

Theme of Present Day Relevance in Vikram Seth's Beastly Tales from Here And There

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Abstract- *Vikram Seth, through his fables, retells the tales of the past in a modernised perspective with a blend humour, pathos, satire, irony, social criticism, preserving nature and the world of animals. Seth presents the world of both, animals and men, through a sensible atmosphere which is witty and imaginative as well as thought provoking concepts.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Vikram Seth, through his fables, retells the tales of the past in a modernised perspective with a blend humour, pathos, satire, irony, social criticism, preserving nature and the world of animals. He makes a sincere attempt to convince children as well as adult learners by refabricating the receptivity acceptable in the 21st century. Seth presents the world of both, animals and men, through a sensible atmosphere which is witty and imaginative as well as thought provoking concepts. The world created in the fables poses Seth as a social critic as he brings out the irrationality and frivolousness of the society. Seth points out the elements of appearance, coquetry and lustre being held high even in the 20th century in a sarcastic manner. The emptiness in the human world is juxtaposed with the hollowness and moral confusion in the animals' world. Seth represents this idea with the story of "The Hare and Tortoise". He personifies tortoise as a practical, down to earth being but even after winning the race, it stands as a foil to the vain hare. The hare is praised and cheered even after it's lose. The hare finds its coverage in the front page of the BBC and even buys a manor house as well as keeping busy with the gossips. This also brings out the tendency of the modern day media which provides excess coverage to clever people.

Seth also takes a dig as how a commission, being formed to set up and prepare a report on national

issues in the modern India, works. The nature of the work

Becomes more vital than the purpose of the work itself. Seth captures this in "The Rat and Ox".

A typical portrayal of the modern day politicians' speech which is deceitful can be found in "The Elephant and the Tragopan". Seth brings out the tendency of the politicians, particularly those who are in power, in an ironical manner. A similar element of deceit can also be found in the behaviour of people as well when the Tragopan is given respect and honour after its death. The people are responsible for its death but their act of deceit is exposed when they pay respect and honour:

He had the body laid in ice,

Draped in the state flag, end arrayed with
chevron, scutcheon, and cockade. (95)

The beasts presented in this fable are not just humanised but are human beings because of humanistic elements like habits, behaviour, mind-set and manners are endorsed upon them. The beasts involve in the daily process of living like human beings. Seth has woven a moralistic attitude in each tale but the humanistic structure upholds the accounts. Seth has set a tone which is witty and humorous but the narration is both racy and bantering as well as involved and detached.

The tales "The Crocodile and the Monkey" and "The Louse and the Mosquito" have a strong message to convey to the audience. This can be considered a warning – do not trust who are not trustworthy. Similarly, "The Mouse and the Snake" and "The Eagle and the Beetle" have a common message – a person who is weak, if becomes determined, can fight

and win the strong person. Likewise, “The Bat and the Ox” and “The Frog and the Nightingale” creates an awareness – the cunning and the sly can always corner the innocent and the gifted and can win the day against truth and honesty. In “The Goat and the Ram” Seth gives out a practical advice that pluckiness and intelligence will always help in tricky situations. “The Cat and the Cock” points out that clever people always remain steady and balanced to succeed in the end.

Vikram Seth has embedded social associations in “The Hare and the Tortoise” and socio-political implications in “The Elephant and the Tragopan” respectively. Seth has given the accounts with social aspects – comparing the Hare to a young lady who is fidgety and given to desires while the Tortoise is cautious and calculative. The strong social message comes out, indeed, after the race between the two. The tortoise wins the race but the publicity given by the media to the defeated Hare becomes more important than the race itself. Seth points out the system of modern society pampering the unworthy people against the worthy people, just merely through their publicity stunts.

The animals in the *Beastly Tales* are also humanized with all their multiple activities and manners and with all their involvements in the daily process of living. The tales have an implied moralistic attitude.

Our global crises is not because of how ecosystems function; it is because how ethical system functions. Getting through the crises requires a clear understanding of our impact on nature. Understanding of ethical system and using the understanding to reform them is the need of the hour. Every one of us is aware of global warming, climate change, depletion of Ozone layer and other large scale environmental disasters that threaten our very existence. Even then people choose to bury themselves in the sands of time. Man has his Anthropocentric vision as opposed to Bio-centric vision. And his compulsion to conquer, harmonize, domesticate, violate and exploit every natural thing which in the end leads to his own extinction along with the total destruction of the Biosphere. As in the poem *Road Not taken* by Robert Frost,

Vikram Seth points out that one is for the betterment and the other is for destruction. In the former poem, one is not aware of which one of the roads would lead to betterment and which to destruction; but in this poem by Vikram Seth each and every reader is well aware that only the bio-centric vision will lead him to prosperity and anthropocentric vision will not only end in his own catastrophe but destruction of the whole bio-sphere. These two visions are well depicted in the next phase of the poem “The Elephant and the Tragopan”.

Thus anthropocentric vision is depicted by the poet which assumes the primacy of humans, who either sentimentalize or dominate the environment. In conclusion a decision is taken to take out a rally. Readers get an account of the rally which is cheered by the Villagers on the way. The poet wants to elucidate the fact that man can survive in the animal habitat, but animals cannot survive in human habitat. Thus the poet is exhibiting his bio-centric vision on environment:

Eco critics do look at the natural world differently. They switch critical attention from the inner to outer sphere and reject the belief that everything is socially or linguistically constructed. The next scene brings man to the scene. The depiction of power hungry, corrupt government officials would be hilarious if it were not so alarmingly familiar. The negotiation is between the beasts on one side headed by the Elephant and his Secretary, the Tragopan and the elected ruler of the town, the Great Big shot Sri Padmabhushan Gobbardhan and his associates. When the aggrieved people expose the motivated selfish doings of the rulers, the Big shot tries to persuade the beasts. The poet refers to the political reality, how they sustain themselves in power and continue administration.

The poem “The Elephant and the Tragopan” has continuous ironical dimensions – irony at the expense of projects, governments and motivated rulers and has got implicit symbolical bearings to suggest how best man can live in this planet and how fruitfully.

Vikram Seth's tales on Beasts is a continuation of the Panchatantra tradition, and an improvement on it, in the sense that it is more related to the factors or reality, relating to the environmental aspects as available at the present modern age. The writer has offered no resolution to the environmental problem. He has only highlighted the inevitable destruction of environment and how best that can be averted. Man has created a huge fence around himself by his artificial way of living so that animals have to stay away from him to survive. Human being's enormous greed is also exposed through his enormous capacity to destroy the environment.

Vikram Seth depicts the interrelationship between man and nature through a sample representation in the characters of Elephant and the Tragopan. The whole text is a careful rendering of the myth of Elephant and the Tragopan to present the environmental calamity that man sets off every day. By the tragic end of the Tragopan, the poet highlights the fact that the callous nature of mankind towards Nature is too close to man and would lead him to death, decay and destruction. Man realises his loss only when it is too late for remedy. If man realises that if he sustains nature, nature would in turn sustain him, perhaps his endless destruction of nature would stop. But he continues to tramp over the face of the earth quiet ruthlessly, unmindful of the destruction he causes every day. However much nature gives to man, man is unable to nurture it in turn and the majority of mankind spurn the tender care of nature due to their sheer arrogance, selfishness and greed. Nature is not a silent spectator. One day it will react. Vikram Seth warns humanity that it would not be just a thorn prick, but could be a mighty tsunami.

The tale "The Elephant and Tragopan" has several references to the modernistic world. The tug of war between corporate and the people, aristocracy and the people and bureaucrats and the people are tactfully presented in the tale. The tale points out how a powerful person can live at his best and lead a fruitful life at the expense of nature and fellow human beings. All the ten tales of Vikram Seth, in one way or the other, exposes the activities of human beings are towards the destructive aspects. This relates the tales to the 21st century as they reflect the features of reality.

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