

CHAPTER - II

PROTEST : SOME THEORETICAL ASPECTS

CHAPTER – II

PROTEST : SOME THEORETICAL ASPECTS

According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, Protest is “an expression of strong disagreement with or opposition to something; a statement or an action that shows this.” (Hornby 1975 : 1019) Whereas A New Approach Dictionary of Living English defines Protest as ‘a strong complaint expressing disagreement, disapproval or opposition’. (Sohoni 2000 : 624) After taking into consideration some of the definitions of Protest I would like to concentrate on the nature of protest and its correlations with various other aspects.

2.1 NATURE OF PROTEST :

Protest is everlasting ‘NO’, an expression of human will to freedom against established behavioural patterns in the long history of ideas. There are various types of discriminations found in the society which are carried on the basis of race, class, caste, gender, etc. that leads to Protest. The ideas represented by these terms was known to the people and the poets even in the ancient times. They did express their resentment against unjust economic, social and religious situations. Protest provides human alternatives for safeguarding not only one’s natural rights but also to confirm

social change. Protest refers to the formal declaration in writing or vocal, expressing the strong objection or disapproval on certain acts, issues or things. The Consciousness of Oppression, exploitation, exclusion, denial of rights, economical or political inequality in rights and laws leads one to protest. Protest is the logical consequence of one's oppression, segregation, injustice, slavery, and such other things.

Human beings are mixtures of different characteristics and protest is one of the characteristics which is inherent in man. The impulse to resent leads a man to protest. When man tries to get rid of the unjust prevailing acts, it is said that the man is protesting. He tries to bring a reform, a socio-political change and to give his people the right of equality, justice and liberty to which they all are entitled. Perhaps it is inherent in human nature to rebel, protest and dissent. Often the protest of an individual is reflected as social protest as well. Protest transcends the primary impulse to refuse and transfuses it into an activity of turmoil.

Narendra Mohan, a significant Indian critic, while discussing the dimensions of protest, defines it as follows :
 "Protest is the awareness that arises when man confronts an unjust inhuman situation, and decides to get rid of it by way of raising his voice against it and acting to remove it." (1985 : 16)

As further pointed out by Narendra Mohan “protest is not ideological in its orientation, but is essentially activist.” (16) A consciousness regarding fundamental rights, a tendency to struggle and a sense of independence and liberty are the basic ingredients of protest, which comes into conflict with the establishment. Protest is, thus, primarily, the result of intense human consciousness, which inevitably involves values. It is both a manifestation of human concern and an endeavour to add meaning to human existence by strengthening the concepts of social justice, equality, and liberty. Protest has the quality of identifying itself with the downtrodden and the oppressed. Protest is not just negation or refusal although it has the properties of both. Protest reaches out for new values and norms. Protest is deep-rooted in human nature and it reflects also in social behaviour and functioning. Internal pressures and external circumstances combine together for the realization of protest.

2.2 PROTEST AND DISSENT :

Dissent is a pre-requisite of protest, as it is an awareness of fundamental rights. But its scope is limited because a dissenter disagrees in matters of opinion, belief etc. Therefore, it precludes any active participation in a protest. In a society, a dissenting voice is of special importance because it may lead to

an organized protest at some later stage. Modernity has led to new specific behavioural attitudes because of such new problems as unemployment, leisure, alienation of the individual's primordial qualities and his withdrawal from performing the major social roles that are manifested in suicide, etc. If social change is to be viewed as a social process and not as an ideology, then dissent and protest are its basic features. Dissent and Protest emerged out of modern situations that generated process of disorganizations and dislocations. Every social structure creates its own types and styles of expressing protests. It depends on the ingenuity of leaders who lead such protest movements.

The nature of protest is also determined by our perception and manner in which we approach it. It can be radical in attitude as well as liberal. It can be political in tone on the one hand and a-political on the other hand. Well, whatever may be its nature, subversion is its essential function. It is not always necessary that the protagonist tries to change the established customs or traditions but also tries to sustain the original values or beliefs.

2.3 PROTESTANT MOVEMENT :

The word Protestant is related to Martin Luther who was born in 1843 in Germany. He propagated the protestant

reformation in Europe. Luther was disillusioned with the Roman Catholic Church when he visited Rome in 1510. He was shocked by the improper behaviour of the high-ranking church officials. He was observed by many questions against the religious authorities which he tried to solve through the Bible. His famous 95 theses placed him in a serious trouble with his superiors. He raised his voice against the church doctrines, including the institution of the pacifism. As a result, he was excommunicated in 1521. He took refuge at Wartburg castle where he translated the New Testament into German. The movement of Protestant Reformation started by Luther has given special meaning to the term Protest. Thus protest movement emerged in society. Protest movement, besides bringing social change in society, has some therapeutic effect for change. But this depends on who protests and what are the aims of protest. Protest is the means by which unhappy, frustrated and exploited people can find at least momentary satisfaction.

Protest is based on every man's desire to be free. This feeling is above any reason. Protest is an effective means of achieving social change in modern society. It is to be noted that most of the political and social changes of the twentieth century have been accelerated by various protest movements.

Protest unmask the self-centered interests of the ruling regime. It acquaints the people with the fact that the people are stronger than they think and correspondingly the rulers are weaker than the people imagine them to be.

After emphasizing the nature of protest we can identify four main characteristics of a social protest movement.

First, it is a collective of the people who share common traits completely or partially. Second, it depicts some level of organization structure of a club type to the most highly organized structure like a party. Third, a social movement is oriented towards transformation of the state of affairs in the existing system. But it is not necessary that a movement would always try to bring about progressive change in the existing social order; on the contrary, it may demand restoration of old values only.

A celebrated American Medievalist Norman Cantor throws light on the nature of protest : "Protest is an attack on the prevailing system in an intellectual or organized way." (1970 : 2)

Poverty and unemployment often lead to protest. The disequilibrium that results from discrepancies between one's educational and social status proves ground for discontent and

protest. When there is lack of recognition for the deprived, they tend to protest.

Joseph Gusfield has given his view that “the effectiveness of a protest movement depends on its ability to overcome the widespread disapproval and opposition it engenders.” (1970 : 1)

Protest as a collective action which involves factors such as agents of protest, reasons of protest and modes of protest which are interrelated to bring about social change. Protest cannot be limited to a particular area or approach. Protest which is the collective action is adequately sustained by an ideology and an organization nurtured by an appropriate leadership. A collective action, when becomes organized under the able leadership, results in the development of systems of ideas and programmes of doctrine and action which is needed by protest.

2.4 PROTEST AND REFORM :

Protest is a continuation of dissent which is linked with reform. Thus it occupies a central position between dissent and reform. Dissent and Protest may be seen from the point of view of those who suffer from it. Injustice is perhaps equally a problem which is created consciously or unconsciously. Protest is the process of upholding human values. Modernity is

a new mental state or a new awareness which gave rise to the sense of inquiry and questioning about natural, human and social conditions. Reform is an integral part of the development of society in effecting social change and transformation. It is as much a continual process as protest or dissent. Protest- reform – protest thus becomes an ever evolving process. Reform is meant to eradicate corrupt social practices and to uphold certain positive values. It paves the way for a well thought out action which is required for any concept of protest.

There has always been an unequal distribution of wealth and power from time to time, thus people challenge the established controlled centres and be a major cause for the origin of various movements. It has become a significant factor in bringing about change, and that is for the rise of protest.

While introducing reforms in a period it must be kept in mind that the seed of reform is always buried under the social structure of country and with the change of time and sense of values, that seed germinates and grows demolishing the existing corrupt and degenerated social practices and institutions.

Reform has in its base a dissenting attitude and mood. It paves the way for any concept or philosophy of protest. Reforms are taken as evolutionary in nature and as part of

human development. There were five phases of the reform movement in England : The first phase (1714-1765), the second phase (1763-1780), the third phase (1780-1785), the fourth phase (1785-1807), the fifth phase (1807-1815). So the reform movements of the 18th and 19th centuries, in England and France, were the natural outcome of protest against the existing political order of the times. When certain reforms are urgently needed in the body of society, social movement make people focus on it and thus try to bring essential change in the society. Movements of protest tend to develop in a great variety of forms in the society.

2.5 PROTEST AND REVOLUTION:

The idea of a protest cannot and should not be confused with an idea of revolution. Protest is individual, and at the same time collective. We can say that protests are of two types – violent and non-violent, violent such as stone-throwing, shooting, shouting slogans, etc. whereas non-violent such as satyagraha, silent march, etc. But revolution is not an individual affair. Revolution is the result of a collective common discipline. It is difficult to tell precisely the range and scope of protest. To a large extent, protest depends on how we comprehend and understand its long history and development. Literary protest is related to the real life and the world around it.

Protest springs out of human spirit and a protestor upholds human rights and civil liberties. When the government goes against the rights of any individual, it seems there is no alternative but to protest and rebel. People have the right to contravene governmental authority and to disobey laws which do not represent a legitimate exercise of power. The creative artist confronting the condition of his times explores it in the context of real life situations. The term can best be understood with reference to the light thrown in Wikipedia :

Protest express relatively overt reaction to events or situations : sometimes in favour, though more often opposed. Protesters may organize a protest as a way of publicly and forcefully making their opinions heard in an attempt to influence public opinion or government policy, or may undertake direct action to attempt to directly enact desired changes themselves.

Self-expression can, in theory, in practice or in appearance, be restricted by governmental policy, economic circumstances, religious orthodoxy, social structures, or media monopoly. When such restrictions occur, opposition may spill over into

other areas such as culture, the streets or emigration.

Man has always been impelled to rebel against the very establishment of which he is a part; and the power of destruction against the existing unjust order produces moments that bring forth violence and protest.

The aim of protest is a search for freedom, liberty and justice. In Roman law to protest meant to make an assertion, to put forth a case.

According to different aspects, the concept of protest changes. So it is essential to understand all the aspects and the diversity of protest literature. Richard Clutterbuck makes the following remark about the importance of protest :

Protest is necessary to maintain a fair rare of change in the face of entrenched interests in any society – both to further the will of the majority and to attain equity for minorities. (1973 : 11)

Protest centers on a particular issue which is generally very specific in nature. In the beginning there should be a consciousness of some injustice which is being meted out to a certain section of a society as a result of which they protest. Once consciousness and restlessness about social inequalities

is shared by many persons, their sharing of deprivation becomes the starting point of protest. It is the duty of an individual to become spokesperson of a certain class to take into account the difficulties of the sufferers of injustice.

2.6 PROTEST AND LITERATURE :

Protest in literature is seen in a number of forms. An artist is bound to protest if he has a social conscience, tender feeling for humanity and larger universal values of justice. The degree of protest depends on the depth of involvement and commitment. One of the aims of literature, from ancient times has been to instruct people, to help them improve morally. The term can be best understood with reference to the light thrown in Wikipedia :

A protest can itself sometimes be the subject of a counter-protest. In such a case, counter-protestors demonstrate their support for the person, policy, action, etc. that is the subject of the original protest. Protest is presented to the reader in two ways : first, by the action and thought of the protagonist who becomes a mouthpiece, not only of the author but also of those who cannot express themselves as directly as the characters in the works of literature. Secondly, it is presented wherein the

common masses follow those characters who lighten and spark off demolition of the past and construction of the future.

A new mode of action is discovered which enables the protagonists to fight the established code with courage and dignity. If we consider literature, the creative writer claims the responsibility of finding a suitable form to express human misery. The reaction of the suffering protagonist is in the form of protest against the existing order and the unendurable suffering.

According to Shashi Deshpande, “. . . literature can be a means of social protest.” (2001 : 31) Deshpande raises a question about the purpose of writing by an author. The attitude of literature of protest is to perpetuate the downtrodden role as much as it perpetuates aggression. The novelist protests through the protagonist who becomes the mouthpiece, not only of the author but of those masses who do not have courage to express it. We can say that by presenting man's inhumanity to man, a novel attempts to humanize the human beings. Thus an author tries to destroy the unjust past order and construct a utopian world of future. Looking at protest from the point of view of an artist, one is exposed to emerging socio-economic patterns and life attitudes. Protest literature has

existed in different forms throughout literary history. Some of the greatest writers in history have employed their talents towards awakening the public to injustices locally and world-wide, for instance Margaret Atwood's *Survival*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, etc. Every creative writer gives in his novels his personal vision of the world. They are social reformers in the sense that they point to the remedies to cure the ailments of society as a whole. The protagonist reveal a realization of the internal weaknesses of their society. They adopt ways and means of removing these weaknesses which result in protest.

The definition of "protest literature" is obviously fluid. Deconstructionists might argue that all literary writing is ultimately a form of protest. Social and historical critics might argue that literary protests must contain a specific political aim, such as changing a law. A Marxist critic might argue that literary protest should disturb the social order in terms of the relationship between social classes. A feminist critic might argue that protest does or does not promote a gender bias. A psychologist might see literary protest as a manifestation of the subconscious. A traditional literary critic might point out the moral relationship between aesthetics and the political

message of protest literature. Our overall intention is to understand all these approaches, and particularly, the plurality and diversity of protest literature. Literature is undoubtedly the clearest in expressing the protest. It has helped creative writers in expressing the resentment against those who have hindered the progress of the society and also those who have hindered the progress of the society and also those who have discriminated in economical, religious, social or political ways. According to Mulk Raj Anand – Protest novel is the source of renewal of the person. This type of novel is an extension of democracy.

Protest in literature has led to Avant Garde which is in itself a body of artist and writers who think art to be an experiment and revolt against tradition.

Art and Protest are closely linked with cultural aspirations of a people. Cultural revolution, in the correct sense of the word, strengthen the element of protest and provide the necessary, new images by way of undoing the old ones and leading to the new forms.

The fact is that the process of changing the social structure is always very slow. Sometimes, it seems that great changes are taking place in society, but in fact they are apparent changes, not actual social changes.

Protest in Art refers to the signs, banners, and any other form of creative expression used by activists to convey a particular cause or message. It is a visual action taken by social activists to make a point clear. Some key icons in protest art have been the dove, the peace symbol, and taunting messages. The most important part of protest and art is element of social activism. Therefore, protest and art requires most importantly a cause or an issue. Protest art can take on the form of a simple sign displaying a social message of displeasure or a large banner expressing discontent with something in particular or in general. Protest and art is not limited to one region or country but is rather a social activism method that is used around the world.

As awareness of social justices around the world became more common among the public, an increase in protest art can be seen. A relation between Protest and Art can be described in the term like resistance art. Resistance art has long been a term used to describe those that use art as a way of showing their opposition to power holders, for instance, e.g. Willie Bester, who is one of South Africa's most well known artists who originally began as a resistance artist.

In short we can say that protest exists from the beginning of human kind. In society the dominant social group exploits

the majority of the oppressed people. Then the majority of people becomes conscious of the injustice being done to them and thus it becomes obligatory for them to protest for the oppress people in the society.

References :

1. Cantor, Norman. *Age of Protest, Dissent and Rebellion in Twentieth Century*. London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970, 2.
2. Clutterbuck, Richard. *Protest and the Urban Guerilla*. London: Cassel and Co. Ltd., 1973, 11.
3. Deshpande, Shashi. *Literature and Morality*. The Literary Criterion, Vol. XXXVI, No. 4, 2001, 31.
4. Gusfield, Joseph (ed.) *Protest, Reform and Revolt*. New York: John Willy and Sons Inc., 1970, 1.
5. Hornby, A. S. Ed. *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English Third Edition*. London W. I.: Oxford University Press, Ely House, 1975, 1019.
6. [http : //en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissent](http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissent).
7. [http : //en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Protest](http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Protest).
8. Narendra, Mohan. *The Eternal No – Dimensions of Protest in Literature*. New Delhi : Ajanta Publications, 1985, 15-20.
9. Shah, Ghanshyam. *Protest Movements*. New Delhi : Ajanta Publications, 1977, 1-5.

10. Sharma, Satish K. *Reform, Protest and Social Transformation*. New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1987, 159.
11. Singh, H. A. *Theme of Protest in Indian Fiction*. New Delhi : Prestige Books, 2005, 7.
12. Sohoni, S. V. *A New Approach Dictionary of Living English*. Pune : Nitin Prakashan, 2000, 624.

