

Book Review on ‘The Village in the Jungle’ By Leonard Woolf

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I. INTRODUCTION

The novel written by Leonard Woolf which was published in 1913 is basically about novelist's experience about Colonial Sri Lanka written in the intuitive point of view. Thus, it portrays a vivid picture of the lives of a deprived and pitiable family lived in the small village called Baddegama which in terms of literally ‘the village in the jungle.

The events that take place in the novel provide a set of mixed feelings of terrifying, depressing and interesting. The description given to the jungle is quite awe inspiring and fearsome. According to the novel, “All jungles are evil, but no jungle is more evil than that which lay about the village of Baddegama”. Baddegama is a rudimentary, primitive settlement in the deep south of then Ceylon now Sri Lanka with just ten families. These families which are poverty-ridden are very much closer to the animals in the jungle. There are civilized culturally influenced values instead people are caught in a muddled traditional beliefs, superstitions and stoicism. The spirit of the jungle is in this village and the people who live in the thicket. The jungle with its hints of evil develops the background of the novel. With this setting, novel begins its exposition by introducing the protagonist or the principle character together by introducing several incidents with other characters which is the development of the novel.

II. BODY OF THE NOVEL

The novel mostly accounts the life of Silindu and his twin daughters who are independent individual with their own living style in order to dwell peacefully with themselves and the jungle. The villagers resolve they are outcast or pariahs and even demons and therefore decided not to extend their help or a finger as they are plotted against over and over for the gains of others. The lives of their twin daughters, Puchi Menika and Hinnihami are overwhelming and upsetting in the way their lives are wasted at the expense of others.

The incidents that are being narrated by Leonard Woolf will give the reader a realistic picture of the village in the Baddegama which is dominated by three corrupt influences, the Headman, Babehami who is the local agent of the British Administration, Puchirala the village medical practitioner and kattadiya and Fernando, the trader. The despicable predicament of the villagers in Baddegama discloses through Silindu, the protagonist in the novel and his interaction with these three evil men. Silindu a man of the jungle is a hunter,

and Chena cultivator meets the British Officials in the guise of the village Headman who insists that he obtains a licence for a gun which under normal circumstances is not an easy task to obtain a licence. Meanwhile, the Headman bears a grudge against Silindu from the time of the death of Silindu's wife, a sister of the Headman Babehami due to ill-treatment she suffered in the hand of Silindu for giving birth to twin daughters instead of sons to help him for hunting and for his Chena cultivation. The Headman harasses Silindu at every opportunity he gets and thus Silindu makes it imperative that he gets the licence for a gun. The episode concludes with Silindu going to Kamburupitiya to get his gun licence and borrow grain from the trader (Mudalali) there. Meanwhile, the Headman uses the non-payment of body tax to harass further. Usually, what generally happens is that the Headman pays the tax for all the villagers and later recovers it with a very heavy interest but not for Silindu whom he wants to irritate.

What is significant is that being the Village Headman a law-abiding person the British Administration, the villagers are kept eternally indebted to him thus villagers too become powerless to combat against these injustice.

It is evident that the exploitation of villagers is further emphasized by the incident when Headman brought Fernando, a dishonest money-lender from Kamburupitiya to live in the village and thus villagers become indebted to Fernando. Headman exploited his vested power and began leasing out government lands for villagers for Chena cultivation on the ground that they pay one fifth of their product to Fernando while their debts remain unpaid. Although the system was illegal, villagers could appeal to none.

The trap which was made with the help of the Headman for Babun to be charged for house breaking and theft was led for a trial where Babun gets six months imprisonment and Silindu was released considering he was insane by the court which once again shows how power has been abused to such an extent.

The Supreme Court trial is the concluding incident of the absurdity which novel depicts throughout. The judge is not compassionate but becomes an impersonal machine of British justice where the trial is held as an absurd occurrence. At the same time Silindu is governed by the simple loyalty in his own world and cannot grasp the British Legal procedure as it is foreign to him.

The end of the novel 'The Village in the Jungle' Baddegam is found to be no more and it has been destroyed more by the evil machination of the man than by the jungle and eventually the jungle takes over the village.

Themes

The novel primarily provides facet of rural life which had been spoiled and exploited after and during the Colonial Administration. The account of Silindu and his ill-fated family is the central theme of the novel which portrays vividly the facet of the rural life. The novel also illustrates the fact the failure of the Colonial Administration to protect the weak and the innocent from the mechanizations of minor officials and shrewdness of urban class.

The downfall of the rural folk also is portrayed as one of the significant themes in the novel. The colonial administration failed to realize the simple and modest lifestyle of the people who lived in rural villages. Though this downfall is illustrated within the Ceylonese context, which is a common feature in all Colonial countries implicated in the long run leading to the downfall of the whole social system. Leonard Woolf describes this tragedy in such a way that the novel depicts its classical features to the reader.

Another crucial theme of the novel is the inadequacy of Colonial Administrative System. Leonard points out that the Assistant Government Agent (A.G.A.) and Ratamahattaya who are really supposed to be responsible for the well-being of the villagers are not aware of what is happening in the remote villages. At the same time, this weakness is well exploited by the people like Babehamy and Fernando to meet their own living.

The novelist also points out not only inadequacy of colonial administrative system but the inadequacy of judiciary to uphold the justice in the society. This occurred mainly due to ignorance. Leonard points out vividly that the weaknesses that have come up in the system due to the ignorance of the judges about the customs, traditions, and beliefs of the people.

The narrator has also been successful in pointing out the weakness of the people as well and these weaknesses are a common feature which portrays a lucid picture about the whole society. The melancholy and fatalistic nature of the people is depicted with their utterances. They always utter: 'what can we do? This tragedy has become an inevitable section of their lives partly as a result of their passive acceptance of Karma which shaped their lives throughout and the adversities caused by the inadequacies of the Colonial Administration.

III. CHARACTERIZATION

The main character in this novel is Silindu. His life is illustrated with several significant incidents that are narrated throughout the novel. Even though, Silindu lived in village Baddegama, he has failed to become a part of that village community as he kept himself away from the village

community and spent most of his time in the forest moving about just like any other animal. When he is at home, he very rarely spoke to anyone and squatted under a tree in the compound for hours at times muttering to him-self.

Even though Silindu preferred jungle habitat to human habitation, his fear of it never diminished. At the same time he loved it in a insensible way in which the wild buffalo loves to wallow in the mud which is an applicable example to show his animal like nature.

The other characters, Assistant Government Agent, Babehamy the village Headman, Punchirala, the Village Medical Practitioner and Kattadiya and Fernando who was brought to the village Baddegama are also significant as their role substantiate in taking the reader to the climax of the story, the most decisive point and then passes the resolution in an interesting yet most horribly depressing and little terrifying manner. For example, Puchi Menika though cast in a different pattern had something of determination of Hinnihamy in her. She refused Fernando's offer of a house and stubbornly stood by her husband, Babun, and her Silindu.

Then, the novel ends with complete destruction of the village Baddegam including people as well as their dwellings yet Silindu, Puchi Menika, Hinnihamy and Babun persist in the minds of the reader as genuine folk who fought their battle valiantly in spite of the likelihoods against them.

IV. CONCLUSION

The novel 'The Village in the Jungle' by Leonard Woolf can be considered a masterpiece of writing as it claims for characteristics of classical literature. The other important feature of this novel is that this might be the first novel of this nature which had been written by a Colonial Author depicting how the rural life exploited by the Colonial Administration. On the other hand, this novel 'The Village in the Jungle' is one of the best loved and well known novels in Sri Lanka which recollects Woolf's experience being a British Administration who unbiasedly portrays the true account of rural folk and their society.

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