

The Exploitative Feudal System: Socio-Economic Strife In Munshi's Godaan

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Abstract

Social dominance and oppression have continued to be significant issues of concern in India since the existence of human beings. *Godaan* paints a striking portrait of Indian society. Characters from the upper, middle, and lower classes are all represented in the novel. The present study illuminates the manifestation of violence resulting from the intersection of feudalistic practices governing the lower castes and capitalist adaptations characterising the higher castes in *Godaan*.

Keywords: Social dominance, Oppression, Feudal system, Strife, Indian society

Introduction

Godaan regarded as an exceptionally authentic portrayal of Indian rural society. This literary work portrays the plight of Indian farmers and labourers, highlighting the challenges they face such as hunger, poverty, inadequate healthcare, suffering, mortality, and degradation. The narrative takes place within the confines of Belari, a little village afflicted by poverty, situated in the Avadh region of Uttar Pradesh, during the pre-independence era. Premchand exposes the enduring suffering that pervades the lives of individuals from disparate social backgrounds. The work opens a window into the subterranean world of corruption, deception, and hypocrisy that exists just below the surface of superficial idealism. It exposes the ways in which people are victimised by the perpetrators of dominant oppressive social structures. Indeed, the narrative provides a clear portrayal of the multifaceted violence that permeates the lives of individuals residing in the rural villages and small cities of India.

The central character of the narrative, Hori, is depicted as a subordinate individual under the oppressive framework of feudalism. He is a Zamindar's tenant, living off the land and performing forced labour for the man who controls the people's fate. The peasants serve as the Zamindar's and moneylenders' slaves. The individuals belonging to the lower socioeconomic class have a profoundly distressing existence characterised by the overwhelming weight of financial obligations. Their existence is replete with adversities and sufferings. This small and devout community is riddled with hypocrisy on both the religious and social fronts. Inhumane social and religious norms have persisted for centuries because people refuse to give up their traditional beliefs.

Hori is portrayed as an awful character, experiencing constant suffering due to his impoverished circumstances and his subservient adherence to societal and religious norms. The unexpected death of the cow and Jhunias pregnancy bring misery to his life. The influential people of the village take these occasions as an opportunity to extract money from him. Hori is being pushed to pay off his debts by the village's moneylenders, police officer, and Pandits. He has placed all of his expectations in his only son, Gobar, but even he has abandoned him. Gobar is swayed by Jhunias beauty and ends up making her pregnant. Gobar leaves his hometown and travels to Lucknow in search of greater economic opportunities. Hori had to put forth considerable effort to make up for his son's transgression. Hori is a firm adherent to time-honored social norms and believes that it is never a good idea to break ties with society. He accepts the exorbitant fine as punishment for his son's actions and is willing to pay it.

Hori and Dhaniya have a lot of debt on their shoulders. Despite their best efforts, they have been unable to alleviate their financial obligations. Hori's family consists of five individuals, namely himself, his wife, their son Gobar, and their two daughters named Roopa and Sona. Sona and Roopa possess inherent beauty akin to their female counterparts within the hamlet; yet, the adverse effects of poverty and exploitation have resulted in their physical appearance being characterised as coarse and ordinary. Whenever Hori ambulates towards his agricultural plots with a fatigued demeanour and perceives a bountiful harvest in the adjacent field, his heart becomes laden with sorrow, for his possession of land is meagre due to the division of his extended family. Consequently, this diminutive allotment proves unable to sustain a large family like as his.

Hori's one and only wish is to have a milk-producing cow. He is working outside one day when he spots Bhola coming around the corner with his herd of cows. Hori has requested and convinced Bhola to lend him a cow. Hori is so excited by the prospect of obtaining a cow that he begins fantasising about the lavish lifestyle he can achieve with its support. The entire family is filled with great excitement and celebrating a festive occasion as a result of Hori's purchase of a cow and brought it home. The cow is revered and embraced by all members of the family due to her perceived embodiment of divinity. It is widely held that the presence of a cow within a household is associated with increased prosperity for the family.

“Hori's bosom swelled by a yard out of pride and joy. The cow was not a bad bargain for eight rupees. It was a well-shaped, sturdy breed, would yield six to seven seers of milk twice a day, and such docile an animal that anybody could milk it. Each of its claws would fetch rupees hundred each in the least. The glory of his door would increase manifold if it was tied there.”

The majority of the residents come to Hori's house to see the cow and to express their congratulations. Only two of Hori's siblings do not visit his residence. Hori visits his siblings, but when he hears them speaking against him, he returns home. Two siblings accuse him of appropriating their share of the property. Hori experiences a profound emotional distress and makes the decision to relinquish possession of the cow, although encounters resistance from his wife who refuses to comply. The presence of a cow has instilled a sense of pride in Hori and his family, leading them to recognise the benevolence of the divine entity that has bestowed its benefits upon them.

The villagers are happy to see the monsoon rains arrive and get ready to work in the fields, but Raisahib stops them and demands they pay off the debts to him immediately. The peasants are compelled to resort to borrowing from money lenders due to a lack of alternative options. There are prevailing myths regarding Hori, suggesting that he possesses undisclosed financial resources, presumably due to his recent purchase of a cow. Only Hori knows the inkling and the fact is that he, too, must visit the money lenders to settle his debt in order to keep the cow with him.

Gobar, Hori's son, storms inside the house yelling and bewildered, provoking a terrible scene of thirst. Gobar conveys the sad news to his loved ones that the family cow was bitten by a snake. Later inquiry proves without a reasonable doubt that the cow was poisoned, not killed by a snake bite. Hori tells Dhaniya, his wife, the truth about the night's thief. He reveals to her that his younger brother Hira is the true culprit. Hori says he saw Hira the day before, standing beside his cow and gave it something to eat. Hori, although knowing this, tells his wife to remain silent because of the risk associated for the family's reputation. Hori's brother Heera poisoned his cow out of envy and then ran away, but in order to protect the family name and honour, Hori went into debt and bribed the authorities not to search Heera's home.

The death of the cow has caused Hori a great deal of stress and trouble. No food is left in the house for him to provide for his family. Since Hori cannot afford to buy the cow from Bhola, he also loses his pair of bullocks. During the day he works as a labourer on a road construction job, and at night he spins yarn to make a living. He struggles hard throughout his life, but when he dies; his family is not able to perform his last rituals due to the lack of money.

After Hori's demise, the villagers implore Dhania to donate a cow as an act of charity. Dhania, who neither has a cow nor the money to acquire one, takes out twenty annas from her savings and places them in her husband's hand. And looking at Datadin says: "Maharaja there's neither a cow nor a calf nor any money in the house, this is all the money I have; this is all I can give. Take this in place of a cow." And saying this she collapses and sank into the ground. The demise of Hori serves as a poignant representation of the complete disintegration of the agrarian utopia and the abandonment of the principles of acquiescence and concession. The displacement of Hori's family from their agrarian lifestyle and the migration of his son Gobar to the urban centre for sustenance are also emblematic of the eventual demise of rural living and peasant culture, highlighting the prevailing dominance of monetary relationships over traditional societal structures.

The title of the novel *Godaan* by Munshi Premchand used the term in a sarcastic manner towards the conclusion of the narrative, serving to emphasise and intensify the tragic circumstances surrounding the character of Hori. Readers exhibit a sympathetic inclination towards the afflictions, anguish, and vulnerability experienced by Hori, so establishing a deeper connection with the story, often accompanied by a profound emotional response. In the final

moments of his life, a figure symbolises an individual who has long harboured a desire to possess a bovine companion, yet finds himself unable to bestow a cow upon a Brahmin.

“Godaan is also a tale of a struggling people, starving and semi-starved, yet willing and optimistic in the real spirit of the age it represents. He depicts with a deep understanding the tragedy and the pathos of their dark lives, their rare smiles and unceasing sorrows, their frustrations and hopes.”

In the literary work *Godaan*, Munshi Premchand has demonstrated the notion that society is not solely a reflection of the prevailing attitudes and characteristics of its inhabitants. Furthermore, it functions as a metric for evaluating their actions and behaviour. The novelist has tried to convey the idea, through the novel, that altering the social structure is all it takes to improve people's lives.

According to Amaresh Dutta, *Godaan* is a vivid and dynamic representation of modern Indian society, effectively capturing the authentic essence of both rural and urban environments in India. According to Harish Trivedi's perspective, “it focuses on Premchand's recognition of its characters deep, unresisting, and often thoughtless allegiance to as well as their uninterrogated internalisation of the violence situated in traditional and social values.” Prabhakar Jha also states that, “Godaan expresses particular era in modern Indian history rather than painting a timeless picture of Indian peasantry.”

The adverse impacts of industrialization have also been portrayed extensively. Gobar is employed in a sugar manufacturing facility as a means of sustenance inside an urban environment. He expresses dissatisfaction with their current occupation as a factory worker due to the presence of hazardous working circumstances, including a confined workspace and exposure to smoke emissions from the machinery. In addition, the remuneration he receives for this labour is rather modest. In this context, he observes the systematic exploitation of the labour force. The labourers engage in a strike, but, it proves to be unsuccessful. The following lines make the predicament of the manufacturing workers very clear: “...the machines' speed and deafening roar made him [Gobar] high strung. There was also the constant danger of being called out for negligence or error in performance of duties. This mental state was not limited

to Gobar; it affected all of the workers. They drowned their physical exhaustion and mental trauma in toddy.”

Gobar refuses to be a slave to hypocrisy, injustice, or exploitation. He possesses the ability to effectively assist individuals in resisting various forms of oppression. He follows the allure of urban life to the bustling industrial city of Lucknow, where he works in Mr. Khanna's mill and experiences profound development in himself. He has the courage to speak the landlords, moneylenders, and clergymen out for their bad behaviour. Hori and Gobar are actually diametrically opposed concepts. He understands that his father cannot be changed and that his dharmic upbringing will prevent him from speaking out against injustice and exploitation. He proves that putting all one's faith in fate will bring nothing but trouble and suffering. Ancient customs need to be rethought, if not abandoned entirely.

In the literary work *Godaan*, each character grapples with the challenges of existence and the pursuit of individual autonomy. Each person possesses their own set of social limits that serve to constrain their freedom of choice. The assertion is made that socialism represents the sole prospect for Indian society, as it pertains to the establishment of a classless social order, devoid of societal biases. The rural inhabitants reside below the poverty threshold. They are unable to access even the most fundamental necessities of life. Hori expresses, “We don't want luxuries; we just want plain food, some cloth, and a life of honour. We aren't even allowed to have these.”

The lamentable plight of the rural working class is evident not just in the primary protagonists Hori and Dhanai, but also in certain other characters such as Girdhar. After a deal involving the sale of sugarcane, Girdhar is in the process of returning with the monetary proceeds. However, opportunistic money lenders eagerly anticipate this situation. Following the repayment of his loan to Jehnguri Singh, he finds himself barren of any financial resources. He consumes alcohol excessively as a means of coping with his emotional distress. He tells Shobha and Hori, “believe me I am not drunk. Believe me. How can i get drunk on an anna? I am just, pretending Ha Ha I am so happy uncle. I've paid back the loan I took twenty and paid back a hundred and sixty. Some loan that!” The subservient peasants endure the burden silently and blame it on fate

Conclusion

Hori's life in *Godaan* is a tragic one marked by his inability to alleviate his own pain. He can't imagine standing against a Brahmin because societal obligations are too strong for a simple person like him, and he is well aware of the nefarious machinations of greedy money-lenders. The prevailing ambiance throughout the narrative maintains a sombre and melancholic tone. Despite Hori's inability to engage in direct conflict with the inflexible societal structure and its flaws, his unwavering faith in the inherent benevolence of humanity and his commitment to preserving human dignity serve as the redeeming qualities inside his persona.

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