

The Plight of Modern Man in *O Andhagali*.

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O Andha Gali is one of the collections of short stories by Akhil Mohan Pattanaik. Human being is at the centre of Mr. Pattanaik's artistic creation. His stories in *O Andha Gali* depict human characters in their sorry plight. They appear as helpless victims in the hand of situations. Some of the stories of the collection can be discussed in this perspective.

Human predicaments like bondage, suffering and quest for the light of liberation constitute an important thematic aspect in Akhil Mohan Pattanaik's stories. Commenting on the theme of his stories Mr. Pattanaik says, "My greater thing is : a good story cannot be created without an appropriate theme. Again, the important matter within the story is the human element, which makes the story great"(Cited in Satapathy 99).

The psychological bondage and the agony produced out of it dominate the theme of "Dimiri Phula". It is the lonely and helpless situation of a mother owing to the death of her daughter, Manju, which is kept unknown to her. She is waiting for her return. She sends gifts to Manju but she does not know that Manju will never get it. She does not know that Manju's research will never end. Differently in a different situation, the piteous plight of the mother in "Dimiri Phula" is like the situation of the mother in Manoj Das's "Sesa Basantara Chithi". The tragedy of the mother is unknown to the mother too. Ironically, the lady in "Dimiri Phula" is happy to know that her daughter is pursuing research. Her husband is also helpless. He is unable to disclose the truth to her, because he wants her to remain happy in exchange of a sweet delusion. The couple is helpless and lonely as they cannot convey their sorrow to others too. Though misfortune of a mother's life, her motherhood and the delusion under which she survives constitute the theme of the story yet the suggestion that the human being is a helpless victim in the hand of fate becomes prominent at the conclusion when the writer says, "It seemed to me that two lonely and cursed human-figures of the ruthless creation of god are dancing raising their hands towards the sky"(13). Commenting on the theme of the story professor Nityananda Satapathy says, "Here, reality and commitment are not the chief motif of the story. Here the poignancy of the theme moves us" (99).

The human situation presented in "Dimiri Phula" is projected in a different manner in "Hansa Sangita". A cry of shock and anguish owing to suspicion emerges out of the celebration of the wedding anniversary. The distance between Ramapada and Uma Devi is widened which is unknown to all other people present in the occasion. Nobody knows that there is an echo of sigh and betrayal under the veil of the external pomp and grandeur. The necktie is a witness of betrayal and its consequence is the book of Ramapada which is an unrelenting satire of all relations between the husband and the wife. Commenting on the fragile conjugal relationship between Ramapada and Uma Professor Sourindra Barik says, "The fig flower of sorrow blooms within them"(55).

Sexual desire often dilutes human relationship. It is suggested in “Akalabodhana”. Binaya Babu and Bela are close friends to each other. They gratify their sexual appetites in the hotel room. But this relationship does not bear any meaning. There is a hangover of languor and defeatism in Binaya’s mind. It is an instance of degenerated human relationship in the present time. “This story presents a picture of both the external and internal vacuity. It is the appalling picture of the contemporary modern life”(Barik 56).

Some of the stories of Akhil Mohan Pattanaik record the helplessness of man owing to abject poverty and unemployment. The picture of such a phenomenon is projected in “Rakta Kain”. The lives of the protagonists are disturbed and agitated owing to the corrosive effect of poverty. It has filled them with coldness. Trailokya and Mitra have lost the heavenly innocence of their childhood. The red lily is the symbol of this hard reality of life. It is the picture of dream, memory and disillusionment of life too. Commenting on the symbolic significance of the red lily professor Sourindra Barik observes:

It is the symbol of eternal truth through all contradictions; which is
the past and the future too; the red lily – the bloody explosion of
The simple and innocent childhood and the accumulated helplessness too.(59)

Humanism is at the core of the stories of Akhil Mohan Pattanaik. The stories of Mr. Pattanaik depict that love and understanding can only lead human beings to confront the pain and suffering of life with courage. This idea is suggested very poignantly in “Andha Gali”. Khitish and Samir are almost helpless in their journey in the train because two other demons bearing revolvers in their hands will welcome them at the Madras railway station. They have no way to escape. Khitish has understood the meaning of life after having handed over Khoka to the Goenka couple. He returns to his own village but Samir has followed him and leads Khitish to Kolkata at the point of the revolver. He cannot live in his own village because he has already got into a blind alley. This is what he says to Samir in course of their discussion while travelling in the railway train, “I know you have entered into a blind alley which have no road to the other side and coming to the back is not possible too” (Pattanaik 177). Samir understands the words of Khitish. A sense of human love is enkindled in him. He embraces Khitish. They cried out of emotion. They pulled the chain and got down. They ran away through darkness in order to reach at the end of the blind alley. They are in quest of light and liberation. It is suggested that the blind alley is not the final destination of a human being. He or she has the indomitable courage and will power to struggle and achieve and realize the ultimate reality. This is the note of humanism that MR. Pattanaik has picturised in the story. Commenting on the issue of human courage and strength Mr. Sitakanta Mahapatra says:

Man is the searcher of light. It is an old cliché but new forever. It
is the uncontrollable desire and intention of the human being in
all ages, in all countries and everywhere to go to the fag end of
the blind alley. He will certainly realize the light. The desire to realize

the sun, the light, is the ultimate desire of the human being. (63)

The human spirit of searching for liberation is one of the chief themes of : Sidharthara Upakatha". The image of the kite flying up in the story suggests the spirit of liberation from the bondage of the material world. Sidhartha observes the kite and thinks of escaping away from his own world like the kite. Mr. Akhil Mohan Pattanaik writes:

It is necessary that the human being should wake his or her delicate and far reaching thread like that of this kite. Then, though the physical body rolls in the mud of the world the mind realizes the touch of God by soaring upward. In a moment the dove of Sidharth's mind started flying along with that kite in the speed of an arrow. It soars high up. This is probably the state of eternal bliss. (126)

By portraying the meaninglessness of relationships and situations of modern man's life the writer suggests for revival of human values in this world.

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