



Life and Works of Jhaverchand Meghani

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ABSTRACT

In present study “Hu pahad nu balak”. (I am the child of mountain) - Jhaverchand Meghani. In 1918, in the shadow of the Russian revolution and during the advent of the Gandhian Era, a freshly graduated Gujarati young man migrated to Kolkata and found work in aluminum factory. As a child, he was an ardent admirer of the duha- battles raging between young cowherds or between aged farmers. Like all mountain creatures, he feasted on the duha-soratha poetry as ravishingly as he relished Banyan figs and wild berries and other exotic dry fruit products of the mountains. During the childhood Meghani acquired popularity as Villapi because he was writing sad songs.

Introduction

“Hu pahad nu balak”. (I am the child of mountain) - Jhaverchand Meghani. In 1918, in the shadow of the Russian revolution and during the advent of the Gandhian Era, a freshly graduated Gujarati young man migrated to Kolkata and found work in aluminum factory. For three years, he earnestly engrossed in diligent work. In his spare moments, he soaked himself in the torrents of the literary renaissance sweeping Bengal. He learnt Bengali, came under the

direct influence of great litterateurs like Tagore and Dwijendra and institutions like Brahmosamaj. The impact of folklore on the Bengali intellectuals fascinated him and made him wonder about the possibilities of exploring the rich folk-literature of his native region Saurashtra, in his own words ‘a peninsula of hoary antiquity on the westernmost shores of India’. Unable to contain his zeal, one morning he handed in his papers of resignation to the owner of aluminum factory and bought a ticket back to Kathiawar, the region presently known as Saurashtra. This maestro was Jhaverchand Kalidas Meghani (1896-1947) he was felicitated with the dignified title of Rashtriya Shayaar, a poet manifesting nationalism. He was born in the Baniya caste at Chotila on 28th August 1896. The native village of author’s forbearers was Bagasara of Bhayani clan in Amreli district. His parents were father Kalidas Meghani and mother Dholiben Meghani. By profession, Meghani’s father was a junior officer of Kathiyawad Agency police force. The British administration in India formally assumed sovereign rights over the princedoms of Kathiawar land and set up its headquarters in Rajkot city in 1820.

Life

The seed of the mountain culture in Meghani was nurtured all along the intervening period because his father was frequently transferred from one outpost to another. Due to frequent transfer of his father, he studied at various schools of multiple cities like Rajkot, Bagasara, and Amreli etc. His bond with Nature became stronger as his father’s posting was most probably at forest or mountain as well as cataract surrounded zone. Meghani’s statement: “hu pahad nu balak chhu” (I am the child of mountain) is quite appropriate because right from the childhood; the deep pools of the rivers that penetrated the granite rocks flowed through the solitary canyons of the range were childhood companions of the author. The eerie hoo...hoo... blasts of howling gales gusting through the windows of Jhaverchand Meghani used to startle him awake and breathed into his soul as the call of the mountains. As a child, he was an ardent admirer of the duha- battles raging between young cowherds or between aged farmers. Like all mountain creatures, he feasted on the duha-soratha poetry as ravishingly as he relished Banyan figs and wild berries and other exotic dry fruit products of the mountains. During the childhood Meghani acquired popularity as Villapi because he was writing sad songs.

Mainly there were the two factors, which inspired him to sing and write sad songs:

1. He used to read sad songs contributed by Kalapi so Meghani became sensitive towards melancholic subjects which he naturally expressed in his writings of songs.
2. Mother's inspiration - Mother Dholi ben's lamentations used to fill entire atmosphere with sadness. Meghani shared this quality with his mother. He often penned many sad songs and earned pen name "Villapi" Meghani passed his matriculation in 1912 and acquired B.A., degree with the English subject in 1916. He served as a part time teacher at "Sanatan Dharma High school" Bhavnagar. His wish to pursue M.A. remained unfulfilled as he rushed to Kolkata in search of job due to his elder brother's illness. He gave up his job as a teacher at Bhavnagar. At Kolkata, he joined Jivanlal's Aluminum factory as a personal secretary. His quest for literature became intense due to his close study of Bengali literature. The study of Bengali literature stirred him to undertake the research of literature of Saurashtra by returning to his native land.

One can sense Meghani's ardent desire to return to his native Saurashtra in the following letter written to his friend: It is getting dark. It is time for cows to return. Animals also come back from the forest. Sonorous voice of their harness bell sounds. Bronze plate of temple also rings. I will come back as soon as I will get bored with experience of this drudgery and mechanic type of life. I will also come back during the evening of my life. My master summons me. I will not miss the real path of my life. I recognize its call. Let me tell that I am not alone in lack of company. (Likhiten Hu Avu Chhu 94) At the end of the letter to express joy, eagerness, and excitement for his return to literature he signed in a very innovative style- "likhiten hu avu chhu." (I am coming back.) Driven by impulse to return to native, he came back to Bagsara by leaving his bright career in Kolkatta. In the beginning, Meghani fumbled in vain to get stability in his desirable career. During this crucial period certain decisive events occurred that were to shape his future. These are discussed as under.

1. Motivation by Vajsurwala During the many intervening years, Meghani imbibed many a different literary culture; he did not know that the streams of delectable folk-delight had kept simmering in his innermost. In 1922, he met the one who could perceive those undercurrents. He was no one but Vajsurwala a

childhood crony of Kalapi and a motivator and friend of Meghani. Vajsurwala was literati from Hadana. Vajsurwala and Meghani's bond became stronger after Meghani's return from kolkatta. Durbar Shree Vajsur wala was influenced by middle-aged society as well as trained under the thought process of theosophy; motivated Meghani towards Folk literature. Vajsurwala was fond of telling stories to Meghani in spell bounding voice. Vajsurwala made deliberate as well as personal efforts to invite Charan and brought "ravno" to inspire Meghani. Daughters of "durbar", used to sing marriage songs for Meghani. Thus, all these events spurred Meghani to delve deep in the study of folk literature.

2. Meghani's Marriage and tour with his wife During this period, another significant event was Meghani's marriage with Damyantiben. She belonged to a very cultured family. On the day of the marriage at the request of all friends Meghani sung "Chalo Dadaji na Desh ma" in his sonorous voice in the presence of his wife Damyanti ben. The third significant event in Meghani's life was his journey soon after his marriage at various places with his wife Damyantiben and the family of Gulabchandbhai. This joyous family tour inspired him to pen creative works of literature namely, "Moti ni Dhagliyo", 'Amar Rasa ni Pyaliyo', and "Choro no pokar". He sent his creative writes up' Choro no Pokar" for publication at some auspicious moment. Amritlal Seth the editor of "Saurashtra" was impressed by reading this article. It was soon published in the weekly magazine, 'Saurashtra'.
3. Beginning of desired career and creative use of weekends Thinking of the rich folk literature of Saurashtra, Meghani's soul cried out. Unable to ignore the call to pursue literature; he returned from Kolkata to his native land in 1921. Meghani sent two-three treatises to Amritlal Seth to get them published in "Saurashtra". Amritlal Seth was fully amazed on reading Meghani's scholastic and touching articles. Amritlal Seth got glimpses of Meghani's tremendous energy as a writer of Literature. On recognizing Meghani's talent as an illustrious writer, Amritlal Seth invited Meghani to give his service as a man of literature by joining the group of editors of the weekly

named “Saurashtra. Meghani gave his consent by joining as an editor. The commencement of the publications of Meghani’s writing happened soon by joining the newspaper ‘Saurashtra. The first book of the author that was published was his translation of Tagore’s “Katha O Kahani” and very soon the first volume of Saurashtra Ni Rasdhar found publication. Later on the chain of his research works of Soarhi Sahitya consistently continued. Remaining volumes of Saurashtra ni Rasdhar, Radhiysali Raat, Chundi, Soarhi Baharvatiya, Halarda, Soarhi Santo, Dadaji ni vato etc were published. Amritlal Seth found talent in Meghani and he provided full facilities to ignite Meghani’s passion for literature. Due to comfortable arrangements made by Amritlal Seth; Meghani’s latent talent of creativity bloomed to its peak. Here he got ample opportunity to read and learn. There were very small but rich libraries in ‘Saurashtra’. He had to prepare all his write-ups by referring reference works offered by these libraries. The consistent usage of library books exposed him to the best literature of the world. Meghani had an off for three days in a week i.e. Friday Saturday and Sunday. He utilized the slack interval of three days between the editions every week by travelling in search of the folklore and the oral traditions of Saurashtra. The consequence of this journey for research was creation and publication of Saurashtra ni Rasdhar,’ Misar no Mukti Sangram’, ‘Hungeri no Taranhar’. In 1932, Meghani and his friend started’ Fulchhab’, the news paper related to literature. After certain period, he left ‘Fulchhab’ as it got coloured with the politics of the time. In 1934, Amritlal Seth started the daily named ‘Janmabhumi” Meghani joined the daily magazine Janmabhumi. In this daily paper there was one column of literature titled as Kalam and Kitab. The editorial responsibility of this column of literature named Kalam and Kitab was allotted to Jhaverchand Meghani. It was the beginning of his adeptness as a critical appreciator of literature. He started to write independent novels titled as Niranjan, Sorath Tara Vehta Pani Etc. The stories of Sheni and Vijanand, Ladakvayo, Tane Aavdi lalap etc he got it dubbed in cassettes in his majestic voice. In 1936, Meghani accepted the responsibility of editorial ship of weekly Fulchaab related to literature. This task of editorial ship of Fulchaab gave glimpses of Meghani’s new skill of writing. Due to noticeable impression of his new method of writing as a journalist; he started to contribute social novels namely Vevishal, Tulsi Kyaro etc. He also penned historical novels like Samragan, Ra” ganga jaliyo etc. In

1945 he gave up his service of writing in Fulchaab and willingly took retirement after 23 years of his service to journalism. 4. Role of Dheli ben His love for folk songs stimulated by mer woman Dheli ben. She inspired Meghani to study folk songs. Meghani yearned to hear live raas of mer community sung by mer women. He made many efforts to find any mer woman who could sing songs to him. Ultimately, Dheli ben fulfilled Meghani's desire by singing songs. Dheli ben was an inhabitant of Bagvadar in Porbandar district. Neglecting their tiredness due to day and night hard work in the farm; both husband and wife remained awake during one whole night to quench Meghani's cravings to listen Mer Raas. Dheli ben continuously sang Gujarati raas while Meghani went on jotting down songs in the dim light of lantern. Dheli Ben's husband sat beside the two to inspire Art. All the three sat whole night in the open corridor during one chill cold night.

Work

Meghani's contribution to literature Meghani was passionate to delve into the hoary depth of the folklore of saurashtra region, a unique land that is throbbing and alive. This passion prompted Meghani to search and research literature. His contribution in the field of folk literature is immense and noteworthy. The reason behind Meghani's fame does not lie in the matter that he was the first to cultivate an untilled field of folk literature. There were many writers who worked on the form of folk literature especially: Dalpat- Farbes, Narmad, Mahipatram, Parsi editor F.B. Kinkaid and many others. Though many writers contributed to folk literature; Meghani has remained peerless as the contributor of folk literature. Meghani's contribution to folk literature remains at par from his contemporaries as well as predecessors because Meghani studied folk literature as whole rather than part. Another main difference in Meghani's effort is that unlike other he did not merely study couple of genres at a glance; Meghani explored and scrutinized the entire form of literature. Meghani's keenness regarding research of folk literature has made Meghani and folk literature inseparable. In the foreword to Saurashtra nee Rashdhar, Meghani wrote that his love for region and especially regional pride inspired him towards the study of folk literature. Had it been merely regional pride then it would not have lasted for long. Neither regional pride nor influence of western countries had enthused Meghani's writings. His efforts of studying folk culture of Saurashtra enabled him to gauge the fathom of rich social and cultural heritage of Saurashtra. The study made him realize the need of preserving the treasure trove of sublime values, innate ideals and mosaic culture of past. Meghani ventured to keep essence of cultural and social heritage alive

through folk literature because it is the major source of inspiration for the present as well as future generation. Meghani's mission of life was to pursue research and to edit folktales. Scenario of his work enlarged as he proceeded in his research and edition work. Meghani's dream was to cater history of gallant caste that gave birth to folk literature and preserved it. It was a 'Herculian task'. It was very difficult to handle the most difficult project single handily. His work was equivalent to work done by one institution. In spite of doing the path breaking work in folk literature, he constantly experienced pangs for the work left untouched in the field of folk literature. Meghani not simply read Folk literature or knew it; he experienced as well as lived folk literature. Meghani's aim was of revival of folk literature. Throughout his life, he single handily strived to make this mission successful. There were two targets to fulfill) Meghani wanted to make educated class free from prejudice. b) Meghani wanted to establish folk collection as literature by giving best and classic specimen of folk literature.

Limitations of Meghani's Writing

There are few limitations of Meghani as the editor and a writer. According to critics there is hyper use of innovations instead of actual presentation of folk tales. Furthermore there is excess use of imaginative language, emotional experiences and missionary impulse. Narotam Palan the well known Gujarati writer and a critic has enumerated the following limitation of Meghani's works.

1. Awesome and curiosity centered approach.
2. Exclusive appreciation of qualities of lower class by ignoring their limitations.
3. Excessive use of Charan as narrator of the story
4. Introductions of only particular region
5. Mistake of considering folk literature as only literature
6. Analysis of miracles of 'Saint Lore'
7. In research and appreciation of Folk literature, Meghani is present as creator but absent as linguist.

8. Coribantian revelers, necromancers, mendicants, superstitious complete the picture of society but they are all absent in Meghani's literature. (Kothari 131-132)

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