

## AFTER IT'S CENTENNIAL, DEVDAS HAS SAME RELEVANCY: A CRITICAL READING OF SARATCHANDRA CHATTOPADHYAY'S DEVDAS

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### ABSTRACT

This paper clearly discusses why after 100th year of its anniversary, the novel *Devdas* has a prominent relevancy between the readers. It also upholds the theme of the novel. It is a kind of a journey from Devdas's innocence to his experience. This present paper clearly shows how Devdas's life becomes complicated and how he responsible himself for his tragic ruin. It also sheds a light on Paro, the blind innocent devotee of Devdas and the courtesan Chandramukhi, who loves her Dev-babu a lot. This present paper also vividly portrays the prevalent blind-caste system, in Saratchandra's time. Subsequently this paper depicts that, the name of the places which are mentioned in the novel are not imaginary, they has a clear existence in reality. Also, it focuses on the 'babu' culture of the rich landlords, in then Bengal and their own customs.

**KEYWORDS:** Tragedy, Devdas, Paro, Anti-masculine, Hindu-Hamlet, Hatipota, Tal Sonarpur

### INTRODUCTION

Saratchandra Chattopadhyay was one of the most renowned and, prolific Novelist and Short-Story writer of Bengal in early 20th century. He was born on 15 September 1876 in Devanandapur, a village in West Bengal. His childhood and youth were spent in extreme poverty. And, for this dire poverty, he received very little formal education. But, he began writing as a teenager and was soon to become one of the best-loved Bengali novelists of all time. Saratchandra came to maturity at a time when the nationalist movement was gathering momentum together with an awakening of social consciousness. Much of his writing bears the marks of the resultant turbulence in society. In his hands, the novel became a powerful weapon of social and political reform. Sensitive and daring, his novels captivated the hearts and minds of thousands of readers not only in Bengal, but all over India. He wrote over 30 novels, novellas and stories. Apart from *Devdas* ( 1917), some of Saratchandra's best-known novels are *Palli Samaj* ( 1916), *Charitraheen* (1917), *Nishkriti* ( 1917), *Grihadaha* ( 1920), *Pather Dabi* ( 1926), *Sesh Prasna* ( 1929) and *Srikanta* ( in four parts, 1917, 1918, 1927 and 1933). He died in the year 1938.

*Devdas* composed most probably during 1900-1 in Bhagalpur, Bihar (Saratchandra's maternal grandfather's home where he grew up), was first published as a magazine article serialized in Calcutta based Bengali literary magazine *Bharatvarsa* ( Chaitra 1323 - Baishakh-Asad 1324 [ March 1916 - April-June 1917 ]) and subsequently as a discrete book on June 30, 1917. It is generally believed to be an idealized and fictionalized rendering of the childhood romance of its young author. The whole story of the novel revolves round with the character Devdas or Debdas and his relationship with Paro. Devdas was the central protagonist of the novel.

## DISCUSSIONS

Devdas was the younger son of the Mukherjee household. Narayan Mukherjee, Devdas's father was an established landlord or zamindar. Dwijodas and Devdas were the two children of this house. On the other hand Parvati or Paro, the beloved daughter of Nilkantha Chowdhury, a gentleman of Devdas's locality was almost like same age of Devdas. They were also schoolmate. Devdas's childhood was spent like any other normal children with extreme naughtiness. He plays a lot with Bhulo, the class monitor of his school. Govinda Master was Devdas's teacher. Under his guidance all students grows up.

Parvati calls Devdas as Dev-da and her Dev-da calls her Paro out of affection. Actually at first they were like good friends from their earlier childhood. But ultimately this friendship turns into love. And it is that 'forbidden' love that destroys their lives in later, especially Devdas's. The two children were having the time of their lives. They roamed the fields all day long, came home late to be scolded and beaten, and next morning they were off again. Both are slept like babies at night, tired as they were. In the morning they ran to each other, and started their games afresh. They had no other friends and neither did they need any. The two of them were enough to kick up a ruckus in the entire neighborhoods. After some days Devdas's mother was getting very upset. She called her husband and said, "Deva is growing into an unlettered bumpkin - Please do something. "

Mukherjee-babu pondered over it and said 'Let him go to Calcutta. He can stay in Nagin's house and finish his study. 'From this time a radical change appears in Dev-Paro's life. Parvati was shocked to hear the news. When she got him alone, she hung onto Devdas's arm and said, " Dev-da, you are going to Calcutta? " At first Devdas denies it. And assured her that he never go. But he was not able to honour this promise. His father, after much scolding and cajoling, managed to send him off to Calcutta accompanied by Dharmadas, their servant. On the day he left, Devdas felt very sad. He didn't feel an ounce of curiosity or excitement about the new place he was to see. Parvati refused to leave him alone for a second that day. She wept and wept, but no one took any notice. She then refused to speak to Devdas. But he called her and said, ' Listen Paro, I'll be back soon. If they don't let me come, I'll run away. '

In this way Devdas left for Calcutta. In Calcutta he settles in a mess. On the other hand Parvati's life was also changed. Now Parvati had just turned thirteen. Her family planned for her marriage. Actually Paro's family was not wealthy. And in that time bride-price was a prominent custom in every household. Without it no one can imagine a marriage. Paro's mother knows everything about Paro's relationship with Devdas. And Devdas's mother also has a hint about it. Actually Paro's family was so close to Devdas's family. Devdas's mother loves Paro as her own child. One day Paro's mother said Devdas's mother, "Your Devdas and my Paro - they are so close to each other; it's a rare sight really ". Devdas's mother understood all the veiled hints. But she said, " you know Aunty, Devdas's father is very definite about not getting him married at this age, when he is still studying. ". After hearing this Paro's father was feel ashamed and decided to fix Paro's marriage in different place.

After some days Devdas came to his home. And he observes that Parvati, his Paro who had been his playmate now turns into a grown woman. Paro also often thought of the fact that her Dev-da was now Devdas-babu. Time and situation changes everything. Paro's father fixes Paro's marriage with Bhuvan Chowdhury, the zamindar of Hatipota village. Apparently he was very well off and below forty years in age. He had lost his wife the year before - hence he decide to marry again. After listening this from his mother Devdas was shocked and stunned. Later he also informed that Paro's

mother wants to fix her marriage with Devdas but they reject the proposal. One midnight Paro came to Devdas's house. Devdas was astonished to seeing Paro in the midnight. Then Paro tells Devdas that she will wants to marry him anyhow. Without Devdas she can't breathe. But Devdas refuse to marry her because of his family's status and reputation.

After this the next morning Devdas moves to Calcutta. But before the day of Paro's marriage, he comes to Paro and wants to marry her. But this time Paro denies. Devdas's heart was broken into pieces. His life was totally changed. He goes to his mess again. But everytime he missed Paro a lot. In Devdas's mess Chunilal, a lout was also lived. He always drinks a lot and speaks about the philosophy of life. Devdas is almost like being a mad person. His heart always cries for Paro. He never imagines Paro with another man. Every night he saw that Chunilal, being well dressed went for somewhere. One day he asks Chuni about this. Chuni said to him that he goes such a place in where one can forget every sorrows. Then one day he takes Devdas with him to the brothel house of Chandramukhi, where he came every night. Devdas repeatedly asked Chuni how he able to forget Paro. Now Chuni says Devdas that he forgets Paro only in Chandramukhi's brothel house. At first Devdas was too much annoyed in that place. He said also that he hates Chandramukhi. But gradually he comes close to her. Also he was so much addicted with alcohol only to forgets Paro and always spends his time in Chandramukhi's lap. But whenever he is in with Chandramukhi, there also Devdas talks about his Paro. He tells her everything about his enduring love story, with Paro and he always said to Chandramukhi about Paro's chestity, purity, kindness. On the other hand, Chandramukhi who handled numerous men in everyday, behaves with Devdas in a totally different way. She cares him like her own husband. She is so impressed by the nature of Devdas. Gradually, she falls in love with him. Her this love is pure, sacred. She worships Devdas as a Lord. But, Devdas was indifferent to her. After some days, Devdas leaves Calcutta. His father was also no more in this world. Then Devdas lived in Allahabad for some time. From there he wrote to Chandramukhi, 'Bou, I had decided never to love again. For one thing, it is very painful to love and lose, and on top of that, failing in love again would be the biggest folly, I think. ' But as the days passed, Devdas often wished that Chandramukhi have been with him. The very next moment he'd back off apprehensively, 'Oh no, that won't be good - if Paro ever came to know of it...' It shows that how he loves his Paro. It also shows that he also prefers Chandramukhi, the courtsean. Actually this novel is essentially a retelling of the relationship between Krishna, Meera and Radha, portrayed as Devdas, Chandramukhi and Parvati ( Paro) respectively.

Then ultimately Devdas became annoyed with his bored life. So he now wants to go some other place but he can't select wherever he goes. He then told Dharmadas that, 'Let's go home first ; the rest can come later. ' They bought tickets for Hoogly and boarded the train. Dharmadas stayed close to Devdas because he was very seek. In the train he always wished that he meets her mother for the last time somehow. He knows that his days were almost finished. In the early hours of dawn Devdas stepped outside after touched Dharmadas's brow. He stepped out in Pandua station. Then he asked a coachman of a buggy, " Hey there, could you take me to Hatipota village? ' Actually he for the last time wants to see his Paro. Then Devdas starts his journey in a bullock cart towards Hatipota. This journey is full of symbol. It symbolises our last journey of life. Now Devdas prepares himself for death. He always asked the coachman, "How much more?" Then gradually Devdas with too much pain leaves his life. The cart came to stop under the huge Banyan tree before the house of the zamindar of Hatipota. The coachman receives no response from Devdas. Then he and the other villagers identified that he is died. And they also identify that he was Devdas Mukherjee. When Parvati get this news she was totally shocked and astonished. She runs first to meet with her Dev-da for the last time. But Bhuvan Chowdhury ordered his every servants to stop her and when she came close to the big gate of the house then she was stopped by the maids and the servants of the

house. She falls in a faint. This was also very symbolical. It shows that society does not approve the relationship of Devdas and Paro. And for that she doesn't see her Dev-da for the last time and the vice-versa.

Actually some critics linked Saratchandra's *Devdas* with William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. And they also described Devdas as Hindu-Hamlet because of his hesitation to take decision. To be or not to be - that is the main question in Hamlet in his entire life. He has dream to become the King of Denmark but he hesitates to kill the present King. And this way his life becomes complicated. Here also in *Devdas*, we get same kind of situation. When Paro wants to marry Devdas, then Devdas denies her because of his social position and his father's reputation. But after some days he changed his decision and proposes Paro for marriage. But this time Paro rejects the proposal. He has always conflicts in his mind.

Some critics also says that *Devdas* is an anti-masculine hero, totally opposite of the Angry Young Man type. He has no courage to take risk. He always think internally but fails to implements them in practical fields of life.

According to Aristotle's concept of tragedy - a tragic hero must belongs to an aristocratic class, and he has his own flaw and this flaw leads him to destruction. Similarly if we analyzed the character of Devdas, we clearly found that he has some affinity of Aristotelian tragic hero. Devdas belongs to an aristocratic family. His father was a landlord or zamindar. He always spent his life with full of comfort and ease. And also his tragic ruin it is none other he himself is responsible. Paro wants to live with him, but for his egoistic nature he rejects her. With time Paro moves on and lives her own life in her own way. On the other hand Devdas never wants to realize the reality. And always indulges himself in the thoughts of Paro and their past memories.

Saratchandra was always famous for his narrative style. For his style of narration he known as a katha sahityik. Sreejata Guha beautifully describes it,

"Readers will not need to be reminded of the power and effectiveness of the early scenes between Devdas and Parvati, the scene where she proposes marriage to him, or their meeting on the riverbank just before her marriage. The drama is enhanced by some telling touches - the solitary conchshell that blows out during Devdas's last talk with Parvati, signalling the closing of their days, even as Devdas asks the chillingly futile question, ' Can you run away with me tonight?' ; or Parvati's last pathetic comment on the dead Devdas : 'All night '. The scenes between Devdas and Chandramukhi are etched out equally economically. What happens as a result is that the reader, having seen the characters at high points of drama but not having been told much about them besides, is focused to think about them. These are the means by which this sparse and simple 30,000 - word novel is able to assume proportions larger than it.

There are two other reasons why the narrator of *Devdas* captivates the imagination. Firstly, the four principal characters - Devdas, Parvati, Chandramukhi and Chunilal - are as convincing as any quartet can be. This has to do with the fact that all of them are drawn to some extent from real life, and find parallels in Saratchandra's autobiographical masterpiece *Srikanta*, the first and second parts of which were written at around the same time as *Devdas*. During his childhood, Saratchandra's playmate was a girl called Paru, who appears as Rajlakshmi in *Srikanta* and as the young Paru/Paro in *Devdas*. Rajlakshmi reappears later in *Srikanta* as the courtesan Peari Bai, who is quite similar to Chandramukhi in *Devdas*. This development of Rajlakshmi's character also hints at a parallel between Parvati and Chandramukhi, a parallel that is quickly outlined in *Devdas* through their Mother-images, and finally made obvious in the last chapter when Devdas visualizes them side by side. Rajendranath, a friend of Saratchandra's young adulthood in Bhalgalpur who introduced him to the forbidden pleasures of alcohol, tobacco and dancing girls, appears in *Devdas* as

Chunilal ; the character is modeled closely after that of Indranath's in *Srikanta*. *Devdas* himself is perhaps not so closely drawn from the author himself as *Srikanta* is, but the novel nevertheless echoes with experiences drawn from real life."

Saratchandra was always famous for his characterization also. The novel *Devdas* was divided into 16 chapters. In this novel he used so much characters. They were - Devdas Mukherjee, Parvati Chakravarty or 'Paro', Chandramukhi, Chunilal, Narayan Mukherjee, Devdas's father, Neelkantha Chakravarty, Paro's father, Devdas's mother, Paro's mother, Kumud Mukherjee, Devdas's sister-in-law, Dharmodas, Mukherjee's husband, Manorama, Bhuvan Chowdhury, a reputed zamindar, Bhuvan's elder son Mahendra, Bhuvan's mother, Sakhi, Yashomati, Kaka, Devdas's great grand-mother, Kalibabu's mother etc. All these characters were very appalling to the readers.

After its 100th year anniversary the novel has its relevancy among the readers and the critics also. Saratchandra's characters became popular characters so much so that every young lover believed himself to be Devdas who could do all he could get his lady love. The female characters too were a hit with educated women that time, who identifies themselves with characters. For lovers, *Devdasiat* became a fashion which implied a condition to envied, cultivated and revealed in. Even now when a boy fails in love, immediately he is compared with Devdas, the eternal tragic hero. Not only the characters, the place and surroundings which are mentioned in *Devdas* is also has scientific existence. The novel seems to be a story. There is nothing in reality. But it was a fact. Once there is a village named Hatipota. Devdas once in this village. He came to meet with his lover Paro lastly who was the housewife in this village by cart from Pandua station. But he could not meet with her. In the novel it is said that Devdas died under a Banyan tree in the village Hatipota, this village is about 30 Km away from Kalna city. This Kalna city is in Burdwan district in West Bengal of India. In present there are Devdas sporting club, Devdas renown Library and Devdas glory preservation committee. The people of Hatipota are call it is not story or history, they say it is fact. That Banyan tree is no more today where Devdas died under the Banyan tree. A new Banyan tree has been planted, which is 100 years ago. Hatipota is also no more today in Hoogly district of West Bengal, is in the south of the Burdwan district. Devdas and Parvati were born in the village Tal Sonarpur. Their house were also no more in the village but the village has its existence. It is now in the Hoogly district of West Bengal.

*Devdas* is a story that cries out to be made your own, and this may well be one of the reasons why the novel has consistently fired filmmaker's imaginations - not only in Bengali and Hindi, but also in languages like Tamil and Malayalam. The first film of the novel - by Pramathesh Barua - was released just before Saratchandra's death in 1938. The Hindi version of the bilingual gave cinema its first memorable in the form of K.L. Saigal. The subsequent Dilip Kumar - Vyjayanthimala - Suchitra Sen starrer directed by Bimal Roy ( which followed the novel closely) is still considered a classic of the celluloid screen. Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Devdas* lends to the story an opulent, extravagant backdrop, making for a visual treat that showcases the story like an illuminated jewel. Each now interpretation has brought a fresh cadence to the original story, and has brought it alive for a new generation of viewers. In many ways *Devdas* has in fact become a part of the collective unconscious of Hindi cinema - while films like *Muqaddar Ka Sikandar*, for instance, are direct take-offs on it, films like *Amar Prem* and *Prem Rog* have built on *Pyaasa* and specific aspects of Saratchandra's story, the *Devdas*-*Chandramukhi* relationship and the early days of *Devdas* and *Paro*, respectively.

## CONCLUSIONS

So the novel ultimately ends in separation with tragic tone. But this novel is always be regarded as a cult in the history of Bengali novels. Also the novelist himself said at the last of the novel that,

"I have no idea what has become of Parvati now, after so many years. Neither do I want to find out. But sometimes I do feel sorry for Devdas. After you've read this story, maybe you'll feel the same way as I do. There is just one thing that I can say. If ever you happen to come across a hapless, unruly rascal like Devdas, please pray for his soul. Pray that, whatever happens, he shouldn't meet with the kind of unfortunate death that Devdas did. Death is inevitable, but at the final moment at least one loving touch should brush his brow ; one caring, yearning face should bid him goodbye for ever - he should die with the sight of one teardrop shed in his memory. "

So actually however love exists on the earth *Devdas* will be remembered for his tragic doom.

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