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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF VAIKOM MOHAMMED BASHEER AND SAADATH HASAN MANTO WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SHORT STORIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to analyze two of the prominent literary figures of Urdu and Malayalam, Saadath Hasan Manto and Vaikom Mohammed Basheer who in spite of belonging to two different linguistic families have much in common. Both were acclaimed excellent as craftsmen of short stories in their respective languages. This paper examines the similarities and contrasts between Manto and Basheer. It is observed that the portrayals of characters by both writers are realistic. Further, both writers have made an indepth analysis of the human psyche, especially of women. Most of Manto's works reflect Freudian thoughts, while Basheer's works comprise an in-depth observation on human psychology without its sexual aspects.

Introduction

The tradition of comparing the works of contemporary writers has been prevalent in Urdu literature for quite sometime now. This practice often leads to the poets ending up in being rivals like Anees and Dabeer, Ghalib and Zauq, Mir Hasan and Daya Sanker Naseem, Mir Aman and Surur, Mulla Wojhi and Gawwasi. The evolution of comparative literature has made it easier to compare the literary figures and their works. One of its advantages is that it enables us to perceive the thoughts and perspectives of writers from closer quarters. In fact, comparative literature should facilitate analytical and critical understanding of diverse cultures, language and literature. In this context, the particular paper is obviously pertinent from an academic point of view since there are commonalities in different cultures in spite of their apparent divergences.

This paper therefore seeks to analyze two of the prominent literary figures of Urdu and Malayalam, Saadath Hasan Manto and Vaikom Mohammed Basheer who in spite of belonging to two different linguistic families have much in common. Both were acclaimed excellent as craftsmen of short stories in their respective languages. I would like to look into each of these similarities and contrasts in Manto and in Basheer.

Manto and Basheer: Similarities and Differences

To begin with, in the portrayal of characters both of these writers are realistic. There are many realistic elements in their work. Manto, for example commented:

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"If you want to be familiar with the times, then you must read my short stories. If you are not able to tolerate these stories it means the times are unbearable. Any shortcomings of mine should not be attributed to me but to the age. There are no defects in my stories. The defects attributed to my works are basically the flaws of the system."

(Lizzathe Sang- Manto P 20)

Like, Manto, the stories of Basheer are rooted in reality. Both are adept in portraying the complexities of life with great subtlety.

The elements of realism in Basheer's story are best reflected in his story 'Birth day'. In his story, he narrates the tale of an educated young man who was unemployed. He comes to the city in search of a job. In spite of searching for several days he fails to find a job. During this period he was forced to borrow money from the hotel boy and on his birthday, hunger-striken he is forced to steal the food kept at the neighbour's door step. Tonight man in the neighbourhood returns after dinner and offers the same food to the unemployed young man. When he knocks at the door the unemployed young man's stomach suddenly grumbles with nervousness. He feels then that all the food has been digested. And so his birthday passes.

'Hunger' and 'A man' are stories by Basheer with identical strand of thought. Dr.M.P.Paul, an eminent critic of Basheer made a relevant remark regarding the theme of his works:

"This is a page torn from life, around which you can find blood dripping ''

(Balyakalasakhi-Basheer P-8)

In the works of both these writers' there are frequent references to prostitutes. They delve into inner life and the psyche of prostitutes. They have revealed the real woman inherent in these prostitutes. Perhaps these pioneering works sympathize with the marginalized sections of people. The delineation of the life of the prostitute can also be noticed in Basheer's stories such as 'Tara Specials', 'Sounds', 'Hungry', 'Prostitute of the poor' etc. and in the short stories like 'Black Salwar', Insult, A bulb of 100 watts, Sarada, Burmi girl, Qadira Butcher etc of Saadath Hasan Manto. They address intricate problems faced by women, such as sexual anxieties, anticipatory anxieties and fear of impending old age.

Both the writers have ventured to make an in-depth analysis of the human psyche especially of women. The works of these writers have been labeled obscene which has directly affected the reputation of these writers. Manto has been subjected to legal trial on this account. His works like Odour, Cold meat, smoke, Open up etc were criticized and he was sued for the obscenity in these works. Vaikom Mohammed Basheer's Sounds, Hungry etc have been strongly criticized for pornography, too.

The subtle differences between Manto and Basheer are equally striking. Most of Manto's works reflect Freudian thoughts. However, works, psycho analytical thoughts of Freud do not seem to have influenced Basheer's works. Nevertheless, Basheer's works comprise an indepth observation on human psychology without its sexual aspects.

Manto and Basheer, during the initial days of their writing career focused on bringing about a social transformation in the society and they reflected their spirit for freedom struggle. Both had been associated with the socialist movement. Basheer had been arrested for his association with the freedom movement. His ideas have been informed by a terrorist movement like that of Bagat Singh. He expressed his resentment against British rule in his stories and essays.

Manto assumed the pseudonym Mufakkir and Comrade in his early period. In this period the major topics of his writings were freedom fighting, progressive movement and revolution. Bloody spit, Ji aaya Sahab, Revolution, Mad poet, Testing of strength etc. were primary examples for this style of writing.

Sex and hunger are two driving forces of human life. The realistic artists, who present real life, usually discuss explicitly the theme along with the related topic of hunger. Man usually embraces the pure love caught in the web of sex. In Basheer's story 'the first kiss', a character gives a first kiss to a girl. When an artist heard this, he asks ''how do you know, you gave the first kiss to that girl? What kinds of proof do have you that you are the first person to give the first kiss to your beloved or wife?" Is pure love only imagination? In fact this is a realistic question.

In the story 'Heaven of idiots' Basheer presents sex with purity. The character 'I' went to a prostitute with passionate sexual feeling. When he heard her story from her, his feeling of id subsides and awakens his humanity. 'He abandons all his money and goes outside from there without any word….strange life! She, her mother, father and corpse like children…. When he is going, he thinks. Why does it happen like this? Is that lady who was looking at me with the gaze of piercinging my heart? How can she love?

We can see the same topic in the short story 'Cold meat' of S.H.Manto. The character of this story Isharsingh kidnaps the young girl when he loots with sexual feeling at the time of riots. But when he tries to rape the girl he identifies that she has died with fear. There the feeling of humanism awakes. When he tries many times to have intercourse with his beloved Kalwant Kaur, he fails and he dies by Kalwant Kaur.

Generally realistic artists create gloomy atmosphere. They show the dark side of life. Manto and Basheer control gloomy atmosphere with the help of comedy. The characters of their stories are bad, but we can perceive the humanity of light coming out of their mind. In Manto's characters Isharsingh, Babu Gopinth, Sahaye and Mozel and In Basheer's stories the characters, the pick pocketer of the story 'A man', Abdurrazak of 'Justice' are notable.

Both Manto and Basheer described the city life and its complications. But innocence and love are reflected in their characters.

The short stories of both writers reflect the autobiographical color. Sometimes the writer directly becomes the characters of the stories and sometimes he becomes the first person by presenting his experiences. While reading their stories we get more information about many sides

of their personalities and life. According to K.M. Tharakan, ‘‘Basheer differs from the other writers because of his extra ordinary personality and unique intelligence. It is like butter in milk,

only one difference, we can separate butter from milk, but if we try thousand times we cannot separate Basheer from his works.” (Anugraheethanaya Basheer P-8)

It is also a wonderful comparison that two of them were run away from house in their childhood.

Both of them were associated with film industry. Basheer’s stories Blue light, Walls, World renounce nose, Shashinaz, Childhood friend etc. were made as films. Manto wrote many stories and screen plays for films and become famous. His most famous film was Mirza Ghalib.

Conclusion

Briefly V.M. Basheer is not only a stylist of Malayalam literature but also the creator of unique manner. Another difference is the milieu of Manto’s writing is the social and psychological life of Indian subcontinent. Basheer described the Muslim social life of Kerala. Basheer often becomes a mystic or sufi. One more thing is that Basheer looked at life in a positive manner and he presented it the same way. Manto presented the positive aspect of a negative world.

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