“The Two Lady Rams” as a Critique of British Colonial Regime

Mulk Raj Anand’s story “The Two Lady Rams” is a scathing critic of British colonialism in India. A striking feature of the story is its sharp representation of the writer’s view. Anand has a wholesome hatred for the colonial masters who, as he thinks, are singularly inept and formal about the human details of lives.

The beginning of the story indicates an interesting aspect of the mechanism of British rule in pre-independence India. The colonial masters considered the support from the wealthy and privileged class important for the stability of their regime. The author considers such an attitude cynical as the provisions of the colonial rule go against the larger interests of the poor and dispossessed of the country.

The colonial regime has conferred knighthood on Jhinda Ram raising his level to the elites of the system. In reality knighthood is nothing more than a decoration—it does not even allow Jhinda Ram easy access to the governor. With knighthood, the regime has bought his services for supporting and sustaining it. This clarity of perspective enables the author to depict the mundane as mundane, divesting it of the glory associated with the protocol the regime observes. It is notable that Jhinda Ram does not come from the landed rich in the country. His father was an ordinary shopkeeper and he has been able to amass wealth either as a corrupt contractor or because of the enormous amount of money that came with the first wife as dowry.

There is a conscious purpose in the story behind representing the specific episode of the husband resolving the domestic conflict. The purpose is to give the impression that the British rule in India is a mockery of governance, drawing sustenance from distributing titles, bribe-taking, and letting state functionaries manage support from India’s traders, contractors, shopkeepers, middlemen, brokers etc. On the other hand, the governor is called a “holly of the holies’. It seems that the governor does not know enough about the doings of his team of subordinates through whom he operates in the colony. More significantly, the king and colonial master, His Majesty the Emperor, does not seem to be informed about the acts of his governor. From top to bottom, the state structure in the colony works like a well-oiled machine at one level, and lacking in informed knowledge of ground realities at another.

The author depicts the hollowness of the colonial regime in the story in a satirical way. The story is an example of grandiloquence, irony and mock-heroic. The use of language in a complicated and bombastic way to draw attention and make something seem important is called grandiloquence. Calling the governor of the province 'the king's representative', 'shadow of monarch' and calling the governor and his wife 'His Excellency and Her Excellency' are such examples. Lalla Jhinda Ram has been conferred with the title of knighthood, but he is a corrupt contractor involved in bribe taking and forgery. During the 1930s, when many leaders including Rabindranath Tagore returned the 'knighthood' title, he accepted it merrily. But the title is merely a decoration on his name because he does not even have direct access to the governor. He pretends to be a cutlery seller to meet the ADC. Besides, unlike the conventional heroes, his father was an ordinary shopkeeper and he was able to amass wealth either by committing crimes or because of the enormous dowry brought by his elder wife, Sukhi. Jhinda Ram’s evolution as a member of the moneyed class in the colony is a target of satire in the story.

Thus the story “The Two Lady Rams” has a strong nationalist perspective and it is a sharp critic of the British colonial regime.

Source:

Prakash, Anand, editor. *Interventions: Indian Writing in English*. Worldview, 2016.