

CULTURAL CONFLICT IN THE LITERATURE OF ANNA BHAU SATHE

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Abstract:

The second half of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of industrialization in India and gave rise to the capitalist and working class. The working class became the victim of the capitalist class who in the process of maximizing their profits exploited them. This exploitation of the workers led to the rise of labour movement in India during the last quarter of nineteenth century. Number of leaders and personalities addressed the issues of workers and played an important role in Indian labour movement. Anna Bhau Sathe was one of the prominent figures amongst them. He expressed his views on various labour issues and problems through his writings and speeches. His philosophy of emancipation of workers runs through several genres of literature like novels, short stories, ballads (Powadas), folk dramas (Loknatya), poems etc. His writings and plays proved to be the catalyst for the labour movement of the twentieth century. His writings reflect a deep sensitivity to the questions of subaltern groups which includes working class, untouchables, women etc. As most of his writings are from literary perspectives, it is essential to contextualize his works and contribution to labour movement in a historical perspective. Though Anna Bhau played phenomenal role towards Indian labour movement, it has gone un-noticed by history scholarship and is excluded from the mainstream history of Indian labour movement. This paper is an attempt to understand his varied contribution towards the Indian labour movement through his varied forms of literature.

Keywords: Anna Bhau Sathe, Communism, Indian Labour Movement, subaltern, working class.

Introduction:

The second half of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of industrialization in India resulting in the socio- economic growth of cities. Subsequently, it gave rise to the capitalist and working class. The working class became the victim of the capitalist class who in the process of maximizing their profits exploited them. This exploitation of the workers led to the rise of labour movement in India during the last quarter of nineteenth century. Number of leaders and personalities addressed the issues of workers and played an important role in Indian labour movement. Anna Bhau Sathe was one of the prominent figures amongst them. He expressed his views on various labour issues and problems through his writings

and speeches. His philosophy of emancipation of workers runs through several genres of literature like novels, short stories, ballads (*Powadas*), folk dramas (*Loknatya*), poems etc. His writings and plays proved to be the catalyst for the labour movement of the twentieth century. He wrote primarily in *Marathi* language which became the vehicle of mass education for the Indian working classes. Besides his literary works, he was an activist in all social and political movements of his contemporary times. He used literature very effectively to describe the day-to-day life of common man, peasants and workers.

Anna Bhau Sathe deserves to be called an ‘organic intellectual’ who had both political and intellectual abilities to consider not only his caste-class people along with him but also the larger masses. His writings reflect a deep sensitivity to the questions of subaltern groups which includes working class, untouchables, women etc. As most of his writings are from literary perspectives, it is essential to contextualize his works and contribution to labour movement in a historical perspective. Though Anna Bhau played phenomenal role towards Indian labour movement, it has gone un-noticed by history scholarship and is excluded from the mainstream history of Indian labour movement. This paper is an attempt to understand his varied contribution towards the Indian labour movement through his varied forms of literature. It will also throw light on those subaltern people and role of his literary works which created awareness among them about their rights, issues, problems and a proactive role in fighting for their rights by participating in movements.

Anna Bhau Sathe’s Participation in Indian Labour Movement

Anna Bhau Sathe was born on 1 August 1920 at Wategaon in Sangli district of Maharashtra and belonged to *Mang or Matang* community which was one of the untouchable castes in Maharashtra. His childhood was spent in a very miserable condition. Poverty has deprived him of his formal education. In the search of job, he has shifted to Bombay and had to do various kinds of works. He has also worked in textile mills of Bombay as mill worker. At that time several developments had been taking place in Bombay. Strikes, closing of markets, morchas in the workers colonies of Bombay had negative as well as positive effects on him. During his stay at Matunga Labour camp in Bombay, he was attracted towards the activities of study circle of Communist party. He joined the Communist party due to the work of eminent communist leader Comrade S.A. Dange and become the member of ‘*Lal Bavta* (Red Flag) Union’ in 1936. He deeply studied the policies, objectives and programmes of Communist party through party meetings and conferences which helped him to broaden his intellectual horizons. As mill owners were not ready to increase wages of workers, Comrade Dange asked Anna Bhau to declare strike in his own mill where he was working. Anna Bhau informed his fellow mill workers about strike and to create conducive

atmosphere for the workers about strike and to inspire them, he sung '*Stalingradcha Powada*' (Ballad of Stalingrad). This ballad was highly appreciated by his fellow workers and became very popular amongst the workers. He was removed from mill but decided to work in communist party to spread its activities in Bombay in very lucid manner to his fellow brothers.

Anna Bhau founded *Lal Bavta Kala Pathak* (Red Union Cultural Troupe) along with Shahir Amar Shaikh and Shahir D. N. Gavankar in 1944 under the guidance of Comrade Shankar Pagare and Comrade B.T. Ranadive and became the full-time propagator of communist party. He wrote number of ballads (*Powadas*), folk dramas (*Loknatya*), novels, poetry etc. to spread the labour movement and to create consciousness amongst the workers. He actively participated in Samyukta Maharashtra movement and asked workers to join the movement in large number. This shows his dedication towards the labour movement which he continued through his writings till his death.

Anna Bhau Sathe's Writings and Indian Labour Movement

Anna Bhau Sathe's work with the communist movement and his critical perspectives on his life as a Dalit formed his prolific thinking and writing. His 35 novels, one play, a travelogue, 10 folk dramas, 23 collections of short stories and 10 Ballads (*Powadas*) have been published in Marathi. He wrote all based on his true-life experiences and his novels reflects the fighting spirit in their characters who work against all odds in life. His approach was revolutionary and practical. He portrayed the social realities, both oppressive systems of power and the working classes miserable conditions. His writings are useful and are unique tools for understanding subaltern community's consciousness. The class question, according to Anna Bhau, can be resolved only when it is followed by the emancipation of caste question. He uses the tools acquainted from his class analysis to approach the caste question. Anna Bhau addressed several issues regarding the lives of workers and peasants in his writings. Due to his labour consciousness, he wrote on the life of urban Mumbai, on the problem of textile workers and labourers and depicted the rural life in his various genres of literature. He wanted to describe the history of communism in simple language and motivate the workers for joining the Indian labour movement. He did not go into the philosophical genre but use his literature to reach out the common masses and motivated them to participate in Indian labour movement. His contribution to Indian labour movement can be seen through his writings which can be studied in the following categories: Ballads (*Powadas*) Anna Bhau Sathe composed nearly 15 Ballads (*Powadas*) and many of his ballads throw light on the then contemporary labour issues. They were mainly used to awaken the workers and peasants and give them strength and inspiration. One of his works *Stalingradcha Powada* (Ballad of Stalingrad) stands influential. It has

dedicated to struggles and histories that inspired people worldwide. This ballad was highly appreciated by prominent communist leaders and workers. This ballad shows that Anna Bhau's knowledge was trans-national as he knew the events of world and he incorporated it in his writings. He has also composed a ballad *Bangalchi Haak* (Call of Bengal), to raise funds for the drought affected. It was an attempt at creating global worker's consciousness. Like *Ballad of Stalingrad, Berlincha Powada* (Ballad of Berlin) is also written and about an international warfare. Ammalnerche *Amar Hutatme (Immortal Martyr of Ammalner)* written in 1949 to commend and acknowledge the courage shown by communist activists who laid their lives and became martyrs. He wrote this ballad to inspire and motivate the workers. *Mumbaicha Girani Kamgar* (Mill Worker of Mumbai) written in 1949 and traces the struggles and miseries of Bombay's factory workers. Besides above important Ballads, Anna Bhau wrote number of ballads to expose the exploitation of the workers by the capitalist class of Bombay and highlighted the problems of workers. From the above powadas, it is very much clear that Anna Bhau was the staunch supporter of communist party and its ideology. These ballads gave great inspiration to workers and it contributed to the development of labour movement. He called them to unite for the proletariat revolution to end their suffering and exploitation. Due to his ballads, he became very popular amongst the Indian working class.

Folk Dramas (*Loknatya*) and Plays.

Anna Bhau wrote in all fifteen folk dramas (*Loknatya*) during 1944-1962. But unfortunately, all of them are not available today. There seem to be two prominent aims behind his folk dramas, one is to criticize the congress party, its agenda and its style of functioning and second is to present the ideology of communist party and its programmes before the people in a favorable light. He used these plays to highlight injustice, ridicule oppressive exploitation and social relations of the powerful caste and to offer solutions and inspiration. He wrote the first folk drama entitled *Akalechi Goshta*(Story of Intelligence) and presented at the peasant conference at *Titvala* in Thane district in 1944 which was highly appreciated by his party members and workers of Maharashtra. One of the central concerns of this play is to make uneducated manual labourers understand Karl Marx's theory of class struggle by using simple, jargon-free and understandable language and also to impress upon their minds their place in the social change. He also wrote *Deshbhakta Ghotale(Patriotic Mr. Confused)* , *Nivadnukitil Ghotale (Mr. Confused in Election)*, *Shethjicha Election(Election of the Rich Men)*, *Bekaydesheer(Illegal)*, *Lokmantryacha Daura(The Minister's Tour)*, *Muk Miravnuk(Dumb Procession)*, etc. and expressed the grievances of workers and peasants and exposed the hypocrisy of Congress party, its capitalistic policies, feudalistic altitude and motivated the workers for Communist revolution.

Mazee Mumbai arthat Mumbai Konachi?(My Mumbai means whose Mumbai) was written against the background of the formation of linguistic states in India which came into focus after India's Independence in 1947. It highlighted the various problems and issues like migration, urban unemployment, plight of the workers and the sanyukta (United) Maharashtra movement. Besides above plays, he also wrote number of folk dramas like *Pudhari Milala (Leader Found)*, *Inamdar (Landlord)*, *Bilandar Budawe (Wily Defaulters)* etc. and voices the grievances of workers. Thus, Anna Bhau used this genre of Marathi literature very effectively to describe the day-to-day life of common man, workers and subaltern masses. He was actively involved in *Sanyukta Maharashtra* movement and motivated many workers to join the movement for their benefit

Poems (Verse)

Anna Bhau Sathe wrote many poetic verses which were related with different aspects. His poems and lavanis enriched the poetry of Marathi literature and contributed towards the development of Indian labour movement. His poems related with labour movement can be classified into three main categories. They are:

Composition of Marxist Leanings

Anna Bhau Sathe composed many poems which had Marxist leanings. *Kamagar Stavan* (Praise of labourers) shows how worker is the real earth-mover and *archrevolutionary* who destroyed oppressive powers. *Kala Bajar* (Black Market) talks of how the black marketers and hoarders create an artificial shortage of essential commodities. He also talks about how the government's Rationing Act has failed miserably to check the evil activities of the black marketers. *Ekjuticha Neta (Leader of Unity)* envisages the materialization of the dream of classless society in India under the leadership of workers. Workers, he feels, will play the role of the unifying leaders. They will unite farmers and the oppressed and lead them for revolution. He also wrote poems such as *Tu Marathmola*, *Bolat Kada Kapari*, *Shivari Chala*, *Duniyechi Daulat Saari*, *Telashivay Jalato Diva*, *Lavadacha Aika Parakar*, *Chini Jananchi Mukti-Sena*, *Lenin Shubhnamache* etc. and expressed his vision of communist revolution. He highlighted the problems of Dalits and workers in his poems and gave inspiration to workers and peasants.

Bombay Poems

Anna Bhau Sathe minutely observed the lifestyle of Mumbai and tried to describe the life of workers in his poems. His poems related with Bombay presents two contrasting sides of life in Bombay – prosperity and poverty, dazzle and darkness, culture and cruelty. *Katha Mumbaichi (Tale of Bombay)* presents two sharply contrasting worlds that very much existed along with each other in Bombay. Through

this poem he wanted to show his fellow brothers the difference between two different worlds in Mumbai and how workers can unite to change this situation through Communist party's programmes. He also wrote *Mumbaichi Lavani (Poem of Bombay)* in 1949. This poem reflects the misery and destituteness of Bombay. In *Mumbaichi Lavani*, he wanted to tell workers that though so much disparity was there in Bombay, workers can unite under the banner of Red flag and workers revolution could take place. This poem reflects his positive approach towards the life and the problems which workers were facing. He wanted to give inspiration and strength to workers movement in Bombay which will lead to the communist revolution in India.

Novels

Anna Bhau Sathe wrote nearly about thirty-five novels. His novels are associated with different field such as adventures and courage, women's, peasants and workers problems, love and rural life. His most prominent novels are *Waranechya Khoryat (In the Valley of Warana)*, *Mangala*, *Fakira*, *Waranecha Wagh (Tiger of Warana)*, *Master (Teacher)*, *Dhund (Engrossed)*, *Agnidivya (Ordeal)*, *Chitra (Picturesque)*, *Chandan (Sandalwood)*, *Chikhalateel Kamal (Lotus in Mud)*, *Fulpakharoo (Butterfly)*, *Tila Lavite Mee Raktacha (I Put Gory Mark on Forehead)*, *Aavadi (Loved and Liked)*, *Vair (Feud)* and *Ratna (A Gem)* etc. Through these novels, he spread the philosophy of class- struggle by picturing the rural life, exploitation of landlords and moneylenders and struggle of workers and peasants against their exploitation. Number of his novels was used for movies, through which his work has reached to the larger section of society.

Conclusion

To sum up it can be observed that Anna Bhau Sathe was not a typical academic writer, but his pen analyzed and reflected the day-to-day realities and social interaction that made up his life as an activist. He united the workers and made them conscious about then contemporary socio- economic and political problems. As a worker himself, he was an ardent supporter of the workers' rights and his literature contributed to create class consciousness among the workers. He used various genre of literature to spread the ideology of Marxism among workers and transliterated into activism. His work reflects his life's experience. His literature becomes the catalyst for the reform, improving the workers' conditions and for taking up the issues. He used both the philosophies of Marxism and Ambedkarism and Caste-Class analysis in his writings to awaken the Indian working class. Both these schools of thought help to give the clear understanding of the struggles of the marginalized. The struggle which he highlighted was not only the struggle of workers alone, but it was the struggle of those people who were in the periphery. His

writings were not taken cognizance of for quite some time because of his acceptance of a political and economic ideology. i.e. Communism. Since he adhered to and very enthusiastically propagated Communist philosophy, majority of Marathi literary critics ignored his works and contribution to Dalit literature. However, he courageously withstood all this negligence and did not lose faith in himself as a writer. Due to this approach and positive attitude towards life he has been emerged as a prominent writer in Marathi literature as it was highlighted by Comrade S.A. Dange in ‘Anna Bhau Sathe Memorial Issue’ published by ‘Yugantar’ in November 1969. Dange explains that class consciousness was the characteristic of his writing.

Anna Bhau Sathe gave equal importance to both caste and class in India unlike the other writers. He opened up a mine of strikingly new themes and subjects in Marathi literature thereby making the centre of Marathi literature moved from urban middle class to the rural masses and there from to the erstwhile untouchables, dalits, nomads, tribals, workers, peasants etc. He followed the tradition of Karl Marx, Mahatma Phule, N. M. Lokhande and Dr. B. R Ambedkar and awakened the lower classes and workers through his writings. He blended both caste and class to understand the problems of the workers as he lived as worker and comes from untouchable castes. His writings reflect caste and class and the struggle which he highlighted are not only based on class but also on caste. These struggles were depicted in all his writings and varied forms of literature. Due to his performances of *Kala Pathak*, he reached out to all strata of Indian society. He devoted his entire life to spread the labour movement in India. He used his various forms of literature to sensitize the workers and blended his ideology of caste and class in Indian context. In Gramsci’s term, he was an ‘organic intellectual’ in real sense. Thus, his contribution to Indian labour movement should be included in the mainstream history of labour movement in India.

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