



SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN AMAR NATH DWIVEDI'S MUSINGS ON SELF 'N' SOCIETY (A LONG POEM)

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ABSTRACT

Prof. A.N. Dwivedi is not a new name in the poetic horizon of Indian English literature. He is a prominent 'new' Indian English poet and a renowned Indian critic. Prof. Dwivedi's perspectives on Indian society, his thoughts on contemporary issues and his ideas about healing the offended civilization are reflected in his poetical works. He not only introduces several critical terms but also enriches modern Indian English verse to a large extent. Here, in this study, his long poem entitled Musings on Self 'n' Society is being taken up to observe socio-political consciousness in it.

INTRODUCTION

Prof. A.N.Dwivedi is an eminent Professor of English and an outstanding poet with seven volumes of poetry to his credit: *Random Reflections* (1994), *Fine Frenzy* (1998), *Protest Poems* (2002), *Beyond Borders* (2008), *Wayward Wanderings* (2012), *Collected Poems* (2018) and *Musings on Self 'n' Society* (2022) . Prof. Dwivedi has also written about two dozen books on English, American and Indian English Literature and has rendered three books of translation (from Hindi into English). He wrote more than a hundred research papers for various Indian and Foreign journals.

DR. PANKAJ KUMAR TRIPATHI

1 Page



According to an estimate, “Socio-Political consciousness is an individual’s ability to critically analyze the social and political forces that shape the society... (internet)”. These are the forces which attract the social norms towards its side and influence the society as per its ideology. The customs and cuisines, believes, ways of life, modes of living, political ideologies and the ongoing scenarios form the social-cum-political contour of any particular society. Needless to say, the ongoing issues, major contemporary events and the entire social phenomena influence the literary texts right from ancient to modern age. In India, Valmiki is regarded as the most ancient poet and his epic the *Ramayana* is considered to be the oldest text. This text also highlights the social and political problems, like the problem of successor, the abolition of evil, etc. *The Mahabharata*, centered mainly on the issue of the disrespect shown to a worthy woman named Draupadi and the problem of bonafide successor too, is another great ancient epic which deals with manifold social evils and political problems. The plays of Kalidas, Bhavbhooti, Bhasa, also depict sufficient socio-political issues of the then time. The Hindi poets like Kabir, Tulsi, Jayasi, Surdas, Keshav Das, Bihari, Bhartendu Harischandra, and 20th century poets like Prasad, Nirala, Ram Vilas Sharma, Rangey Raghav, Trilochan deal with the social and political issues of their respective periods. In English literature, we have Geoffrey Chaucer who deals with the papal, religious, social and political issues in his *magnum opus* entitled *The Canterbury Tales* (1395). Then the Renaissance writers drew our heed to the said problems, for instance Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* (1586), Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1601), *Othello* (1604), *Macbeth* (1606) etc. described the evils, corruption, malpractices and socio-political problems of their period. John Milton, another English poet of great repute, produced manifold pamphlets regarding political and social matters like *Areopagitica* (1644), *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1648), *Defence of the People of England* (1651), etc. During the Restoration period and the Age of Pope, we have satires of Dryden and Pope. They ridiculed the social and political topics to a large extent. After that, we see the painful picture of the Victorian society and the socio-political scenario of that age in the novels of Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Thomas Hardy, etc. In the modern age, we see the two great wars having influenced the literary texts to a large extent. T. S. Eliot, a renowned English writer of the 20th century, depicted the modern situation in his *The Waste Land* (1922) as follows:

*A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no
Relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water.*

(Poetryfoundation,internet)

D.H. Lawrence, another English novelist of great repute, depicted the picture of society in his own way and wrote in his famous novel entitled *Lady’s Chatterley Lover* (1928) that, “Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins... (goodread, internet)”. Graham Greene like other novelists also focused

DR. PANKAJ KUMAR TRIPATHI

2 Page



on the said subject matters. The said issue is also prevalent even in the present day, as Prof. P.K. Nayar wrote in his book *A Short History of English Literature*:

“The present refers to the literature after the 1970s. This is the age of rapid globalization and mass migration, industrial disasters, the threat of war, the shift from cold war with its nuclear threats to collapsing communism mark the geopolitics of the age.” (376)

Needless to say, the above issues are socio-political issues. Prof. A. N. Dwivedi also writes in the very Introduction of this long poem that “In composing this poem, my purpose is to create a society free of malice and corruption, violence and terror (vi)”.

This poetical work entitled *Musings on Self ‘n’ Society* is divided into four parts. The first part is ‘On Self’, the second part is ‘On Society’, the third part is ‘Interrelationship of Self ‘N’ Society’, and the last part is ‘Summing Up’. In the very first part, the poet gives his autobiographical details and becomes nostalgic by depicting about his birth, his parentage, his schoolings, his job as lecturer of English in several colleges as well as in G.K.U and A.U, his interest in his own particular discipline etc. After giving his autobiographical introduction, the poet beautifully defines the work of a true teacher as follows, “for any true teacher, teaching comes first, other activities later” (8).

The poet moves slowly from the academic to the real world in the second part of this poem. He writes thus, “The thorns of life prick you when you step out of art” (11). This is how the poet starts describing society and its matters. He presents his own philosophy of life as, “life is, after all, a mixed tale of joyous moment ‘n’ needling sorrow” (12). He speaks about harsh-cum-bitter reality of human lives and seems to assume Shakespeare’s idea of “Character is destiny”. According to the poet, the relationship can be tested in hard times; he writes thus, “That’s the testing time for your friends ‘n’ relations” (12). The same idea has also been depicted by Tulsidasji in his *Shri Ramcharitmanas*: “Dheeraj, dharm, mitra aru naari, Apad kal parikhiye chari (That is, we may test our patience, righteousness, friends and wife in the hard times, ‘Arandya Kand’)”. The poet indicates about the selfishness of today’s friends. According to the poet, people have started showing little interest in mankind gradually. The poet asserts this age to be Kaliyug, i.e. the age of Evil. In this age, the righteousness and virtues are sidelined and evil practices are at the peak. We may observe the loss of human values in Nirbhaya like cases and the suicide cases in the failure of love. But in the Satyug, i.e. the age of Truth, we may see the example of Raja Harishchand who never spoke a lie and sacrificed everything including his family in the name of truthfulness. The poet also draws the attention of his readers towards love and its pros and cons. Love is an influential term for Shakespeare and Kalidas. But, in today’s scenario, its definition has been changed as boys and girls are trained in amorous tantrums and are displaying their love at public places. Their



love marriages are getting ruined and are ending with self-sacrifice. Lovers, if they are not united or get deceived by one another decide to commit suicide. But, for the poet, arranged marriage has also a darker side and that is dowry system. Daughters are setting themselves on fire because of this system. As the poet is writing on social problems, he quickly attracts his readers' attention towards the agonies of farmers. At first, Prof. Dwivedi points out the problems of ancient days when *zamindars* and *talukedars* gave farmers red blows. But, in today's time, their condition can be ameliorated by waiving their loans and fixing a reasonable MSP. Then, the poet moves on to the political issues. He says that the politicians are adept in making hollow promises at the time of election and forget those promises afterwards. After forgetting their dignity, they do not listen to the grievances of the people of their constituencies. They indulge in corrupt practices. The poet also remembers the famous slogan that is 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' given by our beloved P. M. Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri. According to the poet, our defence forces have proved themselves to be the strongest ones. They save our country from Pakistan and China like enemies and do their job with all zest and zeal. Their heroic role cannot be forgotten, especially in 1971 during the Bangladesh war of liberation. But they face cross border terrorism and that act is tough to handle. The poet writes thus:

*Terrorists, a pack of disgruntled men
bent on the course of violence 'n' bloodshed,
sweep stealthily on the innocent people,
Open fire indiscriminately.... (20)*

The political issues are not less severe than other social issues; the leaders are also caste-conscious and they have divided the population into several castes and categories. Sometimes, they create rifts between castes, creeds and sects to reap benefits. Further, politicians do not have any concern with the basic necessities of common men. They do not think of the employment to the unemployed youths nor do they work for the youths' welfare. They reward ruffians and mobilize the mob of cow vigilantes to lynch innocent people. They do all malpractices to embarrass common people and get hard core criminals released with honour. Some democrats do cry for the system of reservation within reservation. This is how the poet describes about the political problems going on in our society.

After that, the poet moves on to the issue of womankind. Even today, women have to be given extra benefits to join the main current. Those females who are qualifying some competitive exams just present the fragmented picture of the society because 'boys are treated as a special brand in our society'. The poet argues his best to provide equality to womankind. Women have to face domestic violence and they feel unsafe at offices and are getting exploited by their superiors. Even in schools and colleges, ill-disciplined boys taunt them. They require extra care, so the society must respect and protect womankind to see a better prospect. The poet also presents the painful event of Nirbhaya case and says that



people do not have righteous outlook for rape victims and do not accept the rape survivors as their near and dear ones. So, they have to live the shameful lives or to commit suicide in severe depression. The poet presents the solution of this great problem as follows:

*We all have to combine
'N' put up a stiff resistance
To the self-willed unsocial elements,
To get them arrested
'N' thrown behind the bars. (27)*

After it, the poet moves towards the problem of judiciary. Here, he points out that justice delayed is justice denied. People have to wait a lot to receive justice and by that time the accused dies. Hence, the poet suggests the establishment of fast track courts. Here, the poet also draws our heed to the civil cases turning into 'Beerbal ki khichadi'. These cases are time taking, money-consuming and energy-consuming. The state also plays, sometimes, foul game as it steps in the sensitive matters. In India, there is a caption of 50% of reservation, yet all the governing bodies are confused in this matter.

The poet also heeds to the police forces as they function in an arbitrary fashion. He also points out that police and ruffian nexus is very dangerous for the society. The poet also writes about PAC, RAF, RPF who do their duty in a proper manner. Sometimes, a few questions are raised on the working methods of CBI which tarnishes its image to a certain extent. The poet writes hopefully that "If the civil police mends its ways, society 'n' individuals stand to gain" (31).

After this, the poet moves his mighty pen towards the problems of Democracy. Though the poet asserts that it is the best form of government, yet in India its scenario is totally different. There are several political parties in our country, unlike the U.K and the U.S.A., and the politicians have forgotten Gandhian ideology. They attack one another out of sheer vendetta. After it, the poet writes about radicalization of religious thoughts. Here, humanity is at stake and zealots of one faith clash with those of another. Though no religion demands inhuman activities, yet people do so when situation becomes tense and intolerable :

*No religion proclaims openly
the practice of hate 'n' violence,
but indulges in the same
when life around it is smothered
'n' the situation becomes tense. (34)*

Keki N Daruwalla also depicts the same thing in his poem entitled 'Death by Burial'. Here, he presents the painful condition of Indian society where riots, burglary and rape become common things. According to him, there is no harmony in the Indian society:



*...half the village could be Hindu, half Muslim
Enough cause for a riot,
With half the village shouting
‘death by fire!’
And the other half
‘death by burial!’ (82)*

The poet remembers the sorrowful tragic event of 26/11 when the terrorists attacked our public places and killed our innocent citizens. He also mentions the tragic crash of World Trade Center by the trained jihadi pilots. He remembers the tragedy of Paris too. It seems that these terrible events gave an acute blow in the poet's emotional heart. He also criticizes fake pundits, mullahs and padarees who tempt the simple people with hollow promises of Heaven. He condemns the regrettable practices like the sacrifice of animals in some rituals or festivals. He also feels pity over the sad condition of widow in the Indian society. He defends these unfortunate women and presents their pitiful condition thus:

*A widow is compelled to lead
a cursed life, with shorn head,
bangleless hands, unadorned body,
without sindur on her forehead,
wearing always a white dress. (38)*

He also points out that if a wedded woman is childless, it is she who is blamed for her childlessness, not her husband. He denounces the rotten practices of discrimination in our society too. He tries to show a new vista to reunite upper and lower castes because this practice is not prevalent in Christianity and Islam. He writes as follows:

*The same veins, the same sensations,
the same-coloured blood,
the same thoughts ‘n’ feelings
are to be had in them too!
This kind of inhuman distinction
tears apart the fabric of our society. (39)*

Apparently, that the concept of untouchability in Hindu community hurts the poet to a large extent. For the poet, everyone is equal in our country and there should be equality in our society. He also endorses the policy of liberalization of Indian economy as this will provide employment to Indian youths and will push up the rate of our GDP as well. This enables the Indian industrialists and entrepreneurs their western counterparts. According to the poet, the real utilization of the notion of globalization relies on the promotion of local artisans and their skills. The local products like khadi, mats, baskets, hand fans, pickle and jams should be

DR. PANKAJ KUMAR TRIPATHI

6 Page



introduced in the global markets and then the Gandhian notion of *Ramrajya* and the very notion of 'vocal for local' will translate into reality.

After this, the poet moves on to the problem of Indian education system. At first, he says that it has become the business of anyone and undeserving leaders are deciding the fate of higher education. The secondary education has no fixed time-table as its session starts in a haphazard manner and exams have no set date. The poet again describes the problem of higher education. Since Prof. Dwivedi has been a renowned academician and a great professor, he better understands the anomalies going on in the recruitment process of teachers at degree colleges and universities. Sometimes, UGC changes the eligibility criteria and sometimes it changes the standard of research papers too. This type of sudden decision confuses the candidates and hampers the progress of research projects. The poet suggests the governing bodies to establish a new commission like UPSC or State Commission where written examinations are conducted and judicious interviews are held. The universities and degree colleges are the place of academic excellence and quality research work Prof. Dwivedi also suggests that the students' unions should also organize debates and seminars on the campus:

*The future lies in the hands of our students
who can make or mar the environ
on the academic campuses.*

*Healthy discussions 'n' intellectual seminars
constitute the soul of an institution. (45)*

The poet opines that higher institutions have been given sufficient funds. The term of V.C. and Director should not exceed a period of three years so that they do not become dictators. The social evils like favouritism and nepotism should not be in effect at higher so that the quality is compromised. With this, teachings as well as research works in India will bloom day by day.

In the third part of this long poem, 'Interrelationship of Self 'n' Society', the poet tries to establish that self and society are, to some extent, identical. The self is perceptible and concrete entity. It should not be misconstrued as soul. Self is a small unit of society and thus society consists of self. For the poet, bigger than self is the family, constitute a community, while society is larger than the community as its geographical area is vaster than that of community. According to the poet, society can also cross the national border like Islam and Christianity. Hence, the society is a broader concept, yet without self its existence cannot be imagined. Prof. Dwivedi says that an individual has to perform manifold duties, like serving



the society, purging it from evils, saving it from malpractices, etc. When self is purified or purged, the society gets cleaned automatically.

Prof. Dwivedi concludes this introspective study of self 'n' society with 'Summing Up'. He asserts that this study is a minor attempt to describe the impact of society upon self. In this long poem, the poet presents his personal account, his experience with society, the present political scenario and the condition of the people of our society. Prof. Dwivedi envisions a society free of malice and corruption as well as divested of terror and coercion. He writes as follows:

*May be, I'm not alive
when these things materialize
but my living compatriots
will welcome it filled with surprise. (50)*

Thus, the poet concludes this poem with an emotional tone and with good hope of a positive change.

The artistic beauty of this long poem is worthy of special note. The poet uses very magnificent metaphors like 'mirror of life', 'thorn of life', 'boat of life', 'age of virtues', 'chariot of love' and 'mask of deceit' etc. He also uses a lot of monosyllabic words in the entire poem. The style of this long poem is descriptive. Though the poet also uses several visual images, yet the darker side of the society presents tragic images too. But the hope of positivity and goodness manifests glowing images as well. The poet has exploited the free verse stanzas in this long poem, like other modern and post-modern poets. Thus, this long poem becomes a milestone in 'new' Indian English poetry as the 'new' poets also follow the same stanza pattern. This long poem has been moulded in the pattern of run-on-line. The poet seems to avoid rhyming in it, but the poem nicely holds rhythmic beats of lines.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this long poem presents a clear-cut picture of several socio-political issues. It is the work of a writer who wants to draw the attention of his readers to the burning subject-matters so that the governing bodies may start focusing on these problems. In this way, a society will get rid of these issues. For instance, Dickens presented the harsh realities and social evils of Victorian society in his novels and then several laws were passed to eradicate those evils. Prof. Dwivedi, following the path of his predecessors, focuses on certain socio-political issues with a good hope that his readers understand these anomalies of the society and they will try their best to ameliorate them, and then the society will get rid of such problems gradually yet steadily.



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