



MINING ACTIVITY AS A SELF-INVITED DISASTER OF MAN IN THE UPHEAVAL



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Abstract

The present paper focuses on the hazardous impacts of the mining on the rural community of Goa. The author Pundalik Naik has tried to show the real situation in the interior parts of Goa during the mid twentieth century. While the nature was getting destroyed because of the mine business, the mentality of the people also goes on changing. Heavy work at the mines becomes the profession of most of the villagers of a village by the name Kolamba and as the story moves on, we see how it takes toll on their happiness, prosperity and cordiality. *The Upheaval* tries to show the mining activity as not something natural but a self-invited disaster for man and the whole community of that village. This paper takes some incidents from the novel and analyses how the mining activity takes on the nerves of so many characters in the novel, prominent among them being Pandhari, Rukmini, Namdev (Nanu) and Kesar. The story of one family is just a miniature to represent the story of the whole village and rural community of Goa. Taking into consideration several incidents from the novel, the paper comes to a conclusion that it is man's self-invited disaster.

Keywords: Mining, Disaster, Culture, Disintegration, Community, Degradation, Addiction

Research Paper

This paper highlights the theme of “Mining Activity as a Self-Invited Disaster of Man in *The Upheaval*”. The novel is basically written in Konkani entitled as *Acchev* by Pundalik Naik. Vidya Pai has translated it into English entitling it *The Upheaval*. Pundalik N. Naik is a Sahitya Akademi award winner; he is an eminent Konkani novelist, poet and dramatist of Goa. He has been an active protagonist of the Konkani literary movements that have been taking place in and around Goa. He has an eye of a keen observer and tells the story of the rural community of Goa. He has about forty books to his credit. Some of them are very good dramas and novels. The novel *Acchev* which was published in 1977, is his masterpiece. He speaks of the disastrous impact on the psyche and nature of the rural communities of Goa.

The Upheaval is a tragic story of a village by name Kolamba. It has three veins running through. First, the novel narrates the degradation of a society; second, it shows the fall of a man due to his greed for wealth; and the third, it speaks of the cultural degradation too. It is set in Kolamba village of Ponda taluk in Goa and in the times when the interior Goa was ruled by the lure of mining business. Pandhari, the protagonist of the novel is a prosperous farmer in the village. But eventually we see how one wrong choice by Pandhari because of his thirst for money, brings down havoc on the family. It is not only Pandhari but also several other farmers who choose to work at the mines for more daily wages. These changes slowly set in a vicious circle of events that take place in the village. As the story proceeds we see the villagers no longer celebrate their traditional ceremonies and festivals. Abu is an old man and well-wisher of the village. Savlo master is a school teacher in Kolamba. Both Abu and Savlo Master are the guide-lamps of culture and good traditions for the villagers. But, the death of Abu and the exit of Savlo master from the village of Kolamba herald a series of further degrading incidents. The school children are dragged on to work at the mines and the womenfolk of the village fall prey to the lust of the managers at the mines. Youngsters and adolescents take to alcoholic addiction and indulge in prostitution. Nanu and Manuel are the two young drivers who become victims of the bad habits. Not only that we also see how the women in the village lose their chastity. Rukmini yields to Babuso’s lust and her daughter Kesar elopes with Manuel.

Pundalik Naik has not only focused upon the impacts of mining on the human nature and culture but also upon the environment. There are ten chapters in the novel, in the first few chapters we see the author giving detailed description of the natural beauty of the village of Kolamba. Eventually as the story moves on we see the horrible impacts of mining on the

environment through further descriptions. The novelist has very painfully explained how the nature was destroyed by the mining activity. The novel ends on a tragic note as the son of the protagonist, Nanu dies unfortunately at the mining site. Nanu's death shocks everyone in the village and at that time Pandhari realises what his choice has cost him ultimately.

As we go on looking at the horrible impacts upon people, we can say that mining can be called a self-invited disaster as depicted in the novel. Pundalik Naik has aesthetically appreciated the beauty of nature in the interior Goa, with the Mandovi meandering through and augmenting the natural grace of the coastal plain. He has depicted very observantly even the minute details of nature, seasons, paddy fields and the agricultural activities in synchronization with the changing seasons. While giving beautiful imagery of the natural scene of Kolamba he writes thus:

The nip in the air set tiny buds sprouting among the lush foliage of the jackfruit, and the mango by the lake seemed to come of age as its crown of fresh green leaves gleamed softly in the sun. The wispy curls that sprouted on the cashew soon unfurled into leaves which grew bigger by the day and the clusters of blossoms swaying from every bough cast their fragrance into the morning mist. The santon stood proud and erect by the lake casting its benevolent gaze on the rows of hutments and the raat ki rani flowers that bloomed in every crevice by the lake, filled the night air with their heavy perfume (Naik 25).

The beautiful descriptions such as these are presented before the reader in the first half of the novel.

As the story proceeds, the author excavates the worst impacts of mining on the nature and people, one followed by the other. It is surprising to see the sudden changes in the temperament of the villagers after the mining activity began. The author has been successful in conveying us that the lust for wealth destroys man ultimately. Naik has also, at few points, tries to detail the adulteration of natural environment due to the pollution caused by the deep earth-digging.

Popular writer and modern interpreter of Indian mythologies, Dr. Devdutt Pattanaik writes about the process of urbanization at the cost of natural destruction, "Growth of human civilization involves the domestication of nature, the uprooting of forests and destruction of ecosystems" (Pattanaik Loc. 928). But if this is not done in moderation it leads to disasters such as the one we see in *The Upheaval*.

The mining business attracts many people with its economic comforts in the beginning. It is quite natural for the lot of poor farmers to be lured by the money which would naturally bring them more comforts and luxuries and also in a way raise their social status. Naturally, like Pandhari, slowly all the farmers turn to the mines for earning more. Ultimately the mining sites turn out to be grave yard especially for Nanu. The mine business thus becomes an invited monster which takes away the peace and prosperity from the villages, destroying communities, culture and mindset of the people.

Naik has effectively touched upon the uncertainty and despair in the life of the poor farmers of India in general and Goa in particular. The helpless situation of a farmer is seen when Pandhari opts to start working at the mines.

As we all know that agriculture has been the backbone of our economy. The seasonal cycles of the Monsoons have always gambled with the agriculture. In the recent years, due to the impacts of globalization and unchecked urbanization, the seasonal cycle has been collapsing and the agriculture has been affected to a greater extent. There is always a question mark about the certainty of good rains and the farm output.

This is exactly the situation which the writer has tried to capture in the novel when he writes about several farmers turning towards mines. Due to the uncertainty of yield and income in agriculture, Pandhari is compelled to accept the offer of mines work. He thinks that it would bring him more economic stability. Daydreaming about the wealth and prosperity that the new job might bring him, he chooses to go there, only to ruin his prosperity and health at the end. The heavy work at the mines not only deteriorates his health but also destroys his family. Further Pundalik Naik has shown how with the beginning of the mines, culture and the preserved traditions of the villagers fade away. As the days advance, people begin to think more and more materialistically. Almost every farmer stops working in the fields and start looking only for more and more money. The “Mine-fever” attacks all the villagers of Kolamba, Naveli, Shenori and Chinchey Devni. Once they start working at the mines, they loosen their communal bonds which they had some years ago. Unity and humanity of the villagers vanishes away giving way to the unfortunate development of the vicious circle of corruption, addiction and prostitution. The moral degradation of the society accompanies with the loss of tradition and rituals:

...‘A Christian! O my God! Bhatmam, wrap up your Puran. No one’s going to listen to that any longer, now that the Satyanarayan puja at the lake is an occasion for these Christian fellows to sing and dance! That old man Abu passed away, and with him

everything that is traditional too faded out of Kolamba. Don't invite us to these rituals next year!' Jaidev got to his feet (Naik 87).

The disastrous impact of the mines is observed at many points in the novel. Babuso who is a lusty vagabond, introduces Pandhari to a Gujarathi contractor, Prasad Babu. As the time passes, Babuso tries to intrude into the family of Pandhari. He is able to seduce Pandhari's wife Rukmini through his sweet tongue. Babuso not only seduces Rukmini but also has an evil eye upon Kesar and also tries to seduce her once. Thus we see this wicked character in the novel who brings in the monster of Mines in the village for the sake of more money.

There are some incidents in the novel which show us the seeds of corruption are sown into the minds of the innocent children unknowingly. We see how the children imitate the talks and ways of elders and enact them into their games. The novelist has portrayed an episode wherein Kesar, Narashinv, Nanu and Shanker are busy in their childish games on the outskirts of Kolamba. Although nothing seems so unusual about the childish games, there are some dialogues spoken by these children which hint at something dangerous:

...Let's not work in the fields. We'll work in the mine. More money there. "Ore. ...The more you bring, the more I'll pay you....

...Didn't that Ravan go to meet Sita when Ram was not at home?...Will you take her away?... Like that Babuso Mama does? (Naik 37- 38).

Pundalik Naik has observed in the novel how the mines and the money had made the farmers lazy and callous. It has always been the nature of man that he becomes careless and lazy when he starts getting enough money. The rich are complacent and lazy while the poor are always hard-working. This very nature of the human being is shown in the novel. As Pandhari starts going to the mines, we see him neglecting his works in the fields. His laziness and carelessness towards the agriculture is chided by Abu:

... that wretch has sold himself to the mine!... "Shame on you... You were always the first man in the village to finish the ploughing, the first one to sow and the first one to reap... But what sort of a wretched harvest is this?" (Naik 42-43).

The year Pandhari joins the mines and thereafter, his farm yield goes on collapsing and his fields become barren. This is not only true in the case of Pandhari, eventually most of the farmers face the same situation. Their fields go dry and infertile.

Pundalik Naik also throws a light upon another hazardous impact of mining i.e., Child Labour Problem. Pandhari pushes not only himself but also his whole family into the heavy works at the mines in order to gain more money for the day. Nanu, his tender son is stopped

from going to school by his parents. Pandhari stops educating Nanu and drags him to work at the mines. Unable to bear the strain of physical toil at the mines, Nanu suffers severe neck pain in the childhood itself. Nanu recounts the reason for neckpain in front of Savlo master thus, "I went to Naveli yesterday, and the day before...Bappa said not to tell anyone...took me to work at the mine. To carry stones on my head to fill the cart... Then my neck began to ache..." (Naik 51).

Thus he becomes a prey of the hard work. Even after being persuaded by Savlo Master Pandhari doesn't listen to his advice and makes Nanu a victim of the mines. It is very unfortunate to see how an innocent child Nanu grows into a youngster with all sorts of bad habits and addiction.

We also see how Kesar falls a prey to the mines. Kesar is also sent by Pandhari to work and at the site of mines she is ill-treated and one of the drivers, Manuel seduces her and develops an illicit relation with her which further leads to her elopement with him.

The impact of materialistic life is seen on the temperament of the whole community of Kolamba. The villagers lose humanity and become totally callous. The incident of Abu's death reveals to us how the mining industry brought a drastic change in the sensitivity of the people. Abu, an old man who dies in despair is shown as a real caretaker and well-wisher of the villagers. But at the time of this old man's death no one even cares:

The morning passed. Not a single man from the village went towards Abu's hut. A few women sidled in, making a show of sorrow, touching their dry eyes. Savlo master sent the children home from school. He didn't light a fire in his hearth all day, keeping vigil patiently outside Abu's hut. Not a soul passed along the foot-track by the hut, not even the labourers who generally came home from the mine at lunch time. Even the children who wandered on the foot-track were hastily dragged away by their mothers. (Naik 70).

Savlo master is also insulted in the village. People gathered for watching *Taalgadi* and *Divli dance* by the children blame Savlo master when Nanu falls on the stage with the lamp on his head. Further he is also insulted by Pandhari in the following manner, "... Bring Master's share of paddy... let's not wait for him to beg..." (Naik 74).

The mining activity has disrupted the whole family of Pandhari. Nanu whose education was stopped by his own father, grows up to become a rash, immoral, careless young man. He is spoilt in the worst company of the truck drivers at the mines. Whatever he earns spends on

drinks and whores. He never cares about his ageing father and ill mother and stops coming home.

Pandhari's wife Rukmini also becomes a woman of easy virtues. Forgetting her loyalty and chastity, she yields to the seductive attempts of the lusty vagabond Babuso. Due to the hard work at mines she loses her health and becomes unable to manage her family.

Kesar, the daughter of Pandhari also becomes a silent victim to the lusty driver Manuel. We come to know that she gets pregnant before marriage and at the end of the story she elopes with Manuel.

Thus we see how Pandhari's family gets totally disrupted. At the end both Pandhari and Rukmini are suffering due to illness but both their children are not with them to support.

Nanu's unfortunate and tragic death is the most heart-rumbling scene in the whole novel. The character Nanu is the most important one when we consider the tragedy of man due to greed for money.

This unfortunate youngster is deprived of education and is made an addict of all vices because of mines. At the end of the story, Nanu goes to Shenori to load his truck. Unfortunately when he stands under a mound of soil for shelter, it collapses over him causing his untimely horrible death:

...“My son! Oh my son!...” Rukmini pushed through the crowd of men and women and leapt into the dust. One of the workers tried to hold her back and jumped into the dust right behind her. Rukmini grabbed Nanu's head as it emerged from the dust, the head that she had so lovingly smeared oil upon, only that morning. One of the workers caught hold of her trying to draw her back when horrifyingly, everyone screamed as Nanu's head slipped into her hands, severed neatly from his body... (Naik 138-139).

We see through this novel how the devil of greed catches hold of the village and engulfs Nanu's life. The people once united, hard working and happy turn discontented, divided, disorganise, lazy and merciless due to their self-enticed disaster and the mirage of wealth.

All the local lakes get polluted, trees are felled, rivers get muddy and all the paddy fields turn infertile because of negligence. People forget their culture, traditions and rituals under the pretext of modernisation.

This series of degradations that take place in the story can be claimed 'self-invited'. The people of Kolamba fail to make the right choice of occupation. They leave their fertile farms and move towards the luring mines thereby digging their own pits.

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