Poetic Journey from Chaucer to Mukunda Chakrabarti

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ABSTRACT

Chaucer and Mukunda Chakrabarti are truly the social historians of England and Bengal in the late fourteenth and sixteenth century respectively. Their verses reflect the medieval era as a complete whole. Other poets of their age draw attention to only certain limited aspects of the time. It is their greatness that they show not one aspect of their time only, but all its wide and different faces of life. Chaucer and Mukunda give a direct view of reality and a true picture of daily life of their ages. Chaucer mirrors his age in The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales and Mukunda Chakrabarti depicts the true colour and aroma of sixteenth century Bengal in the Chandi Mangal.

Keywords: *corruption, medieval age, church, goddess, pilgrims*

INTRODUCTION

Literature upholds the contemporary societal, political and other traits of its age. The medieval age of both England and India are fascinating. This paper traces back the turbulent societies of England and Bengal, a province of India. Chaucer (1330-1400) and Mukunda Chakrabarti are the mouthpieces of their era.

Coghill in his book on Chaucer says; "He has painted the real picture of England of the fourteenth century." Another critic Campton Rickett says; "Like Shakespeare, Chaucer makes it his business to paint life as he sees it and paves others to say the morals."*The Canterbury Tales* is a collection of stories set within a framing story of a pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral, the shrine of Saint Thomas a Becket. The poet joins a group of 29 pilgrims, who assemble at the Tabard Inn, outside London for the journey to Canterbury. These 29 pilgrims encompass the whole range of the England's society of Chaucer's time.

The feudal system was changing as the church was losing its importance and more people were becoming part of the emerging middle class. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is a microcosm of this society. Feudal society was divided into three "estates"., which were roughly equivalent to social classes. The "First Estate" was the church, the "Second Estate" was the Nobility, and the "Third Estate" was the Peasantry. The rigid division of society into the three traditional "estates" was beginning to break down in the late fourteenth century England.

The society of Bengal was divided too on the basis of castes and religions. During fifteenth to eighteenth century the genre of **Mangal Kavya**was developed. The higher caste Hindus wrote verses about the gods and goddesses of the lower caste Hindus, are known an **Mangal Kavyas**. The primary aim was to embrace the lower caste Hindus through these **Mangal Kavyas**. Naturally, these verses describe their contemporary society. One of the significant subgenre was **Chandi Mangal Kavya.** A lot of poets tried their hands in writing **Chandi Mangal** but Mukunda Chakrabarti's composition was the best among all.

During the period of Mughal rule Mukunda Chakrabarti composed his poetry. Under the emperor Akbar's rule apparently peaceful ambiance can be seen but the provincial rulers were cruel, and tortuous. The nature of their brutality has been described by Mukunda Chakrabarti.

Like the provincial kings in Bengal, the clergies in England were cruel. Through the ecclesiastical characters in *The Canterbury Tales,* Chaucer constructs a representative picture of the condition of the church and its ministers in his age. He does not strike pointedly at the corruption among the clergymen of the times but he certainly presents realistically the fatty degeneration that had set in religious life of his age. When he presented the profligacy of the ecclesiast in the persons of the Monk, the Frair, the Summoner and the Pardoner, along with them he also presents the noble spirituality of the poor Parson of the town who practiced what he preached. He satirizes the corrupt

and idealizes the pure. But this satire is not bitter or scathing. It is rather gentle, sympathetic and genial.

The Monk is a fat well-fed individual who is more interested in hunting than in the performance of his religious duties. The Friar used the gifts of the gab to knock out money from the people. The Pardoner makes money by selling pardons to the sinners. The Summoner is, likewise, a depraved fellow. The poor Parson was apparently a follower of Wycliffe who was not in favor of existing conditions of the Church.

On the other hand, Mukunda Chakrabarti has depicted the tragic condition of sixteenth century Bengal as he has seen. He was an artist and a social historian. So, he could not close his eyes to the difference between the corrupt and the pure. In the autobiography portion of the *Chandi Mangal,* Mukunda has picturized how the tax collectors and the other employees of the king tortures the villagers. The tax collectors used to take much more taxes than the actual amount. But the villagers were helpless. The Muslim rulers became the enemy of the Brahmins. They used to assult the upper caste Hindus both physically and mentally. Due to the torture of Mahmud Sharif, Mukunda Chakrabarti along with his co-habitants left their village Damunya. He did not know where to go and in the road he was attacked by the goons. Finally, the zamindar of Medinipur, Bankura Roy provided him with shelter. Mukunda started living at that place and wrote *Chandi Mangalkavya.* Thus, from his description we can have an idea about the relationship between the ruling class and the ordinary villagers. The security of life was at stake. Even the travelers were not safe.

The *Chandi Mangal* is divided into two parts, first deals with the hunter Kalketu and the second depicts the story of Dhanapati, a wealthy merchant. Mukunda Chakrabarti has seen the corrupted tax collectors in his life and he created the character of Bharu Dutta in Kalketu's portion. With the grace of Goddess Chandi, Kalketu became king and Bharu Dutta was his employee. This poem suggests that royal agents, ministers and headmen like Bharu Dutta, were well placed to exploit subjects by force and fraud. and we can understand the calculations of short-term self-interest behind such exploitation. Mukunda satirizes Bharu Datta's transparent attempts to claim more honor than was his due, the greed which motivated him, and Kalketu's simplicity in failing to discern either his character or his intention. Proposing himself as minister, Bharu advised Kalketu:

There is no fear in speaking what is right. To win the love of your dependants take a ledger of their deeds [of land], so that they keep to their own plots. When the winter harvest ripens, you should set upon them a deep stratagem (bisam phanda). Distrain the grain of the poor. Thus no one will flee while indebted to you, and in the end you will not suffer from fraud.

Though *Mangal Kavyas* are gods oriented, in *Chandi Mangal*, Mukunda Chakrabarti has amalgamated the both religious and secular tones. With his magical touch the human characters have become alive. They are equally important besides the Goddess Chandi. Likewise, before Chaucer, only religious poetry was written but his approach is secular. Actually, fourteenth century was age of transition. The age of chivalry and religion was waning and almost vanishing. The new offshoots of modernity were appearing. The fourteenth century marks the advent of the Renaissance.

Chaucer follows a simple method of characterization in in order to make it appear natural and spontaneous. Like a painter, he adds line after line gradually till the image takesclear shape. The Wife of Bath is an example of the portrayal of character step by step. As she is slightly deaf, she thinks that others are like her too. That is why she talks very loudly. Her character stands out dramatically. She is an early representative of liberated woman. The red face and the spiky teeth would be associated with a strongly lascivious temperament. She was much travelled. She has married five times. She lives her life in her own terms. So, she can be said an early feminist in the mail dominated society.

Like the Wife of Bath in the *Prologue,* Phullara, the wife of Kalketu is quite masculine. She does a lot to earn their livings. It is commonly believed that men will go out for earning and women should take care of the household. But Phullara is breaking the idea of *Angel of thehouse.* She is equally hard working as her husband. To support his family, Kalketu hunted the animals. His wife in turn, sold meat, skins, tusks and other animal productsin local periodic markets, and with the payment purchased provisions for their household. Buying and selling is masculine work. But in this *kavya,* men and womenwere imagined as having the capacity to shift among roles within their respective gender forms.

Thus, finally we can conclude that in representing their period Chaucer and Mukunda Chakrabarti are successful. Both of them had an infalliable eye for just that touch that makes a portrait alive. They

notice their surroundings and describe it so minutely that their creations became picture of the fourteenth and sixteenth century respectively.

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