

ANNA BHAI SATHE'S THOUGHTS ON MARXISM

Dr. Dudhkawade Suresh Ramji

Head Of Department Political Science

Savitribai College Of Arts Pimpalgaon Pise

Abstract :

He was born on 1 August 1920, in Wategaon village, part of present-day Maharashtra's Sangli District to a family that belonged to the untouchable Matang caste, Annabhau Sathe, was a social reformer Communist folk poet, and writer from Maharashtra, India Sathe was a Dalit born into the Untouchable Mang community, and his upbringing and identity were central to his writing and political activism. Sathe was a Marxist-Ambedkarmosaic, initially influenced by the Communists but he later became an Ambedkar. He is credited as a founding father of Dalit Literature Sathe wrote 35 novels in the Marathi Language. They include Fakira (1959), which is in its 19th edition and received a state government award in 1961. Sathe's use of folkloric narrative styles like powada and lavani helped popularise and make his work accessible to many communities. In Fakira, Sathe portrays Fakira, the protagonist, revolting against the rural orthodox system and British Raj to save his community from utter starvation. The protagonist and his community are subsequently arrested and tortured by British officers, and Fakira is eventually killed by hanging. 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:

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 'StalingradchaPowada' (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 BhauSathe's Writings and Indian Labour Movement

Anna BhauSathe'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

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.

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 favourable 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 Gostha (Story of intelligence) and presented at the peasant conference at Titwala 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 easy, simple, jargon-free and understandable language and also to impress upon their minds their place in the process of social change. Expressed the grievances of workers and peasants and exposed the hypocrisy of Congress party, its capitalistic policies, feudalistic attitude and motivated the workers for Communist revolution.

Mazee Mumbai Arthat Mumbai Konachi? (My Mumbai means whose Mumbai) was written against the background of the issue 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.

Composition of Marxist Leanings

Anna BhauSathe composed many poems which had Marxist leanings. KamagarStavan (Praise of labourers) shows how worker is the real earth-mover and arch revolutionary 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. EkjutichaNeta (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 TuMarathmola, BolatKadaKapari, ShivariChala, DuniyechiDaulatSaari, TelashivayJalato Diva, LavadachaAikaParakar, ChiniJananchiMukti-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. 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 MumbaichiLavani (Poem of Bombay) in 1949. This poem reflects the misery and destituteness of Bombay. In MumbaichiLavani, 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

Conclusion

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. 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 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, 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.

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