

**THE IMPACT OF URBANIZATION IN THE SELECTED SHORT
STORIES: RUSKIN BOND'S *THE KITEMAKER*, KHUSHWANT SINGH'S
THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY AND HARISHANKAR PARSAI'S *BHOLA
RAM KA JEEV***

Dr. Krati Sharma

Asst.Prof.,Dept.of English
JECRC UDML College of Engg.
Jaipur

Ms. Savita Yadav

Asst. Prof., Dept. of English
JECRC UDML College of Engg.
Jaipur

Abstract

The present paper introspects the delusion of the moral values. It also hints that how urbanization has rooted in our way of life without letting us aware about its after-effects. In *The Kitemaker* a beautiful relationship of Grandfather and grandson has been depicted, where the concern of the grandfather of procuring his art of Kite making which is dying due to urbanization is highlighted. His struggle to save this art for the posterity is clearly visible. Singh's in *The Portrait of a Lady* has very subtly hinted that due to the tempting social life in urban locations people in rural centers are prompt to leave their native places. They pick up the urban living standard and as an effect get busy in their city life and start neglecting and ignoring their elders unknowingly. In Harishankar Parsai's *Bhola Ram Ka Jeev* the soul of the protagonist Bhola Ram a government servant becomes the victim of urbanization. He leaves his body but the soul is lying with the file in his office to get his pension sanctioned for his dependents. All the three stories have felt the undercurrent of the urbanization through their characters, settings and themes.

Keywords: Urbanization, Human values, Society, Modernity.

Urbanization is the study of the social, political, and economic relationships in cities. In literature we cannot ignore the social changes as literature is a part of the society. It is also not false to say that whatever happens in the society is more or less reflected in the literature. Short story is a kind of tool or a medium through which a writer can easily convey the powerful emotions or reflect the social current.

In this paper three short stories have been taken up vis a vis to understand the social effect of urbanization on the relationship of the characters. People in order to; enjoy luxuries of city life move towards city. There are many reasons for this shift. According to sociologist Gideon Sjoberg (1965), there are three prerequisites for the development of a city. First is a good

environment with fresh water and a favorable climate. Second is the advanced technology which will produce surplus food to support the non-farmers and the third reason is a strong social organization to ensure social stability and a stable economy. So they stick to city without thinking to go back and live in villages. Three short stories by the three dynamic writers have been selected to explore this theme.

The first story under discussion is:

Bola Ram Ka Jeev

Harishankar Parsai (1924- 1995) is an acclaimed Hindi writer. He is known for his humorist and direct style of writing. He was born in Jamnia village near Itarsi in Hoshangabad district, Madhya Pradesh. He completed his M.A. in English from R.T.M. Nagpur University. In 1982 he won Sahitya Akademi award for his work titled *Viklaang Shraddhakadaur*.

This story has been written in Hindi and later translated in English by Jai Rattan. This story revolves round the Bhola Ram's soul which is missing in heaven. This creates wonder in Yamraj's office, Chitragupta feels aghast and uttered, "In all my life no one has ever been able to dupe me. But this time that fellow Bhola Ram gave me the slip"(20). The opening of the story is very abrupt with the search warrant of Bhola Ram issued by Yamraj to Narad (Saint).

Parsai very subtly satires that how people are affected by materialism and turn corrupt. He writes about the human tendency to acquire more.

"The railway officials remove socks from parcels of hosiery goods and wear them. Goods wagons are openly detached from goods trains and diverted to other places. And the funniest thing of all is that the leaders of political parties kidnap their counterparts in rival political groups in broad daylight and lock them up" (21).

When Narad reaches to Bhola Ram's home he inquires about him and his life style. The condition of his rented home is very miserable. Bhola Ram wife replies, "It pains me to tell you," she replied, "he was suffering from penury. He retired from service five years back but he did not get even a paisa against his pension which was legally due to him"(22). It hints that they stick to urban setting. Their earning is dependent on pension. Urbanization has opened gates for employment but with it, it is flooded with other problems. The main problem is to get pension. This system has given birth to corruption in the society.

The lives and beliefs of people are transforming due to the effect of Urbanization. When Bhola Ram's wife asks Narad to help them in getting pension, Narad replies, "Nobody cares for *sadhus* these days. And I don't have a following of religious mendicants to lend me prestige. No one will lend me his ear"(22). What Narad utters in the disguise of the saint that today the values have been degraded they don't care for the pious soul. They all are running towards a distant goal. Narad decides to help them. Officials demand bribe from Narad in their own simple way to a Sadhu.

"*Bhai*, a government office is also like a temple where one has to make a votive offering. You appear to be Bhola Ram's friend, in any case, a well wisher of his. You know Bhola Ram's petitions have kept flying about all the time. They have to be secured in this place with some kind of weight. Bring some weight"(23).

This also shows to meet up with the demands of urbanization people are becoming corrupt they even do not shy to take bribe from saint. Narad gives away his veena to fulfill the demand. He wants to help the family and also get hold of the soul of the Bhola Ram. When Bhola Ram's name is called out, his soul answers from the pension file, "Who's calling me?" it

said. “Is it the postman? Have my pension papers come? (23)”. The soul is lying with the file. The point here is that Bhola Ram was too much occupied with his pension file that he could not realize that he was free from the cycle of life and death. This story is a hammer on the modern bureaucratic society where money is the only power. Even the protagonist challenges the cycle of life and death. Bhola Ram overrules the law of death and his soul sticks to his pension file. It is a satire on Indian urbanized society where even death cannot give relief to a poor miserable man.

II

The second story under discussion is *The Portrait of a Lady* by Khushwant Singh (1915 -2014), one of the best known Indian writers of all times, was born in 1915 in Hadali (now in Pakistan). He was educated at the Government College, Lahore and at King's College, Cambridge University, and the Inner Temple in London. He works as a founder-editor of *Yojana* (1951-1953), editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India* (1979-1980), chief editor of *New Delhi* (1979-1980), and editor of the *Hindustan times* (1980-1983). His Saturday column *With Malice Towards One and All* in the *Hindustan Times* is by far one of the most popular columns of the day. Khushwant Singh has started his journey by this first short story titled *The Portrait of a Lady*. This story has many layers. It talks about the relationship between two generations at one level and the changes coming in the society due to urban setting and expansion of cities.

This story revolves round the grandmother and his grandson who enjoy their life in village. They enjoy each other's company. The grandmother is a beautiful lady. She is busy in rearing her grandson by taking him to school and wait for him in nearby temple where she offers worship and give breads to street dogs.

“My grandmother and I were good friends. My parents left me with her when they went to live in the city and we were constantly together. She used to wake me up in the morning and get me ready for school”(4).

Grandmother and grandson's relationship changes with the change in location when she is called by her son in his new home in the city. “When my parents were comfortably settled in the city. . .”(4). This lines shows the development of Urbanisation in the rural area. Families started moving the agriculture land to earn and to enjoy the luxuries of life in the cities. The routine changes here the boy starts using vehicle to go to school “I used to go to an English school in a motor bus” (4). It also hints that distance is so much that parent's role is negligible. Now the grandmother life is confined in one room. She can't move freely as she used to do in her village. This is one of the worse things happen to elder people who get restricted at home in urban settings. Grandmother fails to understand the modern English teaching though she is against it but never shown it to anyone. Narrator writes,

“She did not believe in the things they taught at the English school and was distressed that there was no teaching about God and the scriptures. Oneday I announced that we were being given music lessons”(5).

It also remarks on the change of education where soft skills are completely neglected in order to make them modern and upright scholars.

There is another point to be noted that the elder generation who is sitting all alone in a room or in the home has nothing much to offer in this urban setting. The young generation who is working hard to keep their both ends meet, has no time to spend with the elders or with the younger one. The children who are running after to learn modern education and culture have no time to learn anything from the elders. So, in all the three generations, the elder generation has clinched to their old and odd ways of lives. They don't want to do anything in this newly

acquainted life. Grand old lady has left her village routine life. She tries to accommodate herself to a place which new and restricted. Earlier she managed everything from her home to outside world that is the schooling of the grandchild but now she is confined to four walls. It is a city a big place where people do not know her. It is a new place for her. She finds it difficult to cope up with this new life. So she confined herself in her room, now the room becomes her 'space'. She starts giving bread to sparrows in her room. Through grand lady position here it is clear that in urban living people do not bother about others, they are confining to themselves. In this manner time passes and the grandson complete his schooling and go to foreign for higher studies. On the return of Grandson from foreign after five years the powerful emotions flow profusely and she decides to celebrate the home coming of his grandchild. "In the evening a change came over her. She did not pray. She collected the women of the neighbourhood, got an old drum and started to sing"(5). In this way she tries to bind her roots with the city way of life. After this celebration she falls sick. She dies in the night.

Grand lady dies in peace and leaves behind thousands of sparrows who mourn at her death quietly. It also hints that people have no time in this haphazard life but beasts have because they are not urbanized like human beings. The relationship between the grandchild and grandmother is finally over which has replaced by the sparrows. Jainendra Kumar writes, "Literature can serve both purposes. But if we are to consider what is most essential, most pulsating with life, the longest lasting, then we find that it is literature that accepts the dangers present on its path, even when they are in the form of whip lashes, and takes the society forward(8)".

III

The third story under discussion is Ruskin Bond's (1934-) *The Kitemaker*. He is an Indian author of British descent. He is considered to be an icon among Indian writers and children's authors and a top novelist. He wrote his first novel, *The Room on the Roof* when he was seventeen which won John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957. He is prolific writer has written several novellas, over 500 short stories, as well as various essays and poems, all of which have established him as one of the best-loved and most admired chroniclers of contemporary India. In 1992 he received the Sahitya Akademi award for English writing, for his short stories collection.

The Kitemaker is very simple story about Mehmood a 'kitemaker' and his grandchild. Mehmood led a life of luxury when he was young and famous for his kites.

"He, Mehmood the kitemaker, had in the prime of his life been well known throughout the city. Some of his more elaborate kites once sold for as much as three or four rupees each"(2)

Amit Aggarwal writes about the narration of Ruskin Bond stories that, "His narration is marked with simplicity of tone and depth of meaning"(142).

With the increase in Urbanization which is a two-way process because it involves not only movements from village to cities and change from agricultural occupation to business, trade, service and profession but it also involves changes in the migrants attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour patterns. The process of urbanization is rapid all over the world.

People stop flying kite or stop playing it as a sport. Other sports and entertainment has taken its place. "His kite shop was gone, the premises long since sold to a junk dealer; but he still made kites, for his own amusement and for the benefit of his grandson,(1). When the grandchild complains that he has lost his kites he very sweetly makes him understand that, "You have yet to

learn how to fly a kite properly, my child. And I am too old to teach you, that's the pity of it. But you shall have another" (1). It hints that he wants younger generation to learn kite flying which is losing its importance in urbanization.

With the development of urban setting and population growth this game loses its players as narrator writes, "there were not many open spaces left for the flying of kites. The city had swallowed up the open grassland that had stretched from the old fort's walls to the river bank"(1). Ruskin very appropriately hints the after-effect of urbanization. Even this trade is dying and spaces are not left as they are encroached by the city dwellers. Population is expanding leaving everything behind; in this kind of atmosphere children cannot learn kite flying or enjoy it as a sport.

With the passage of time the old kite lovers also loses their interest of kite flying. They are facing the hard time to sustain their bread and butter in urban centers.

"The children who had bought kites from him ten years ago were now grown men, struggling for a living; they did not have time for the old man and his memories. They had grown up in a swiftly changing and competitive world, and they looked at the old kitemaker and the banyan tree with the same indifference"(3).

The major setback of urbanization is that it hampers social gathering, earlier people set under the banyan tree but now they do not have much time. Mehmood laments, "No longer did people gather under the banyan tree to discuss their problems and their plans; only in the summer months did a few seek shelter from the fierce sun"(4). Social gathering which was a part of the earlier days under a Banyan tree seems dejected in the milieu of urbanization. The haphazard lives of people to keep their body and soul together make it difficult to enjoy these pastimes. Amit Aggarwal writes "The analogy between the Kitemaker and old tree underlines the relationship of man and nature. . ." (158)

In this story Mehmood dies with the dream of making a beautiful kite of God Vayu. It also shows that he wants to continue this art either in reality by teaching it to young grandson or through his dreams. Amit Aggarwal writes for Ruskin Bond, " As an intelligent observer of human life he displays the maturity, sophistication and remarkable ease of storyteller"(vii).

All these three stories have shown the gradual development of urbanisation in the families and life of the people. In the first story *Bhola Ram Ka Jeev* the condition and life of people change when they get switched from their self-employment or agriculture to the Government job for a secure life. On the contrary, these govt. jobs have many problems like the pension file. It affects the life of family members. Bhola Ram sticks to this world after death in hope of his pension. In the *The Kitemaker* we come across the agony of Mehmood as an artisan. It clearly states that urbanization paved the way for industrialization which results in the decay of cottage industry. The small skilled labours lose not only, their occupation but they also lose their skills. It has been killing the skilled labourers. The pathos of people spending their money in watching cinema also convey the undercurrent that people have money but they don't want to spend it in idle past time of Kite flying . They want entertainment which is saleable in this era of urbanisation. These stories also exhibit that with the development of the Nation people have no time to meet their friends or relative. There is no empathy for the older generation. Elders spend their time in their own way like grandmother in *The Portrait of a Lady* is sitting all alone in her room and giving bread to sparrows. Sparrows have time to visit her.

Socialization has changed with the change in time. These stories altogether have viewed that change through the eyes of elder generation who are stick to their times and do not want to

come back. They also tries faintly to involve their new generation like Mehmood tries to make Kite for his grandchildren so that he can learn it and will keep on flying and live up his spirit. In *The Portrait of a Lady* grandmother takes him to school and make him visits temples and also make him realise that we should give food to animals either dogs in the village or sparrows in her city home. She also tries to understand what he was learning there in the his city school. Older generation tried to gel with the young generation in their own way. Mehmood in *The Kitemaker* and Grandmother in *The Portrait of a Lady* are looking back to the past era or time also conveys the idea of pinning for what is not and move forward with the present.

The effect of urbanization is beautifully conveyed by William Wordsworth in sonnet *The World is Too Much With US*

“ THE world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!”

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