

KAURAV SABHA-DISCOURSE OF MAMMON POWER

--Dr.Kesar Singh Kesar

Translated from Punjabi

by **Inder Singh Khamosh**

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Mitter Sain Meet's new Novel *Kaurav Sabha* though published after a decade from his previous two Novels, *Tafteesh* and *Katehra* but like those Novels, its subject matter and locale are concerned with the ill-reputed performance of the Punjab Police and the corrupt position of the present judicial system. The main reason for this is that Meet himself is a Public Prosecutor and has intimate experience of this field. He has already succeeded in establishing his distinctive position in the world of Punjabi Novel by expressing his unique experience in the fictional form about a decade ago. But *Kaurav Sabha* despite being intimately related to his previous two novels in the matter of contents, adds a distinctive dimension to this intimacy because it is not only a narrative of corruption, but is an explanation of mammon power also. This novel being better than his previous two novels in its immensity of narrative canvas, density of its theme, purity of lingual style and the totality of the created situation, is an evident proof of the evolution of Meet's art of novel writing.

By the totality of the created situation I mean that this novel has been created in the atmosphere of spiderly dragnet woven with the threatening attitude and mammon power entangled in which the people of middle and working class have also started giving preference to the corrupt and inhuman values.

The name of the novel *Kaurav Sabha* not only symbolizes the present inhuman character of the situation, but also stands for the picture of corrupt judiciary supporting the intents of the capitalistic class. In the narrative of the novel the illusion to the war of Mahabharata with reference to the characters of Daropati, Bhima, Dhritrasha, Gandhari, Abhimannu provide such a historical prospect to the novel, which extends its canvas to the ancient distant dimensions.

Studying this novel from this prospect we gain an awareness that from days of princely Republic of Kauravas till the present bourgeois democracy, the political trickery, moral depravity, greed, violence and corruption have gained quantitative development and no qualitative change has happened in the Indian Culture of the upper classes, because the economic political structure has been based on the rational of exploitation. In the novel the business families of Ved and Mohan seem to be the successors of inhuman tradition of Kaurav-Pandavas. This is the importance of the use of thematic and motifs of the Mahabharata in the narration of the Novel. For example in them Mahabharata the division of land was the main reason of war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. In the same way the legal

battle between Mohan family(Pankaj and Neeraj) starts because of the possession of a thousand yard plot of land. In the Mahabharata as the fight was between the same family and the same tribe, so here in the novel also the fight is between two parties of the same family and the same class. As the narration of the Mahabharata in the narrative form of the class- war, similarly in Meet's Kaurav Sabha the narrative creation is the changed form of class struggle. Though this struggle is between the two parties of the same class, not between two different classes, yet the characters belonging to middle and working classes with their participation in this battle turn the internal conflict of the capitalistic class into the external struggle between the oppressing or inhuman classes and the oppressed or human classes.

As in the Mahabharata the Kauravas resolve to destroy the Pandavas with their state, property and muscle powers, in the same way the nephews of Ved (Pankaj and Neeraj) decide to teach their uncle a lesson by purchasing the political leaders, police officers and employees, lawyers, judges, doctors and the Bhaya labourers with their money-power and succeed in using them in their favour, the present political, intellectual and physical forces. An advance of one lakh rupees given to the Bhaya-labourers, the money-power is converted into muscle power with which they launch an armed attack on Ved's bungalow, in which Ved and his wife Neelam are mercilessly beaten, his son (Kamal) murdered and his daughter (Neha) raped and valuable articles of the house are plundered. This dreadful criminal incident is the first scene of the novel in which four offences of Indian Penal Code (beating, murder, rape and dacoity) are committed together. This criminal incident is the axis around which the whole narrative of the novel revolves. This incident further expands in the whole narration, because of which the narrative creation does not remain linear and simple but becomes intricate subtle and spiral. After this incident the whole narrative of the novel is directed to show how the mammon power is used to achieve legal victory over the party deficient in money power by corrupting the Chief Minister and his guards, the I.G. Police and the clerks of Police Station, the witness and the doctors, the lawyers and the judges.

One more motif of the Mahabharata is visible in this novel. As Krishna, brother of Arjan's wife and believe to be an incarnate of wisdom, truth and honesty is standing by the Pandavas in the battle of Kurukshetra, similarly Ram Nath, brother of Ved's wife (Neelam) though financially weak is whole heraldry supporting the plaintiff with his legal wisdom, truth and honesty in the legal battle.

My purpose to search traditions of the Mahabharata in the narrative of Kaurav Sabha is not to explain the meaning of the novel, but actually it is to lay stress on that narrative of Kaurav Sabha which relates the meaning of mammon power to the gigantic truth of class-struggle of human history beyond our time.

Ram Nath can be called the central character of this novel, but Meet's focus of fictional vision is concentrated on the description of collective characterization of groups instead of the description of individual characters. The Victim Welfare Society under the leadership of a young lawyer Harish Rai is with Ram Nath. Some of Ved's relatives are helping him. Neha is also a member of some religious association (Yuva Shakti), which gives her moral support. Her correspondent friend (Sagar) being representative of many newspapers, publishes news in the press in support of Ved-family. Kamal's University Students Union gives a call for strike, as a result of which the common people of the city show sympathy with Ved-family. If this whole multitude may be called the hero of the novel, then the other party can be termed as villain party, which includes main offenders Pankaj and Neeraj and their purchased supporters such as the police, the doctors, the lawyers, judges and many other characters. There is a crowd of character in this novel. So instead of their individual characterization, their multitudinous characters are depicted as judges, lawyers, doctors, middlemen, mercenary criminals, corrupt-policeman, politicians, plaintiff and the accused all are mass-character.

The characterization and narrative style of Meet's this novel is different and distinctive from the style of Taftesh and Ketehra', Prof. T.R. Vinod using a symbolical world taunt (mashkari) has said, "In Taftesh the novelist has made the Initial stage of judicial process as the subject matter of this novel and in Ketehra this judicial phenomenon has been subjected to critical scrutiny. As I have already said that from the point of view of subject matter Kaurav Sabha is the third link in the chain of previous two novels, but it is not written in Taunt Style, but its style can be termed as Dialectical-style, because conflict/battle/struggle is its subject matter, so this style is similar to that of the narrative of balladry (VAR). Most of the Punjabi novels have been written in the narrative style of legends or folktales in verse, but Meet's this novel come in the category of Balladry style.

Being a narrative of an open-end, the novel by no means can be called a tragedy, because in the end, though the so called weak and aggrieved party is defeated in the legal battle, yet it does not accept its defeat. The possibilities to keep the battle continue are still present there. Ram Nath's firmness, Nand Lal's repentance, lawyers' social service society, Neha's decision to become a lawyer, sympathy of the students and the people provide sufficient ground to keep the victim party firm no to yield. In my opinion the tragic impression, sarcasm, irony and satire with their conveyance of purpose succeed to create a sense of satisfaction and a feeling of aesthetic pleasure, but the style of Kaurav Sabha with the fictional transformation of the whole situation through the multi-dimensional information to the social culture and judicial system creates an aesthetic pleasure of knowledge and uneasiness in the mind of the reader. This pleasure of Kaurav

Sabha is the pleasure of uneasiness and the knowledge of truth of the wide spread depravity and corruption of the social-moral values of the present legal and judicial system. This uneasiness does not give the reader any mental peace and satisfaction and keeps his consciousness awake and animated for a long time. Thus the novel succeeds in its purpose.

After Kaurav Sabha another important signifier of this novel is Maya Nagar, the Mammon city, which represents the distinguishing features of the local situation. It resembles with the Ludhiana city - the factories, hospitals, university, courts, political leaders, police officers, judges, doctors, lawyers, immigrant Bhaiya labourers, all seem like those of Ludhiana, but the terming it as Maya Nagar has transformed it into such a fictional concept that its symbolical meanings have expanded to the capitalistic society of the world. The Maya (money) is the only identity of this society. The narrator at one place in the novel indicates this distinguishing feature.

(Ih Maya nagri see, ithe sabh rishte maya duale ghumde sun).

This was the Mammon City. Here all the relations resolved round money.

At another place one character says to another character. "Everything is possible. Money has great power."

The law is its slave.

(Sab no janda hai, Paise wich barhi takat hai. Kanoon is da gulam hai)

With the power of money Pankaj, Neeraj are able to turn falsehood into truth and truth into falsehood. When an honest judge (Sadhu Singh) rejects their bail application and orders them to be locked up in jail, they succeed to be declared as heart-patient by generously bribing the doctors and comfortably live in the rooms of private nursing home and run their business from there as if they are living in their own house and claim money from the government spent on their false disease. But in the same Maya Nagar there is an association of honest lawyers, students union, Harish Rai, Sadhu Singh, Udham Singh etc. representing humanitarian force, which combat violence with non-violence, money with organisation, defeat with hope, depravity with morality and terror with moral force. It was but natural that the end of this multi-dimensional and multi-layered narrative of struggle between the negative and positive forces would have remained open.

In order to shape his narrative into more than one dimension and many thematic layers and to provide it with an expansive and dense structure, the novelist has divided it into three parts. The criminal incident happened in the first part, becomes a story of criminal trial in the next parts. This story is very short but its narration is very lengthy and forceful. From the point of view of the story it seems there is a lot of repetition in the novel, but when the layers of the narrative are unfolded, the repetition does not seem unnecessary. The financial, physical and mental agony of the aggrieved characters, hired criminals, terror, corruption,

conflict between the Law and Human values, the proximity and estrangement of relations etc, there are so many small and big thematic details organized and interwoven in the narrative. Due to these details, despite the repetition in the story, the totality of the reality of life has been created so artistically that the curiosity and interest of the reader remain till the case is not finally decided. But the basis of curiosity is not presentation of reality in a strange and extra ordinary manner, because the reality presented is the same as we daily read in newspapers and view on T.V. In this nothing is strange for the reader. Property disputes, murder, dowries, corruption, criminal cases etc. everything is the same which daily happens in our homes. This reality is such for which the reader can have no curiosity to know. The reader loses his interest to know the final decision of the case when the novelist in the very start says. "The law favours the accused. It acquits him giving him the benefit of doubt. This case will also meet the same end." (page 31)

(Kanoon doshian di pith palosda hai. Shak da fayada deke bari kar dinda hai. Is case da iho hashar hon wala hai)

The only curiosity of the reader is to know how all this will happen and how truth of the aggrieved party will complete with the legal falsehood. The novelist organises the conflict of the parties in his narrative in such a way that nothing happens according to the well thought out schemes of any party. Although the final decision of the case is in favour of the accused party, yet there are many turns and twists in the narrative where the hope of the reader for justice is revived. Afraid of the press reporters when the Chief Minister reprimands the police officer, the police acts against the guilty persons. The judge Sadhu Singh does not grant bail to Pankaj, Neeraj and Pancham. The conscience of the lawyer Nand Lal awakens and he refuses to plead the case of the accused. On such occasions, the reader feels that the case will be decided in favour of the aggrieved party. Bound by this curiosity the reader can not leave the novel and goes on reading it and consequently he acquaints himself with the intricacies of the colonial law, the discretions and compulsions of judges, the revalues and fake discussions of the lawyer, puzzling difficulties of court cases, needless inconveniences in hospitals. This is the achievement and aesthetic quality of this novel. Actually the sensible readers already knew the final decision and the same happened.

The capitalist conspirators (Pankaj - Neeraj) are acquitted. The murderers and looters are sentenced to imprisonment three years each, of which the period of two years has already passed and the remaining one year imprisonment is exempted by the Government as a mark of relief of some day of celebration. The aesthetic quality of the novel lies in demonstrating how the court case reach its final decision.

Hearing the decision, Neha is stunned. She is unable to understand anything. The lawyer Harish Chander expresses sympathy with her and explains her meaning of the decision. The aggrieved party is in hospital and the accused are going home in a mood of jubilation. Neha's maternal uncle (the Central Character of the novel) speaks to her "Have courage my dear daughter. The decision of this court is not final. We will appeal to the higher courts." And the narrator comments, "Ram Nath said these words to console Neha, but he knew that in the higher courts the same thing will happen" (the last sentence of the novel) (Neha da man rakkan lae Ram Nath ne Akhia Zaroor, Unjh Usnoo pata si upper vee iho kujh hon wala si)

With the last dialogues and sentences and the demonstration of the created reality Mitter Sain Meeta has served the ideology to meet its doom. The ideology of the characters struggling for truth and justice is permeated in the novel from the beginning to the end which relates it to the outer socio-political system and taking the reader out of disappointment, gives direction to him and inspires him to do something. This ideology is of non-violent struggle.

The ideology of peaceful, non violent struggle is revealed through the narrative of the conflict between the weak and mighty. The message-continue your struggle during the depressing and disappointing situations is clearly revealed from the narrative of the novel and this message is not in the form of any sermon. This ideology under the present socio-political circumstances, prescribes the limitations of strategy of peaceful class struggle. The courts, social service societies, organized peaceful movements and sympathy of the people, are the main weapon of this struggle. The sensible and conscientious persons like Ram Nath, Harish Rai, Udham Singh and Neha, the organizations like Victim Welfare Society, peaceful agitation's like student's strikes are the forces to use these weapons. But the limitation of this ideology is that it is an ideology of social reformation only not that of social revolution. This limitation is jointly prescribed by the novelist's fictional vision and the social reality created by him.

Matching with the novel's urban locale and intellectual or educated environment writer's style is essay-type and his language is standard and idiomatic Punjabi, Contrary to the novels created depicting the rural environment, the writer of this novel avoids the use of any dialect or idiolect of any individual character and he has consciously kept the novel free from any lingual romance. He has not used the allusive language of the police, Hindi-Punjabi mixed language of Bhaiyas and English-dominated language of the lawyers and judges. In place of use of language according to the professions of the characters, he has used their good and bad actions to depict them according to their collective character.

Mitter Sain Meeta not only satirizes the reality of the forces of established capitalistic society compassing it with the reality of ancient Kaurav

Sabha but also dissect their corrupt culture. This novel successfully exposes injustice done under the cover of justice, un-harnessed lawlessness of the vested interests under cover of administrative arrangements and violation of individual rights under the cover of protection of human rights.

The novel lawyers, corrupt political readers, the capitalists, transforming the poverty of the Bhaiyas labourers into crimes, the middlemen and brokers taking full advantage of the Consumer-Culture and the chaotic injustice practiced by all these elements, has been exposed in this novel.

It is for the first time that such a strong effort has been made in any Punjabi Novel to depict a complete picture of the forces, which are busy in doing efforts to re-establish human values by stopping the injustice done by anti-human, anti-social forces. In order to visualize the complete and gigantic stature of this demonic picture it will be more interesting if the Kaurav Sabha is read alongwith Taftesh and Katehra.

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