

Subalternity, Protest and the Politics of HORI's Social World

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Abstract: This paper seeks to explore multidimensional contours of consciousness of peasant world within the framework of Premchand's masterpiece Godan, Hori being the chief protagonist and other characters complimenting him. It would tell us the complexities of agrarian structure of village different from the industrial one. It reveals the process that operates in caste class and community continuum.

Keywords: Premchand, Godan, Hori and his family, peasant, Datadin the Brahmin and his son Matadin, rapacious moneylenders

Introduction

Silia, the innocent *chamaran* girl fell in love with *Brahmin* boy Matadin who betrayed her. However she still remained loyal to him. As a result cobbler community's resistance comes to the fore. But their rebellion was confined to rectify individual wrong and despite the fact that they were not under the hegemony of Brahmin, their resistance remained haphazard. Probably presence of some agency could have taken it further. This paper also discusses the typical sexuality in the village which affected the power relation and the powerful targeted small peasants in their intriguing politics. Hori's concern for Silia and Bhola has been revealed with all his complexities. It further shows that hard pressed Hori could insinuate Dulari for a loan of two hundred rupees. The older relations of Devar and Bhabhi came to help here. But when Hori's tallest sugarcane was auctioned Dulari retreated from her promise because the prospect of recovery was dismal. It is at this time that Nohari came to his rescue. The politics of his social world has been revealed further in this paper.

The verdure of green fields, the twitter of birds, the murmuring rivers in the sequestered, poetic tranquility of open air life, even Hori's troubled heart drowned in so much of colour, could break into song, "My heart burns day & night; Koel sings on mango branch; alas! Where is my peace of life". The panoramic country life along with multiplex ties of kinship, caste and shared structures of feelings could slur over the sharp edges of imminent tension and conflict

configurations. Hori seeing Dulari in a rose sari with thick silver ornaments around her ankles and gold lace around her neck fell into the concussion of salty jokes much to sublimate or settle with the repressed recesses of the history of their unconscious sexuality.¹ Older ties came to provide the cover. “Today, you are looking extremely beautiful bhabhi”. But these jokes also helped him in disarming Dulari. When Dulari reminded him of her money to be returned for which interest was piling up he utilized the same with the words “we are as much yours, bhabhi, as your money”.

Hori reached the barn. The common barn yard of the village resembled to a market, grain dealers were haggling over the prices. A woman was selling berries and other fruits. Menials were assembled to collect their share. Jhinguri Singh was watchful to his share. Datadin too had arrived to collect his share from Hori’s produce and was engrossed in a tense conversation with Jhinguri Singh. Government’s latest decision to bring down interest rates had frightened him.² Jhinguri Singh tried to remove all the riddles and premonitions from his mind.

“Unless the Government provides alternative source of borrowing, this law would prove ineffective”. Of course, “we would deduct 25 in advances for every 100 rupees even if counter signature of village headman is required for the validity of any loan deed”. Well versed in the ways of the world he then sounded the final triumph, “Law sides with rich Pandit, does not the law lay down that no Zaminder and money-lender should treat their tenants harshly yet we see contrary in everyday life... The tenants lack guts to run to the courts every day”. He then cited Datadin’s own example to make his point even more clear. Nokheram had no courage, he reminded, to ask for five hundred rupees, Datadin owed to Raisaheb for he knew well that his interest lay in becoming friendly with Datadin in their common exploitation of the poor. To us, it shows more in alliance the landlord had to forge with rich peasants.³

Things started veering was under discussion around Datadin’s own affairs, the marriage of his own son Matadin. His relation with cobbler girl had earned a bad name for Pundit’s prestige; Jhinguri Singh hinted this point indirectly. Datadin understood the point of his attack and boasted

¹ M. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 2 vols. Middlesex, Penguin, 1981 and Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, London, 1966.

² B. R. Tomlinson has extensively discussed the anti-money lending legislation which was under discussion in colonial officialdom to save the small peasants from getting ruined by the clutches of money lenders; *Congress and the Raj*; 1929-1942 The Penultimate Phase, London, Macmillan, 1976.

³ Emergence of rich peasantry was a phenomenon. It emerges as a political force and colonial legislation helped it in their earlier fight against land-lordism.

of his piousness. He was not bothered about the back biters especially when he had left no space for the violation of Dharma; nobody had ever seen him eating the market made things, he never accepted water from other's hands and touched foods without ablutions; he never missed any monthly fast either. Even Siliya could not touch their utensils and cross their threshold even once. In short, his piousness remained untarnished. Silia living as a kept in his house was no bar to his purity. It was not that he justified Matadin's act of keeping Silia as a mistress, he continued, but if something had already happened, it would be mean of Matadin to leave her in lurch. Women are inherently pure he concluded. He then produced a long list of Brahmins accepting the lower caste mistresses by giving dissertation from Mahabharata and Puranas and argued that their children were accepted as Brahmin and that today's Brahmins were actually the progeny of their progeny. "Why then Brahmins were restricting themselves under the fold of the title of Vajpayee and Shukla?" Jhinguri Singh asked this question and laughed over his masterly interpretation of Mahabharata and Puranas. "It is kalyuga", Datadin threw a ready-made answer, in this age their interest lay in abiding by the dictates of the community. He then boasted his position as a Brahmin integrally associated with the fate of Hindu community to camouflage his wrong doing. Silia worked alone equal to three men's work. He was in no hurry therefore to marry Matadin without taking handsome dowry.

Under the next tree lay Datadin's own plot. Silia was busy in winnowing as if absorbed fully in a game. Dulari came for arrears collection. Silia gave about seer of grain in the outstretched ends of her sari. Matadin stopped her and humiliated her for she had no claim in his things. For him Silia was no more than a machine meant for work and did not want to give anything in return despite taking of her all. Silia was taken aback at his unexpected behaviour. She was reminded of the days when he swore by the sacred thread around his neck to keep Silia as a legally wedded wife and used to follow her in fields and river banks alike but today he treated her so outrageously. Helpless, she resumed work with heavy heart. Her state of mind was like that of bird whose wings had been clipped. She wanted to flutter in the same cage without food water even if she had to break her head striking against its bars. No doubt, she was not legally wedded to him but the world knew she was with him all the same.

Smoldering anger in the cobbler community glowed violently showing the fluctuations and tension in the caste continuum. Located distantly in time and space the cobblers were in no way under the hegemonic control of brahmins. Silia's affair with Matadin had unnerved them. They

seized this opportunity to settle their account of other person past days. Silia was a girl and had to live with one or another person but whosoever keep her should keep her with dignity by giving a full fledged status of a wife. No compromise on this point was called for. They were determined to shed even the last drop of blood. “If you can’t make us Brahmin, we can make you cobbler”, Silia’s father Harkhu said grimly. Datadin warned him about his status as a cobbler and asked him to take his daughter along. “There was no dearth of labourer in the village”, he shouted conclusively. Silia’s mother vehemently shaking her fingers on Datadin’s face said, “What a fine sense of justice, Pundit. . .You think you are pious.. .You can sleep with a cobbler woman but won’t touch food cooked by her”. Harkhu then signaled his men. Three chamars dashed forward, two seizing Matadin’s hand and the third snapped his sacred thread. To the senseless utter surprise of Datadin and Jhinguri Singh a piece of bone was slipped into his mouth, marking a clear cut inversion of much trumpeted ritual superiority.⁴ The world was turned upside down by this symbolic inversion; militancy was called for to balm the injured pride of the community. Resistance was meant to correct some individual wrong; it fell short of the articulation of class discontent. The village community Present at the site remained by standers. No one really came to grapple with defilers of Dharma, as if they extended their implicit support to the ongoing protest. Matadin with his objectionable behaviour with village girls had alienated all of them. Evil does never go unpunished. Datadin and Jhinguri Singh by then grew alert and equation now could have turned against cobbler community as the resistance got over. Hori suggested Harkhu to leave the site immediately if he wished his well. Datadin threatened Harkhu to put him in jail for 6 months. Harkhu remained unperturbed. “We are not parasites like you”, he said, “We can fill our belly wherever we work”. Thus went his confidence.’ But he thought it wise to leave the site. Silia was unflinching in her fidelity to Matadin. She didn’t budge and follow her parents. She bore all the cruel thrashing. To her death was preferable than becoming some one else’s wife Gender relations thus added complexity to the resistance of cobbler community. Matadin refused to take her along. He wailed for his Dharma gone beyond redemption. He was frightened with the idea of facing ostracisation sanctioned by the village community. But Silia would starve, work as a labourer and even beg but not leave Matadin with whom she lived Once. In other words she wanted to live a life

⁴ It offers a contrasting instance from that of the concept of Sanskritization where lower castes imitated the upper ones. Premchand’s own uncle was beaten up by the cobblers because of his involvement with a cobbler woman. See M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, California 1966 and Robert O, Swan, *Premchand of Lamhi Village*, Duke University Press, 1969.

of dignity and honour. Dhanias, the melting and large hearted one then gave her shelter. Hori hesitated. He could very well feel relieved over the fact that Matadin was taught a lesson but it was too much, he thought on the part of cobbler community to spoil Matadin's Dharma. The religious consciousness of Hinduised kind was acquiring its hold over him in normalcy.⁵ But we might relate it to his pragmatic stances. Datadin was powerful and giving shelter to Silia therefore could have invited some problem. Finally, he had to comply with Dhanias who took note of the inferior position of women in the social judgment. "All men are alike", she concluded.⁶ "Has Silia no Dharma of her own that nobody taking her side? Harkhu had rightly punished these 'holy' goondas, she concluded.

Extraordinary events like marriage, death etc. take a heavy toil on peasant's domestic economy. The marriage of Sona now 17 topped the priorities of Hori's domestic life. Because of his poverty he could not discharge this responsibility earlier. His status suffered setback in the community with Jhuniya's arrival in his house. A desirable match for Sona therefore made a handsome expenditure calculus of squaring up the expenses. His last year's winter crop was manipulated by Datadin in such a way that he was not left with more than 1/4th produce. His hemp and sugarcane crops were damaged by excessive rain and white ants respectively. Sugarcane fortunately flourished this year and he had sufficient grain preserved for the marriage party: what he actually needed therefore was amount of 200 rupees. If Gobar helped him with 100 he hoped to raise another hundred from Jhinguri Singh and Manguru Shah. But the idea of going to Gobar was excluded as Dhanias was unwilling to have a penny from him and parting with land was even more awesome. To a peasant land is dearer than his heart,⁷ dearer even more to his ancestral heritage. Marrying his daughter as a dedicated bride (Kush Kanya) with thimble full of grass was equally unwelcome. He was reminded of his father's days when he turned his sister's marriage into a gala social event by giving a handsome dowry and memorable feast to the bridegroom's party. Possessing a status in the community along with the honour of a piece of land, pair of bullocks and

⁵ S. Sarkar, *Popular Protest and Middle Class Leadership in Late Colonial India*, Calcutta, 1983, has argued that peasants at village level tends to think in cast forms.

⁶ The woman's question comes up through Dhanias's utterance, see Simon de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, quoted in Ranajit Guha, "Chandra's Death", *Subaltern Studies, Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Vols. I- IV, Delhi, 1982 – 86.

⁷ T. Shanin in *The Awkward – Class*, Oxford, 1972 talks about the strong affinity of peasant towards land. Any social change was not convincing to him which uproots him from his land. The Russian peasantry (small peasant) resisted the collectivization process.

a house how he could entertain the idea of going for a dedicated bride. These markers of possession came in the way. Days passed without decision.

On the other hand the scamp boys of the village headman started gadding as if the black clouds harbingers of storm and rain had barged in to ruin Hori's green crop and when they came to bath on the same well where Hori along with Sona was directing the water in the field, his blood boiled. A slightest flicker of illicit sexuality was just intolerable. Same evening he approached Dulari with the hope of convincing her to reduce the interest rate for a loan. But Dulari instead started spinning her own tale of woe, of not succeeding in recovering the arrears from the villagers hit by the hard times. Hori still pleaded "Bhabhi, it would be great punya (religious reward) for you, if you help me in avoiding the heavy load from my chest". Dulari could only show sympathy in return. Hori then reminded her of his plight as to how Jhinguri Singh and Pateswari were on look out for his land. It shows how money-lenders were trying to trap the small peasants and Hori's resistance against it. He invoked in her the ethical code of village morality. "Worthy son adds to the inherited property but unworthy destroys even what he inherits from his ancestry". Dulari could still suggest him no more than to be beware of the scamp boys of the headman. For the same reason she had sent her daughter to her father-in-law's house. She suggested him not to mortgage his land. But her sympathy still did not translate into action. Gradually, their talks then slipped into interesting jokes about their youth, Hori was pleased; such encounters were rare in his life. The restricted village ambience does not permit very often these encounters to take place but he was pleased also for he had succeeded insinuating Dulari for loan of 200 rupees.

Over hearing this, Sona was utterly sore and remorseful. The news threw her in turmoil. She was unwilling to burden her parents with a load of new loan for she knows well that the loan would be doubled in couple of years and would ruin her parents completely. She would rather drown herself in Gomti. She told thus to Silia who passionately hugged her as if she found lost eyesight: She was impressed by her understanding. Silia carried her message across the river Gomtj to her would be husband Mathura who cringed under his father's thrashing. Sona waited with expectant eyes. Skepticism and hope gripped her. More one is rich more increases her greed. Then came another thought. If his father agrees to marry .his son without dowry she would serve him with devotion more than she ever served her own father. Silia brings the message. Gori Mehto, a rich peasant of neighbouring village with his own well and 10 bighas of sugarcane looked like a grass-cutter who without giving a second thought beat his son when he approached

him for a marriage without dowry. Sona got a fever with the message. But the other day Gori Mehto sent a letter through the barber and relived Hori from all the burden of dowry. The letter reads thus, Goriram sends his greeting to Sri Hori Mehto who is worthy of greatest respect. I have given this passionate thought to the talk that we had earlier on the question of dowry. I now realized that such give and take will be detrimental to the interest of both the boy's and girl's family. Now that both the families are to unit into ties of matrimony we should not do anything disagreeable to either of us. . . ." Hori got excited but Dhania insisted bringing out the issue of respectability. "Money comes and goes but prestige lasts. Gori Mehto has to accept whatever we give to our daughter". She was reacting in response to the generosity evoked by Gori Mehto's changed stance on the issue. "If a man hurts you by brick you reply by stone but if a man greets you do not abuse him". She thus replied to Hori's puzzle, revealing for us the sentiment world and the moral consciousness of just and unjust, proper and improper, right and wrong. It shows also their sense of belonging to their cultural ethos transcending their material need.

Bickering between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law constitutes an everyday occurrence in a joint family. With Bhola marrying second time the authority passed out from the hands of Bhola's daughter-in-law to the sole mistress of the house. Domestic quarrels consequently blazed off leading finally to the suppression of father and son. Bhola received beatings from his son and spent the night under a tree. Condemned in the neighbourhood for marrying in old age he was left with no choice except telling it to Nokhey Ram, the village headman who was powerful in the whole area, Nokhey Ram, a shrewd conman offered him shelter with a lustful eye on the pretty little woman with him and met his need of an experienced hand to look after his cattle. He was exacting in nature in the illustrious traditions of Zamindars regency.⁸ He had to look after his huge family and had to help his English studying son's extravaganza. Naturally, if a tenant fell into his clutches he would squeeze the man dry. Rai Saheb took note of this situation and was having tension with him.⁹

Mutual envy and demonstration of wealth is deeply embedded in the feudal matrix. Petty fortunes like Nokhey Ram and Pateswari used to compete with each other in the contest for supremacy. Nokhey Ram's authority as a part of the extension of Zamindar's authority was deeply

⁸ Majid Siddiqui, *Agrarian Unrest in North India the United Provinces 1918-22*, New Delhi, 1978. kapil Kumar, *Peasants Revolt*, Delhi, 1984.

⁹ P.J. Musgrave, "Landlords and the Lords of the land". *Modern Asian Studies*, vol.6, part-3.

entrenched in local society. Even Jhinguri Singh and Datadin thought it expedient to flatter him. Pateswari, however, was the sole exception. If Nokhey Ram was proud of his being a Brahmin and make the Kayasthas dance to his tune. Pateswari, the master of pen, thought himself to be ahead of Brahmin in drafting government papers. He even used to hold Satanarayan Puja and extended feast to ten Brahmins to outcompete Nokhey Ram. His being in service of colonial state was a plus point to his authority. But Nokhey Ram too had given thought to it to acquire this position for his son. He used to oblige the petty bureaucrats for the same purpose. But Pateswari was ahead of him in one more sense. He was having, it was in the air, a clandestine relationship with the cobbler woman. Now, with the arrival of Bhola into his clutches he found the opportunity to come to even with Pateswari in this field of having a clandestine relation, the characteristic emblem of the rural rich.¹⁰ When Bhola appealed to him for justice from his Darbar by giving him a flavour of chieftaincy, Nokhey Ram evaded it with shame moralizing to put Bhola into his insidious trap. “God will punish him, Son...no one escapes his retribution...you will equally be well off here”. But Bhola’s plight became miserable. Nokhey Ram went to the extent of asking him to prepare ‘Chelum’ and to spread the cot. His status as a full-fledged house holder was suffering a set back. Moreover, his son too had realized his fault and now came to take him along but Nohari refused to accompany him. He was not surprised for he knew the reason of her refusal but he lacked the guts to go alone. Nohari in that case probably would have followed him subsequently for Nokhey Ram was one among those who believed in hunting the quarry under the cover of camouflage. He thus complied with Nohari.

Whisper, gossip took up and started gathering strength. Bhola had no shame they (villagers) said Nohari Rani was changing sari everyday. From whom would she fear, when her own husband was the police inspector. (Saiyan Bhaye Kotwal ab dar kahe ka) Thus ran the rumours. Shobha made fun of her and as a result met with rebuke by Nokhey Ram. Nohari had begun to have notions about her and expected everyone to behave with her as a Zamindar’s wife. She once brought scuffle between Nokhey Ram and Pateswari. Nokhey Ram’s knowledge about law, acquired by sitting in the feet of city lawyers was of no help. He was an instrument in her hands. She thus affected the balance of power in the village. It upgraded her mark like a soubrette. She held sway over the village. If anybody wanted to have his land partitioned or sought deferment for the payment of land revenue or wanted a plot for the construction of house it was advisable to

¹⁰ The film *Mirch Masala*, directed by Ketan Mehta portrays this theme.

knock at Nohari's door first.

Once Bhola and Nohari both got worked up Bhola was determined to join back his family. He had suffered too much of humiliation. Nohari threatened him of blackening his face by resorting to Panchayat. He mustered his courage to go back and the specter of Panchayat did not make him relent. But Nohari caught him by his wrist, unable to, shake off, he set like a helpless child, painfully aware of his shortcomings. Probably the fear of facing the world outside with a slur of leaving his wife in lurch made him recede to relatively less troublesome abode.

Of all embellishments and trapping of revenue clerk's punctilious performance of duty, holding the balance between the conflicting interest in the village, Pateswari was much inclined to one. Steering discord among the people and keep them guessing was indeed a lucrative sport into which the cunning maneuver like he only could indulge in. Amicable settlement of disputes was not part of his nature. The powerful lot like him in the village could never hesitate in taking weaker ones for a ride into their intriguing politics. Factionalism also had one of these functions. Manguru Shah, the richest of the village held the centre of his attention. Envy creates a kind of desire to have a sadistic pleasure in seeing someone falling from the prosperous estate to the penury. Hori's tallest sugarcane of that year came for a lot of heart burning. Mangru had no interest in the hot bed of village politics. Childless, he considerably curtailed his business and devoted most of his time in the prayer. Hori owed 150 rupees to him but he never showed anxiety to pay it off. Mangru though dropped suggestions to Hori to pay his amount back but never showed any keenness to realize it. Seeing Hori's miserable condition he became complacent. He did not want to bother his head by resorting to court. Now Pateswari instigated Mangru not to be as generous as lethargic to file a suit against Hori and assured him to get a decree in absentia. Hori was not aware of the conspiracy. He knew only when the court bailiff came to have his crops auctioned. He was completely marooned, put up with it with his heart vacant, senses sober down and eyes looking askance. Dhania on the other hand was reviling the suspect Pateswari and frowning to see who comes near her fields. But Hori's defeated heart could very well visualize their helplessness. "You and I stand and watch helplessly. They will cut our cane". He thus gave the ultimatum for he was aware of the logic of the money lending capital and its defence by the court. His meeting with Mangru could not be materialised. As Mangru sat on prayer, Dhania's overpowering righteous indignation, "Did he hoe and irrigate the cane under the June sun" was futile. "No you did but the cane belongs to him" the irrevocable fact was "that we are his

debtor”.¹¹ Dhanias resistance could only prevent Datadin going for bid and the bid went in favour of Mangru for a 150 rupees.

Business knows no mercy. Dulari retreated from her earlier promise with Hori’s crop auctioned. No prospect of recovery made her recede. She could well have mixed the pity in business but to mix business in pity was indeed a foregone conclusion. Gori Mehto had already made all preparations for the wedding of his son and to postpone marriage at this stage was not possible. The ambivalent prospect of mortgaging the land and the imminent peril of getting dispossessed and reduced to a wage labourer danced before his eyes. “Do you want me to mortgage the land and how would you live if you mortgage the land?” Dhanias further interrogated. “I will become a day labourer.”¹² Danced before his eyes. But both loved land. On it depended their everything. “What you want me to do then? He asked. “Entertain the marriage party for one meal and pack off the girl in the morning”. Dhanias answered with pain and consoled herself by abusing the God. “If God wish we lose our face then we should lose it”. Hori was still brooding over ways and means.

Nohari was passing by his house. Dhanias greeted her and invited her for a while. Nohari came to know Hori’s crisis. She had piled up some money and did not quite know what to do with that. She thought it an opportunity to compensate her condemned status in the village; she would gag the gossip by helping Hori. Dhanias and Hori would say Nohari is kind hearted. With this idea in her mind she offered the money. Embarrassment, suspicion and gratitude then gripped Hori and Dhanias. Embarrassment because of their pitiable condition to which they were reduced. Suspicion because Nohari was condemned woman. Gratitude gripped them because the help came in a moment of utter need. She was finally taken up as a Laxmi. Her help was acceptable in the moral code at that moment. The only promise Nohari wanted was to convince Bhola to comply with the state of affairs. If Bhola could not keep her in the seclusion of domesticity it was not possible for her not to mix with people and talk to them, especially when it brought certain advantages to her, Nohari continued. It was a different thing when Bhola used to maintain an elephant by his door. By now they were labourers. In other words she wanted to convey to Bhola through Hori the

¹¹ It shows the process of dispossession of the peasant, B.B Chandhury” Process of Depeasantisation in Bengal and Bihar”, *Indian Historical Review*, 1975 and J. Banaji, “Capitalist Domination and the small Peasantry: Deccan District in the late Nineteenth Century, *Economic and Political Weekly*, special no. August 1977.

¹² Peasant selling their land for marrying his daughter is found in sociological literature. See J. Banaji, *op.cit.* A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian nationalism*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1976.

pragmatic meaning of her sexuality. The loan was given without the dreadful ritual of signing a loan deed.¹³

As with the nature of woman and especially with the village woman blowing one's trumpet is quite common. Nohari tried to reap harvest of her munificence. "You know I helped Hori with the money or his daughter would have remained unmarried". But Dhanias was not of course the type of woman who takes false sympathy lying down. "We have not accepted her money in charity. . . . If she would have loaned her money to someone else she would have despair for the principal capital... We shall throw the money whenever we will have it. She should feel obliged that we have accepted the sinful daughter of their house. . ."

The ethics in peasant society emerges out of sense of natural justice. Immutable regularity in the world of nature gives him the belief in its lawful pattern and rhythm. Surely the inflexible notions of just and unjust, proper and improper, right and wrong, moral and immoral, natural sense woven in the web of myth, legends and anecdotes, reinforce, this quite forcefully. Faith in one man and one woman relationship is very strong and any violation, however slight from this code, is considered sinful. Bhola came to Hori's house to unburden his heart, Hori was sympathetic but Dhanias as always hit straight. "A man can tolerate his wife, breaking a pot of ghee or setting his house on fire but no man of any self respect can tolerate a wife of easy virtue". She gave a bit of her worldly wisdom. "You can expect sincerity and devotion only from the woman who had lived with you in your young age". She thus revealed the sacrosanct politics of body. Death is preferable to living with the lowest women" and Hori added "you will get nothing but heart burning and ignominy from her and suggested him to renounce his wife and live in peace with his son by devoting his time in prayer. Bhola left with determination to leave his wife. But Hori saw him next day in Dulari's shop buying tobacco. Bhola had ruined himself by getting in to the clutches of this woman he pitied. But he could also understand Bhola's dilemma. It was not easy for Bhola to give her up. She would hound his house and sue him for maintenance and villagers would come to know about it. They would say what else the helpless woman could do when Bhola threw her out. True to the country milieu Hori got surprised with the news that Nohari had given such a shoe-beating to Bhola that not a hair was left in his pate. The rainy season had ended. Peasants were

¹³ The written loan-deed is hatred by the peasantry Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983.

busy in sowing crops. Ever since Hori's last crop was auctioned, Hori had no money to buy seeds. One of his bullocks had also refused to work. It became imperative to buy another. One of Punia's bullocks too had died of a fall in a ditch. It had further complicated the matter. They had to use plough on alternate days sowing thus suffered. Hori was at plough but his mind was with Bhola. He never in his experience of life heard a woman beating her own husband. Better to drawn than suffer such humiliation clearly indicates a stringent moral respectability. Images of Nohari, Silia and Dhania danced before his eyes. Nohari; a vamp ruined Bhola bhai's life. Silia; better looking than Nohari, if wished, could use her beauty to her advantage but worked as a labourer, starved and yet remained loyal to Matadin, Dhania, the picture of service and sacrifice having a sharp tongue but soft at heart like wax, striving for every penny yet ready to stake her all when it came to a question of honour. She was altogether a dignified woman.

He saw Matadin coming in his direction. He did not greet him. Peasant without bullock was not only dismembering hand but also without life partner. "You know the God of death can only pension the peasant and his bullocks", he said this to Matadin to his query and bullocks capacity to pull through the season. Matadin freed from the shackles of dharma for Silia. He was down with malaria for more than a month. His pulse became so feeble that they gave up all hope. Than the idea struck his mind that he had been punished for being cruel to Silia. When he turned her out she was pregnant. He wanted to pass over two rupees to Silia through Hori. A flicker of humanism ran through him. Despite spending 300 rupees, his dharma remained defile. With his dharma gone he decided to do openly what he did so long in secret. "If man had a duty towards community he also had a duty to the individual. If you abide by the community it pleases the community. If you have faith in man it pleases God".

Silia got delighted after this warm gesture from Matadin. She felt like being rewarded for her penance. She no more felt uneasy with child. Happiness is best enjoyed when shared with others. She swam across the river to tell it to Sona. Standing in the vestibule, soaked in water, with her vivacity, solitude and darkness conspired to rouse a desire in Mathura. He then came to listen the name Sona perfectly matching with the breaking of conjugal bond. Sona was altogether changed. Bearing a Husli and Hemul in her neck Karnphuli in her ear lobes, her arm was loaded with silver bangles, kajal in her eyes and the vermilion in the parting of her hair. "Was it the same Sona who used to cut grass in the meadows in rags, thin dried body, and tangled hair without oil". With Silia being not greeted by Sona gave her an ignominious feeling. Sona on the other hand

hackened Silia and castigated her with suspicion. "Tell me the whole truth" she shouted with chopper in her hand. "I cut my head and then you take my place". Every word spilled out from Silia's mouth as if a gramophone spoke. She had to even swear by her son. Sona then castigated in suspect Silia's relationship with Matadin. Sona was the victim of village ethical common sense. Silia like one completely lost waded into the river. The waves were still rippling under the moon light but alas contrasted with the darkness of Silia's heart.

Silia's son grew up in the pleasant ambiance of the village. Fondled by Rupa and cuddled up by the villagers. Matadin could not prevent his paternal affection and used to sneak through to have a look of him. After spending a couple of hundred rupees on the Pandit of Benares he was again declared as a Brahmin and taken back to the fold. A big Yagna was performed many Brahmanas were feasted and mantras were chanted as a part of purification ceremony. He had to taste cow-dung and cow-urine. Cow-dung purified his heart and urine destroys the pernicious bacteria of defilement. But it did negatively purify Matadin. From the very day he developed a revulsion for dharma, discarded his sacred thread and dumped his priestly hood in the Ganga. Despite the acceptance of his status as a Brahmin by the Pundits of Benares people never accepted water from him and not allowed him to touch their utensils. In disgust he turned into a tiller of the soil and when the child got pneumonia and expired he expressed his true creed and carried the child to the cremation ground by the side of the river in his arm. Villagers appreciated him. "It was his dharma" they said. He founded a new home with Silia. It was too much for him to bear with a long enduring pathos of Silia and the falsity of his ritual status.

Conclusion

Hori is the chief protagonist. Other protagonists of the village society play a complimentary role which in turn enriches our understanding about Hori and his world. Cobbler's community's resistance was significant but remained unrevolutionary. Dhaniya sided with Siliya and raised pertinent question related to freedom of women. Sexuality typically reveals that how powerful targeted the weaker one in the village and their intriguing politics. Hori was constantly getting impoverished. The trend in economy resulted in impoverishment of Hori and others. His tallest sugarcane did not yield any profit to him and supremacy of colonial law come to the fore. One man one woman relationship is idealized in village society.