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THE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TWO NOVELS 'SHEI SHOMOY' AND 'PROTHOM ALO' WRITTEN BY SUNIL GANGOPADHYAY

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Abstract- The qualitative content analysis of two novels '*SHEI SOMOY*' and '*PROTHOM ALO*' written by Sunil Gangopadhyay, a renowned Bengali writer aims to present the theme of Bengal Renaissance from a socio-historical-thematic perspective over a period of time through the eyes of historical figures and fictional protagonists vividly portrayed and described in the novel. In the novel '*SHEI SHOMOY*' Gangopadhyay depicts the time period between 1840-1870 where '*PROTHOM ALO*' is set at the turn of 20th century in Bengal. The main content of the novel '*SHEI SHOMOY*' is the socio-religious reforms and the emergence of 'Babu culture' which had picked up the height under the imperial ruling of the British East India Company. On the backdrop of the Bengal Renaissance and the 1857 uprising the narrative of this award-winning novel follows fortunes of two families; the Mukherjee's and the Singha's, the landed aristocrats and the native intelligentsia, slowly awakens to its social obligations. '*PROTHOM ALO*' is not a mere sequel of the novel *SHEI SHOMOY* but there is a continuity of time. It is a rich and comprehensive portrait of Bengal, from its sleepy slow-changing villages to the bustling city of Calcutta (Kolkata) where political-consciousness has emerged and taken the form of national-consciousness.

Keywords - Bengal Renaissance, Socio-religious reforms, Babu culture, 1857 uprising, National consciousness

Introduction - The novel '*SHEI SHOMOY*' presents a thematic study of the Bengal Renaissance which is marked as the 'pre-political' phase of 'anti-colonial struggle'¹. It is often attributed as the preliminary stage of the modern age which is dominated by the cultural encounter. In a historical sense, Bengal has been looked up by the historians as the harbinger of modernity in the subcontinent. Fortified with western education, Bengal has witnessed an intellectual awakening that deserves to be called a Renaissance (in European style) in contemporary thoughts and the liberal arts. This segment seeks to analyse socio-historical questions regarding Renaissance which Gangopadhyay has highlighted in the novel. Here, the author stressed on the dominant role played by the native intelligentsia in the discourse of intellectual-social upliftment. He focuses on some notable Renaissance minds (who are the prominent historical figures) and their radical social institutions (Brahma Samaj 1828, Hindu School and College 1817); Raja Rammohun Roy (1774-1833), Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831), Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891), Michael Madhusudan Dutta(1824-1873), Dwarka Nath Tagore(1794-1846) and Debendranath Tagore(1817-1905), Harish Mukherjee, Keshab Chandra Sen(1838-1884), David Hare(1775-1842), John Bentham (1801-1851) etc. The author put the theme of Bengal Renaissance into a broad framework of nationalism or the national struggle (against the imperial ruling). In the novel '*PROTHOM ALO*' Gangopadhyay presents a nationalist imagining called the 'inner spiritual

¹ Anti-colonial struggle: <https://globalsouthstudies.as.virginia.edu>

domain' (Partha Chatterjee) which was a crucial sphere where the essence of indigenous cultural identity could be celebrated in order to project a 'self-fulfilling identity. Author has mentioned that due to the spread of western education the news of revolutionary movements all over the world have come to the forefront. It helped to raise the awareness (national-consciousness) among the middle-class people. The novel touches upon the lives of men and women rising to the call of nationalism, the poets, doctors, scientists, religious reformers determined to pull their land out of the morass of superstitious and blind beliefs. It also sheds light on the growing Theatre movement² of Bengal. Hence, a contextual comparative analysis of two novels presents a major vehicle and expressions of Bengal Renaissance; these are summarized in the following section ---
-----The appearance of a large number of newspapers and periodicals (Sangbad Prabhakar, Tattobodhini etc) , the growth of numerous societies and associations (The Brahma Samaj 1828, Asiatic Society 1784, Sanskrit College 1824), a number of reform movements both religious and social, a diverse intellectual inquiry and more importantly a trend towards 'Bourgeoisie Hinduism'³

Consciousness at its simplest is an awareness of internal or external existence. Self-consciousness is a heightened sense of self-awareness. It is a preoccupation with oneself as opposed to the philosophical state of self-awareness. Historically, the consciousness on self-identity leads to the idea of national-consciousness which is a shared sense of national-identity. In the Indian context, it is argued that Bengal Renaissance acts as a ground-stage to achieve national-sovereignty hence, it led towards the national freedom struggle movement against the British imperialism. Within the framework of 'colonial-modernity'⁴ when every response as a condition of colonial subjugation has been dominated the discourses concerning modern India the sudden emerging native-intelligentsia started engaging in the discourses through which they could claim their representation in the colonial-paradigm. This awaking or self-consciousness about own identity is often attributed as the intellectual and cultural 'efflorescence' which is associated with the socio-religious reforms. Although these reforms are indeed initiated by individuals, the then existing socio-political circumstances and the western education system had left a major impact on the discourses of the individuals.

In the novel 'SHEI SHOMOY' Sunil Gangopadhyay presents the life-story of some historical figures (bourgeoisie Hindus as well as some sympathetic British officials) whose contributions towards social-change are unforgettable. Influenced by the scientific knowledge of the western education and English literatures these learned native intellectual minds had started to raise questions against the dogmas and beliefs which the then existing society (particularly the Bengal) preserved. The new intellectual advancement of European knowledge may be argued to have affected the contemporary minds and their lives radically. Hence, the idea of Renaissance is considered as 'synonymous with modernization or revitalization' (David Kopf).

² Theatre movement: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>

³ Bourgeoisie Hinduism : Brain A. Hatcher

⁴ Colonial modernity : <https://journals.sagepub.com> 'Colonial Modernity and Methodological Nationalism', Sujata Patel

In the novel 'PROTHOM ALO' Gangopadhyay put the theme of Bengal Renaissance into a broad framework of nation and nationalism. Historical notables had the whole 'humanity' (Thomas Pantham) as their audience. They offered the orientation for the resolution not merely of some exclusively regional predicaments or problems but of national-wide historical dogmas and miseries. Hence this is how national-sensibility emerges from the cocoon of self-consciousness towards national-consciousness. In the two novels Gangopadhyay depicts their (native intellectuals as well as some British officials) own interpretations of history, conceptions of man, vision of a good life, views on freedom of state, democracy, violence, human unity, ecological problems, means-end relationship and political-reality. In the novel 'SHEI SHOMOY' these perspectives later offered a mirror to look at the nation-wide predicaments and played a crucial role in the emergence of anti-imperialist struggle against the exploitation. In 'PROTHOM ALO' Gangopadhyay presents the scenario of 'Swadeshi movement'⁵ where women, students and a large section of urban and rural population of Bengal and other parts of India became actively involved in politics for the first time. The next half a decade saw the emergence of almost all the major political trends of the Indian national movement. From conservative moderation to political extremism, from revolutionary nationalism to incipient socialism, from petitioning and public speeches to passive resistance and boycott. All had their origins in the richness of the awareness towards national identity which saw a breakthrough in the socio-religious reforms and self-consciousness towards own life during the period of Bengal Renaissance. Gangopadhyay put the novel to an end before 1911. Here, it is noted that consciousness is related to miseries and exploitation which Bengal had been experiencing since so long until a group of individuals took the initiative to change the then existing social order. Hence, these initiatives later galvanized millions of people of all classes and ideologies into political action which was a result of an awareness towards the idea of sovereign nation and brought to its knees a mighty colonial empire. It is often argued that, in the primary stage, consciousness was confined into the boundaries of elite class who were Western educated Hindu Bourgeoisie but afterwards Indian national movement is 'perhaps one of the best examples of the creation of an extremely wide movement with a common aim in which diverse political and ideological currents could co-exist and work' (Bipan Chandra). *IN A CONVENTIONAL WAY 'BLASPHEMY' IS AN ACT OF INSULTING OR SHOWING CONTEMPT OR LACK OF REVERENCE FOR GOD OR SHOWING IRREVERENCE TOWARDS SOMETHING CONSIDERED SACRED OR INVIOLEABLE. IN THE TWO NOVELS SUNIL GANGOPADHYAY HAD DELIBERATELY USED THE METHOD CALLED 'BLASPHEMY' IN ORDER TO PROJECT THOSE HISTORICAL FIGURES AND FICTIONAL PROTAGONISTS WITHOUT ANY 'PRIDE AND PREJUDICE'⁶. HERE, HE PRESENTS THE LIFE-STRUGGLE OF EACH CHARACTER WHETHER IT'S A HISTORICAL FIGURE OR A FICTIONAL NOTABLE WHO WERE DETERMINED TO ACHIEVED THEIR PRE-DECIDED GOALS. THE AUTHOR GIVES*

⁵ Swadeshi Movement : Bipan Chandra , 'The Swadeshi Movement – 1903-1908', INDIA,S STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

⁶ Novel by Jane Austin.

THEM FLEXIBLE LIFE-STYLES BY RUBBING OUT THE HISTORICAL ATTRIBUTES. HENCE, THE IMPERSONAL INTERACTIONS AMONG THE CHARACTERS AND THE USING OF DIALOGUES ARE NOT SUBJECTED TO BE ANALYSED BECAUSE THESE TWO ARE HISTORICAL-FICTIONAL NOVELS, HENCE, THE AUTHOR HAS THE FULL FREEDOM TO INTERPRET IT IN HIS OWN WAY.

HISTORY OFTEN REMEMBERS THE NOTICEABLE FACTS AND PERSONS AND PUT THEM ABOVE THE PEDESTALS. GANGOPADHYAY DERIVED THEM FROM THE HIGH DESK AND PUT THEM DOWN TO THE STREETS OF KOLKATA. IN TODAY'S ACADEMICS 'OBJECTIVITY' IS UNDER SUSPECT. HERE, GANGOPADHYAY'S TREATMENT OF MEN, MATTERS AND EVENTS ADOPTS A FAIR-MINDED AND NON-PARTISAN APPROACH. HIS HEROES AND VILLAINS DO NOT FALL INTO PREDICTABLE RACIAL STEREOTYPES.

IN THE NOVEL 'SHEI SHOMOY' HE PAINTED SOME EUROPEAN CHARACTERS SUCH AS DAVID HARE, JOHN BENTHAM who are gracious in nature and sympathetic towards Indian cause just as there were wicked Englishmen who comprise the bulk of trading and missionary classes. Vidyasagar, the greatest product of the age was oriental in his scholarship and dress but radically western / English influenced in his reformist thought. Even when the government was on its way to establish the Sanskrit College⁷, it encountered opposite from Rammohun Roy, a notable social reformist. He opposed the idea on the ground that Sanskrit learning was dry and lacked relevance to the modern practice and culture. Gangopadhyay explicitly explained how the puranic tales went through a considerable transformation under the light of western thought in the writings of Michael.M. Dutta who was a great poem of his age. At the end of novel His fictional protagonist, Nobinkumar accepted his dilemma about life. Even portraying of Debendranath Tagore at drinking wine, nationalist Haris Chandra Mukherjees' frequently visiting at the prostitute's house gives a different dimension to the novel. Hence, author shows that the descriptions of good and bad are unduly subjection. In 'PROTHOM ALO' Gangopadhyay describes the bustling city of Calcutta which was emerging from the sleepy slow-changing villages. He further narrates the young and old lives in Calcutta, who had contributed in reforming the society or had witnessed the transformation. Prominent among its many characters are Rabindranath Tagore or Robi⁸, the young dreamy poet, torn between his art or artistic creations and mundane duties as a son, as a lover, as a husband expressed his dilemma about life and uncertainty. Gangopadhyay put him down from the pedestal where Bengali often place him and vividly mentioned about his faults to take apt decisions at the needful time, complete ignorance towards his wife and children, his involvement in the dowry system despite of writings against this evil system, his professional ego clash with Vivekananda etc and made a so called 'common man'. There was dynamic Naren Dutta, later to become Swami Vivekananda, who abandons his 'Brahmo Samaj' learnings and surrendered himself completely to his guru, Sri Ramakrishna Dev.

⁷ Sanskrit College: It was founded on 1st January 1824, during the Governor-Generalship of Lord Amherst in Kolkata.

⁸ Robi is the nickname of Rabindranath Tagore.

The novel also throws light on the growing Theatre movement of Bengal with its brilliant actors and actresses who leave behind the squalor of their lives every night to deliver lines breath-taking in their beauty. The gloomy dark secret has been revealed by Gangopadhyay's narrative. Through all this runs the story of *Bharat* and *Bhumisuta*, one an illegitimate prince, the other a slave who rises to become the finest actress of her age, who clinged to their self-respect and love in the then society which had little time and space for people like them. Applying the method called '*Blasphemy*' these two semi-historical novels touches upon the lives of the men and women rising to the call of nationalism ; the doctors , scientists , poets , teachers (Professors) , reformers , western educated elites , zamindars and the local kings of the then existing British Provinces determined to pull their land out of the morass of superstition and blind beliefs. In the course of doing so they often committed mistakes, misinterpreted by conservatives yet they achieved their predetermined goals. As is always the case when someone rises to power, we seek to turn him into either hero or villain. They are not superheroes but they determined to change the then existing evil in the society. They are not villains as well but they have had villainous moments.

Conclusion- the work seems to churn out the symbiotic relationship between the then occurring socio-religious reforms ('*SHEI SHOMOY*') and the emerging cultural-political consciousness ('*PROTHOM ALO*') which was the direct consequence of that reformation period , these two semi-historical novels aim to depict an account on how the comprehensive fields of literature , philosophy , science , politics and social reforms have been engrossed into the rice cultural heritage since the time of Bengal Renaissance through the notable contributions of historical figures (both Indian as well as foreigners specially the British one) and fictional protagonists. In these two novels Gangopadhyay pushes himself beyond the frontiers of the 'well-made novel' into the fascinating world of family, period history, reportage, travel narrative, folklore and ethnography. Involving cultural memory and a vestige of history he offers a new understanding of the Indian colonial past. This paper is an attempt to do a contextual content analysis of the two Bengali classics in order to assert the mutual relationship between the self-consciousness and national-consciousness which were the gradual consequence of Bengal Renaissance. There are some questions which has divided the community of Indian historians and cultural critics for decades; these are ---- was the Bengal Renaissance the seed-time of nationalistic favour that culminated in the Swadeshi movement? Was it more in the nature of an enlightenment or was it a form of religious revivalism or Hindu nationalism? Gangopadhyay does not claim to have the final answers. This paper seems to give a fair answer by attributing Bengal Renaissance as the inaugural stage to achieve country's sovereignty. Focused on the Renaissance period (the crucial decades between 1840-70) Gangopadhyay maintains that history in the conventional sense is not central to his writings though these two novels '*SHEI SHOMOY*' and '*PROTHOM ALO*' are a careful and admirable reconstruction of the past with an eye for 'cultural nuances'. Even though there has been tremendous amount of work on the Bengal Renaissance, this study aims to reconstruct the culture of consciousness during that period which still continues to encourage progress in different areas.

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