the novelist to all the people of the world that they should not run after wealth.

In Matadin's case, the novelist touches a new problem of caste and class prejudices. Matadin was a Brahmin while Siliya was a chamar. At the same time Matadin was rich, while Siliya belonged to a poor family. The social prejudice would not let them unite. Therefore, Siliya's father said, "Today we'll either make a chamar out of Matadin or shed his blood with our own. Siliya is a woman, and she has got to live with some man or other. We have no objection to that, but whoever takes her must become one of us. You can't make Brahmins out of us, but we can make chamars out of you" (51). And Siliya's mother very cogently asks the Brahmins, "You're so pious-you'll sleep with her, but you won't drink water from her hands. No one but this bitch would tolerate all that. I'd have poisoned such a man." And in order to make Matadin a chamar, Siliya's relatives thrust a bone into Matadin's mouth. The novelist laughs at their concept of caste and religion as he says, "The piece of bone had polluted not only his mouth but also his soul. His religion depended on absolute purity in eating and drinking; now that righteousness had been cut off at the root, performing thousands of penances - eating cow dung and drinking Ganges water, giving alms or going on pilgrimages -could not restore his virtue..... From now he would be considered as an

untouchable even in his own home" (49). The novelist castigates the society for such foolish notions. Matadin was not defiled in doing sex with a chamar girl, but he was made an untouchable by the touch of a bone. But the novelist gives a beautiful turn to the whole episode - Matadin went to the hut of the chamar girl, considering it as the temple of the goddess. The novelist gives the message that a lover should not desert his beloved whatever the circumstances be and that love must be held above all considerations of caste and religion.

The Malti episode is designed to give higher philosophical values of life. The novelist wants to say that greatness of a man lies in appreciating virtues in others. Malti failed to appreciate the hospitality extended by a tribal girl in

the jungle. Mehta therefore had to tell her that if Malti had the qualities of the girl she would have become a goddess. Malti realized the truth. She changed and dedicated herself to the service of the poor people-she started making sick-calls at the houses of the poor persons without charging any fees and visiting the villages to advise the poor and unlettered persons how they could live a better life. But she says that she was, in fact, doing service to herself more than the poor persons. She told Mehta, "Believe me, the thought of service or sacrifice has never entered my head. Everything I do is done directly or indirectly out of self-interest. When I sing, it's not in order to make any sacrifice or in order to console sad hearts, but only because it gives me pleasure. I provide medicine and treatment to the poor for the same very reason-just to please myself. Maybe it gives satisfaction to my ego" (47). Again, she told Mehta that she would not like to put herself in the bonds of marriage, because she thought that she would then be confined to her household. worries, and would not be able to reach out to the people to serve them. She said to Mehta, "And I love you too, and I believe in you.... If we set up our own small household, shutting our souls in a little cage and restricting our joys and sorrows to each other, could we ever approach the infinite?

It would just put a struggle in our path" (55). The novelist wants to impart this sagacity to the public. If anybody makes a sacrifice or does some service to the people, it should give greater pleasure to the doer than the recipient.

Thus, we find that the novelist wants to give moral values to the people. 'Prem Chand was a pioneer of progressive writing in Hindi novels. The novelists that preceded him were writing romantic tales, but for Prem Chand novel-writing was a serious business. He studied the social problems like a sociologist, and presented them like an artist, arousing noble emotions of love, kindness, charity, pity and other social behavior for the fellow beings, without any prejudices of caste, colour or race'. (Inder Nath 27)

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