

## MUNSHI'S TRILOGY: A KALEIDOSCOPIIC MANIFESTATION OF POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE SOLANKI AGE

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### ABSTRACT

Shri Kanaiyalal Munshi (1887-1971), the most distinguished writer of Gujarati literature enthralled the readers by his historical novels depicting the grandeur of Gujarat. He is rightly called the 'Father of Historical Novels' in Gujarati for his stupendous contribution to the genre of historical novel. Munshi also coined the word Gujarat-ni-asmita 'Gujarat Consciousness' through his literary endeavours and by means of organizations, founded and managed by him. The present paper focusses on the kaleidoscopic manifestation of the political, social and cultural environment of Solanki Age as depicted in the historical trilogy of Munshi comprising of three novels - *Patan ni Prabhuta* (The Greatness of Patan) (1916) *Gujarat no Nath* (The Master of Gujarat) (1917) *Rajadhiraj* (The Emperor) (1922). The trilogy incorporates the Solanki period that is considered to be the golden period in the history of ancient Gujarat. The region of Gujarat during this time came to be known as 'Gurjar desh'. The Solanki kings of Anahilwad Patan not only established their supremacy in the regions of Gujarat but also extended it to various areas beyond the territory of Gujarat. The kings of this dynasty were called 'Chaulakyan' in Sanskrit whereas they were known as 'Solanki' in Gujarati. The emphasis of the paper is on presenting the literary acumen employed by Munshi in exhibiting the social, cultural and political milieu of the Solanki age of Gujarat.

**Keywords:** Gujarat-ni-asmita, Gurjar desh, Chaulakya, Solanki, Sadhu, Anahilwad Patan and Hinglaj Chachar.

### INTRODUCTION

Shri Kanaiyalal Munshi (1887-1971) is considered to be the pioneer of historical novels in Gujarati and is placed among the foremost Gujarati litterateurs of India. His novels, plays, history, essays, speeches, biographies and autobiographies – all pooled together created a brilliant chapter in Indian literary renaissance. Munshi's primary focus in his works was to enhance the *asmita* of Gujarat and making Gujarat consciousness a living factor. Munshi's historical trilogy consisting of *Patan ni*

*Prabhuta* (The Greatness of Patan) (1916) *Gujarat no Nath* (The Master of Gujarat) (1917) *Rajadhiraj* (The Emperor) (1922) depicts consolidation of Gujarat in the days of the Chalukyan kings in the ninth and twelfth century.

The trilogy is based on the most glorious period of Hindu Gujarat, the reign of Siddharaj Jayasinh. Though set in the past, the novels are realistic both in their relevance to the contemporary scene and in their portrayal of the fundamental human passions of love and power through life-like characters and intricate plots. The dead pages of Gujarat's history become a real experience for the people through these novels. The trilogy providing heroic models strongly appealed to the contemporary Gujaratis. The attempt is to deal with the political, cultural and social milieu of Solanki period of Gujarat exhibited by Munshi through his novels.

### **DEPICTION OF POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT IN *PATAN-NI-PRABHUTA***

*Patan-ni-Prabhuta*, the first historical romance attempted by Munshi presents a picture of the historic days that shuddered Patan, the capital city of Gujarat, immediately after the demise of Karandev Solanki, the King of Gujarat. Jayasinh Solanki, the son of Karandev, being a minor, aged only twelve years, was to be crowned the King. But his young age was an obstacle in his path of succession as a king. The perplexed people of Patan - Jains and Hindus, Ministers and Nobles became victim of the divided loyalties in the baffling and uncertain political situation of Patan.

Munshi has vividly described the intrigues & counter-intrigues to make and break alliances with a purpose of acquiring the dominating position in the State - all occurring at the backdrop of the royal throne of Patan. The complicated situation that arises in Patan due to the willful ambition of Queen Minaldevi to rule Patan singlehandedly and her differences with Munjal, the Minister of the State, is well presented by Munshi in the first novel. Moreover, the trickery played by Jain *sadhu*, Anandsuri who wishes to convert the whole of Gujarat into Jainism, is also depicted judiciously at the hands of Munshi. Munjal's zeal and devotion for the national unity as well as his crucial role in the reconciliation of conflicting interests and his success in crowning the boy Jayasinh as the King of Gujarat is the key phenomenon that dominates the novel. Munshi has put before the reader the conflicting ideologies and political connivances prevailing among the people of Gujarat during the Solanki age in a skillful manner.

Munshi has exercised the power of his imagination in depicting the historical background of the novel. The novel encompasses the period from 1066 A.D. to 1143 A.D. The role of astute Prime Minister Munjal in ascertaining the unity of Gujarat and establishing it as a strong unifying nation is effectively

narrated in the novel. Moreover historical facts such as King Karnadev's death, the invasion of Malwa over Gujarat, resistance of the residents of Patan, the efforts of Minaldevi in establishing the dominance of Chandravati in Patan and revolt of the chieftains of Patan, along with tug-of-war for power among the Rajputs are meticulously presented in the novel *Patan-ni-Prabhuta*. The chief characters of the novel such as Karnadev, Munjal, Deviprasad, Tribhuvanpal, Kak are based on true historical characters. Also the places like Patan, Chandravati, Prabhas Patan etc mentioned in the novel are all historical places of Gujarat. In addition to this, the variety of weapons, war technique, use of palanquins, journey on horses, description of castles, gates, palaces etc mentioned in the novel reflect the essence of the atmosphere of the eleventh century Gujarat.

### **DEPICTION OF POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT IN IN GUJARAT-NO-NATH 'THE MASTER OF GUJARAT'**

In the novel *Gujarat-no-nath*, Munshi has astutely presented the Solankis of Patan, popularly known as Anahilwad Patan. In the present times, the only remains of Patan that are witness to the silent testimony to its former splendour is a small village known as Enawada, an area occupied by Patan's traders. Munshi refers to thousands of men and women stepping over the remains of Patan who are unaware that these remains are not lifeless stones, but sacred relics and mementos of a brave city. The remains of Patan speak of the Gurjar people of the earlier era.

In *Gujarat-no-nath*, Munshi extends the story of *Patan-ni-Prabhuta* and gives a detailed account of several major characters with respect to love, war and political intrigues in Gujarat. A three-cornered struggle for securing power to rule over Gujarat including Munjal, the Minister, Udo, the minister in charge of Khambhat and Kak, a young warrior of Broach is, around which the story of the novel is weaved. Munjal's Machiavellian politics, his gigantic stature, his invaluable contribution in saving Gujarat from political crisis, is presented artistically by the experienced hands of Munshi.

Moreover Kak's rescuing of Manjari, a beautiful Brahman girl from the clutches of the scheming Udo, the arch-villain of the novel; conflicting ideologies between Munjal and Kirtidev, a young man who preaches the political unity of India for the defence of its religion and culture against the intrusion of Muslim invaders; depiction of Kak's courage and chivalry by his mighty deeds of daring and winning love of the proud maiden, Manjari; Jaysinh falling in love with Ranak but challenged by Khengar of Junagadh and ultimately defeated through connivance of Kak - are all such incidents on which the Munshi has focussed the second novel of the trilogy. The chief attraction of this novel is the portraying of abounding variety of characters, awe-inspiring horrors of the supernatural forces through *Hinglaj*

*Chachar incident* in which Kirtidev desires to know the secret of his parentage through black magic. Also the ambitiousness, meanness and jealousy in procuring dominant political positions during the time are well depicted in the novel.

It is significant that apart from two pure religious traditions of orthodox Brahmanism and Jainism that were in vogue during Solanki period, there was present among a few people the impure tantric tradition, notorious for its dark and evil rites. Tantric ate and drank excessively, boasted of their vile deeds, and tried to win influence in society by frightening pious and ignorant people. While selfish and vengeful persons often sought tantric help for their own narrow gains, even the otherwise powerful and respected persons in society were cautious of the tantric.

Over a period of time, as Brahmin and Jain saints increased their influence over people, the tantric tended to confine themselves to forests and a few temples. But as they distanced themselves from ordinary life, their notoriety amongst the people increased in proportion. They were held in mortal fear and were believed to be capable of supernatural feats. The terrifying forms of their gods and goddesses, it was rumoured, could sometimes be seen on dark nights near cemeteries, in dark forests, or in some temples. Near big cities like Patan and Avanti, it is believed that there were camps of witches who were in possession of fantastic powers. Pure and sensible persons would never seek them out, but there would always be others, more crafty ones, who would contrive to get their help to deceive and dominate the common folk.

### **DEPICTION OF POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT IN *RAJADHIRAJ***

*Rajadhiraj* is the last novel of the trilogy written by Munshi after *Gujarat-no-nath*. Like the previous two novels of the trilogy, this novel is also replete with political intrigues, scheming and conspiracies by various characters to establish their supremacy over others. The political atmosphere is charged with King Jayasinh's ardent desire to win back Ranakdevi who is abducted by Khengar and satisfy his yearning of marrying her and making her queen of Patan. Moreover his ambition to rule over entire Gujarat by extending the boundaries of the State and ascertaining his status as Rajadhiraj, the emperor finds expression in the novel. The novel presents a true picture of the mindset of the kings of Solanki age who are always eager to demonstrate their valour and gallantry to the general populace.

In the novel *Rajadhiraj*, Munshi has also dealt with the system of Sati prevalent during the times through the character of Ranakdevi. When the fort of Junagadh is attacked, Khengar, Ranakdevi's husband dies fighting for the cause. Jayasinh, fascinated by the beauty of Ranak, carries off her with him. But he is pursued by Kak who saves the honour of his friend Khengar's wife by imprisoning the wilful

king of Patan Jaysinh for some time and setting Ranak free. But Ranak mounts the funeral pyre of Khengar and becomes Sati.

### DEPICTION OF SCENIC BEAUTY IN THE TRILOGY

While presenting the political and cultural environment of the period, Munshi has presented the scenic beauty of Gujarat in rainbow colours. The descriptions of gigantic mountains, sinuous rivers, flowing streams, high hills and soaring trees are abundantly found in the novels. Munshi's love for Gujarat is expressively exhibited in his minute descriptions of forts, castles and historical monuments in his trilogy. An aroma of self-esteem for the native land is incessantly experienced throughout his novels. A brilliant example of the same is found in Munshi's description of the enchanting splendor of fort of Patan in the following words:

"The fort walls were topped with white marble turrets and battlements with fine carvings. Rising beyond them, the city of Patan seemed to be carved out of white marble that turned to gold in the light of the dawn." (*The Master of Gujarat* (pp 16-17))

Munshi has exhibited the importance of festival of colours – Holi among the people of Patan. He describes the preparations made by the people for the forthcoming festival of Holi in a brilliant way:

Citizens and their leaders jostled for space on the roads; laughing and playful young ladies crowded onto the balconies; little boys and girls came out on the verandahs, excited at the prospect of squirting colours on one another. Lavishly bedecked elephants hurried along through the crowds, and carefree soldiers, with garlands around their necks, swaggered along seeking enjoyment. Even officers of the state allowed their fearsome caution and dignity to be replaced by laughter and fun... Men and women felt a joyous pride in their city and their kingdom, as they prepared with eager excitement to celebrate Holi, the spring festival which is dedicated to Madan, the God of Love. (*The Master of Gujarat*: 145)

Munshi throughout his series of historical novels endeavoured to enhance the glory of Gujarat and establish its *asmita* 'Gujarat Consciousness' in true colours.

### CONCLUSION

Munshi evinces an intellectual integrity and imaginative vigour through the trilogy of historical novels penned by him. A scholar and devotee of ancient Indian culture, Munshi is replete with enthusiasm while expressing his affinity with his native land. He has skillfully presented the political

intrigues, conspiracies, customs, superstitions and religious bearings of the people of Solanki age in his trilogy. His fascination for the scenic beauty and glory of Patan too finds reflection in his novels by his vivid descriptions of forts, rivers, mountains and grasslands. The role of tantric employing black magic and the strong belief of the people of Patan in him are also dealt with poignantly in the second novel of the trilogy *The Master of Gujarat*. The custom of *sati* too finds occurrence in Munshi's third novel of the series called *Rajadhiraj*.

The jubilant manner in which people celebrated various festivals like Holi is presented awfully by Munshi. The great honour that was conferred on the victorious soldiers on their arrival at their home grounds is emphatically narrated by the novelist. It is evident that Munshi inventively suffused the historical facts with his extraordinary power of historical imagination that enticed a vast array of readers. Through his superb skill of narrating events, Munshi has presented through his trilogy, the political, cultural and social scenario of Gujarat in diverse shades.

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