

Phase 1-SOCIAL REALITY IN I. H. RIZVI'S POETRY

by

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Poets do the best reform job. Indian poets have also done this job to a great perfection. Tagore is a cosmopolitan. His poems have given a direction to the readers. Sarojini Naidu has written many poems on Indian themes. Her poems inspire us to realize the best way of life and to follow it. A poet is a keen observer more than anybody else and when he finds things happening in society which should be taken note of and brought to light and put before the society at large, he reacts forcefully and presents it through his chosen medium, i.e. poetry.

Social consciousness means consciousness of the social, political and economic happenings and situations having a direct effect on society. Man is a part of society and society is the home of man. Customs, traditions and festivals are the result of human associations.

Social consciousness in relation to poetry is not just the plain statements dealing with the happenings in a particular society, its ways and methods, customs, and traditions, festivals and manners of worship. A student walking to school, a fruit seller selling his fruits, a mother feeding a child, flowers being offered to the Lord and a funeral being performed are, of course , an integral part of society. However, there is nothing unusual, striking or

surprising about these happenings. To describe them in plain terms is the business of prose and not of poetry.

India being a very large country, poverty-stricken and with hungry masses, faces innumerable problems. Hunger, poverty squalor, black marketing, hoarding, smuggling, exploitation, corruption, political hypocrisy, prostitution, unemployment, superstition, false education, inequality, communal disharmony, barbarity, arson riots, violence, atrocities, murder, rape, torture, terrorism and massacre are rampant in the modern Indian society. Consciousness of all these happenings and their depiction in strong terms with the weapon of irony and satire so as to stir the conscience of the people is real social consciousness in relation to Indian English poetry.

H.S. Bhatia says, "Social consciousness is virtually a study of man in his social milieu, as a dynamic creature, sometimes alive and active, sometimes passive and tolerant, but sometimes volatile and aggressive and sometimes pursued and persecuted."¹

However to be precise, social consciousness is the portrayal of the dark side of life which result in making life miserable, unbearable, depression-ridden and sorrow-laden. One aspect of poetry is a reaction against such disturbing forces.

A socially conscious poet is different from a mystical, philosophical and religious poet. His heart bleeds to see so much of misery around him. India being a land of various customs, religions, castes, languages, tribes regions etc., provides limitless material to a socially conscious poet to

think, feel, ponder and dwell on the subjects. A true poet is the creature of his time and cannot afford to be consciously blind to the misery of life he finds himself surrounded by. All the poets who flourished in Pre-Independence India ignored the picture of Indian life the way they should have depicted it. Hence they were not socially conscious poets. It was after Independence that Indian English poets became conscious of the prevailing conditions and the problem which the people of our country began to face.

No other contemporary Indian English poet is more socially conscious about the prevailing situations in India than Iftikhar Husain Rizvi. The phenomena of poverty, prosperity and progress in the world around incline Rizvi towards meditateness of the problems of a man in his social economic, political and intellectual aspects only to find expressions in his literary creations. Rizvi's poetry presents a big spectacle of many social problems like hunger, poverty, exploitation, prostitution, pseudo-religious mindedness, hoarding, moral bankruptcy, corruption and communal disharmony. This aspect of social awareness is found in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Bhavani Bhattacharya, Ruth Praver Jhavbala and others. Jayant Mahapatra's treatment of social themes is like a visionary enraptured in the poignant glamour of faded past catching on its smoky trails to peep in the future. This social awareness has first found adequate expression in the poetry of O.P. Bhatnagar.

To quote Prof. P.P. Joshi, "A host of new poets like Nar Deo Sharma, L.N. Mahapatra, R.K. Singh, I.H. Rizvi, A.L. Agnihotri show, as in the

words of O.P. Bhatnagar " an intense awareness of the socio-political crisis demoralising hopes and conduct in the Indian scene."**2**

To quote Prof. P.P. Joshi again, "Social awareness has become more specific and concrete, down to earth and yet touching and more authentic in the poetry of I.H. Rizvi, a prolific poet from Bareilly, U.P."**3**

Dr. Satish Kumar says, "Rizvi is perturbed by the evils of his time, disturbed in feelings by things around him and he aims at showing mankind its ugly face, hidden in the mask of modernity in the mirror of harsh reality. The civilized society suffers from the cancer of bankruptcy, both intellectual and spiritual."**4**

The poet feels pained to note life around him. As a true poet of modern age, the poet sees life with all the angles. Man is out and out surrounded by millions of things.

There is no place of love in today's life. Even genuine laughter is hard to come by. We can call none our own. Man is sunk deep into the sea of doubts.

"Surrounded by millions of things

We live and weep and die alone

Each thing has cruel biting stings

And nobody heeds another's moan"

'WE LIVE AND WEEP AND DIE ALONE from FALLING PETALS'

(P.3)

Human relationship is all feigning. There is no respite or rest in man's life. The blooms of sweetness have withered. People are moving to and fro with deep melancholy. Virtue is bleeding from head to toe. Friend and foe are alike. There is no ray of hope in life, as presented by the poet in his poem ' *THE CONCERNED* ' :

"There appears a dagger from the sleeve
How can man keep himself away ?
With eyes to see , a heart to feel ,
His glance away how can he steal ?
How can now man be unconcerned ? "

- ' *THE CONCERNED* ' (P.5) ' *FALLING*

PETALS '

Man is killing man. What man has done to man ? Nothing. Human relationship is all fading. People come close and deceive on the pretext of being friends:

"There appears a dagger from the sleeve
of one of the partners in the game
And pierces one's unguarded back."

- ' *CLOSE CONTACTS* ' IN ' *FALLING PETALS* ' (P.10) repeated in ' *THIRSTY PEBBLES* ' (P.69)

How materialism and exploitation have sucked blood from human veins and left the man lifeless and too weak to keep the strife is described beautifully in the following lines:

"Shadows
Of moving skeletons
With despair loaded brows,
A dainty food for fun
Stumbling on tunes of life."

'SHADOWS' repeated in 'THIRSTY PEBBLES' (P.73)

A socially conscious poet not only speaks about the happenings of his time but also gives the people a right way to life. Rizvi not only sees the dark side of life but also sees its bright side. Life is, no doubt, very harsh and intolerable in today's world but petals of hope always peep through the clouds of despair. We should bravely face life- its sorrow and its joys as he says in his poem, *'PETALS OF HOPE'* :

" That life is meant for those who dare,
They speak of cheerful rays
Which bring the golden days."

- 'PETALS OF HOPE' (P.16) ' FALLING

PETALS'

The lot of prostitutes is nicely presented by the poet in *'TOYS FOR SALE'* :

"Fair toys for sale

Invite manhood to feast

On wound of social boons

Like vultures, hounds and beasts...

Are caught, sandwiched and pressed

In hard-millstones of society....."

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