

Janamtip: A Female-Centered Novel by Ishwar Petlikar

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Abstract

Ishvar Petlikar (1916-1983) remained one of the successful writers of Gujarati literature. Petlikar chiefly depicts the Patidar community of Charotar region and Patanvadia community residing in the region of the Mahi riverbank located in Kheda district of mid-Gujarat state in his novels. Janamtip (2007) by Petlikar is the female-centered novel based on the theme of revenge and self-respect. It describes the life-imprisonment of Bhima for killing Punja whilst shielding his wife Chanda's honour. For a small sort of revenge, the characters of this novel play the contest of life. Petlikar uncovers the enmity inherited from generation to generation, the revenge and the customs observed in the Patanvadia community of Charotar region through local colours and native language. Petlikar pervades at every stage of society owing to his attachment to social reality. The novel seems alive in a rustic environment. The novel Janamtip touches the social issue and seems to solve the domestic tie and preserve the female dignity. Petlikar aims at portraying social reality; recognize life-puzzles and its possible solutions.

Key Words: revenge, self-respect, rural society, humanity, chaste-womanhood, enmity, region, community

Pursuing the same path preferred by Meghani, Ishvar Petlikar too emerged one of the successful writers of Gujarati literature. Petlikar (1916-1983) was born at a village named Petli in Kheda (now Anand) district of Gujarat. He confirmed his dedication for native village Petli by changing his last name Patel into Petlikar. He started his career as a teacher in primary school. After reading *Gramlakshmi* by R. V. Desai, he went on to mark his

contribution as a journalist, writer and social thinker. He was awarded Ranjitram Suvarnachandrak in 1961. Petlikar chiefly depicts the Patidar community of Charotar region and Patanvadia community residing in the region of the Mahi riverbank located in Kheda district of mid-Gujarat state in his novels. Petlikar too, like Pannalal Patel couldn't receive university education. Both were trained in the vast university of life. It has been observed that Pannalal's literature focuses on individual and family life while Petlikar goes ahead to him by inquiring into the problems of the family to social life. Both remain the Janpadi (of rural life) novelists and have the spirit of local languages (dialect) as well as perception of life, yet they differ towards the consequences of their vision and style. As a writer Petlikar has earned the fame for his *Gramchitro*, a book portraying the clear individual pictures of rural society like Mukhi, Valand, Bhuvo, Darji, Bhanjgadiyo demonstrating their lifestyle, nature, etc. Later on he is firmly accepted as a writer by his famous novels *Janamtip* and *Bhavsagar*. His literature has reached up to common man. To Petlikar, R. V. Desai's *Gramlakshmi* remains the major source of inspiration. It is the time of freedom movement and the education with cultural changes has been extended to villages. The Transition period of a rural community is the constructive phase for Petlikar from where he receives the subjects and perception of fiction writing.

Janamtip (2007) by Petlikar is the female-centered novel based on the theme of revenge and self-respect. It describes the life-imprisonment of Bhima for killing Punja whilst shielding his wife Chanda's honor. For a small sort of revenge, the characters of this novel play the contest of life. Chanda, the brave woman willingly accepts the lifelong separation from her husband for the sake of self-esteem and chaste womanhood. Petlikar uncovers the enmity inherited from generation to generation, the revenge and the customs observed in the Patanvadia community of Charotar region through local colours and native language. The depiction of rural communities, the identity of life-puzzles and their solutions in novels like *Janamtip*, *Dhartino Avatar* and *Bhavsagar* have remained the prime focus of the writer, and when they are extended towards further social inquiry, they add feelings and ideas woven together with it. Except his fiction writing, Petlikar shows his impressive image as a second reformer and thinker in his major writings. Petlikar pervades at every stage of society owing to his attachment to social reality.

Surveying the plot of this novel, we come to know that Chanda makes her first engagement null and void because her husband proves a coward. She gets married to Bhima willingly. Bhima's handsome figure, manners and courage attract her to be his wife. She proves her uncommon female strength by controlling the powerful bull. She proposes certain conditions to Bhima before their marriage takes place: Bhima should never insult her nor reproach in bad words. Except these, she has never learnt to be afraid of the pains and die for

the pleasures of life. Once, she is having a water-pot on her head and seems to hide her youth under sari, at this time Punjo sees her youth blossomed in its full spring, speaks in an insulting tone that “(she) hasn’t covered up what is to be (hidden), now what is the use of hiding mere face” (17 Trans.). Chanda is the female of dignity, even bitter and obstinate by nature. In hesitation of such insult, she could not reach the farm at fixed times to give lunch to her husband. Hence, she delays. Excited by harvesting the crop of millet in hot season, Bhimo without asking the reason for the delay stops her at the gate of the farm and welcomes her by beating with a stick. She suffers her husband’s beating calmly, but reacts thus: “beat me, beat me! why did you stop, what more can you do than this! (10 Trans.) She seems to reproach her husband that the woman whose husband is a coward, how could he challenge the others who are making dirty comments about his dear wife? After this unfortunate incident, she leaves her husband according to the pre-marriage condition resolved. Meanwhile Bhimo performs the second marriage, but she doesn’t have any complain towards him. Though, Bhimo is not interested in the second marriage, but to survive his male-status and family-credit, he is forced to conduct the second marriage. Bhimo is convinced that he could please Chanda only when he would take the revenge and kill Punja. Once, Bhimo is wounded in a clash with thieves, Chanda goes to serve him day and night. However, when Bhima recovers, she soon returns to her father’s house. At the end, the inner consciousness of the son and the father awakens and they kill their staunch enemy Punja. As a result, both of them are arrested and sent to jail. At that time, without being invited, Chanda rushes to her husband’s house to be the savior, the pillar of helpless family. Moreover, she appeals to her husband to confess the crime himself instead of accusing her father-in-law. She makes her husband secure by performing all the responsibilities on behalf of her husband. She consoles her husband not to worry even if he would be punished for life-imprisonment. When Bhimo is declared a murderer, she once again joins in exhausting farming labour. She seems like a steady rock against the difficulties and introduces her female strength.

For a small sort of revenge, the characters of this novel play, the game of life. Chanda willingly accepts the separation and loneliness of her husband for a whole life. Though, *Janamtip* as a novel has a romantic approach, but the character like Chanda and Bhimo do not sweep away in the mere flow of feeling. Their obstinacy cannot be ideals. It’s a matter to be talked about nature. At the end though the character of Chanda, the reader, of course, will catch the feelings like: “A string, through it burns, keeps coiled”. Though, the attitude, understanding and steadiness of characters prevents the novel from becoming it mere a romantic novel.

The fixity of character-sketch is the significant aspect of the novel. The character like Bhima has been raised by the mere speech behavior whereas Chanda’s character has proved

its worth in the end. The writer has drawn the introductory sketch of Chanda's character at the beginning of the novel. Later on we do not find the progress of her character, but mere justification. The novelist has nourished the curiosity by using the flashback method in the beginning. Though, later on it runs in a timely movement. The novel depicts the character sketch of Chanda as: 'She has the spirit and strength of her father's youth, beautiful pointed eyes, the arrogant face having raised frown, the puffed nose with pride, the stiff neck raised of vanity, the youth tied with the string of cloth, her wheat-coloured body decorated in a red odhni (sari) and dazzling look catching the attention of each one's heart.' (59 Trans.)

Petlikar's word picture of Chanda 'going to control the bull' has constructed a climax of narrative art. The statements manifest the inner personality of the characters. Chanda says to Bhima: "you have no experience of Chanda's personality; she is made of different clay. She does not care whether she receives food or good clothes. She would calmly suffer the blaming and beating of her husband's family, but...but... if he will drink wine, speak haphazardly or make disgrace (ill-repute) outside, she would not bear it at any cost.... From tomorrow I would be yours, I would merge myself within you, but remember my conditions- my nature is like: 'A string though it burns, keeps coiled'" (105 Trans.) Here, the grandeur of Chanda's character has been preserved with due respect. Her words seem to confirm the self-respect and the entire image of her character. Petlikar shows her delicate feelings flowing in her heart till the end. Chanda's harsh nature is due to her rustic rearing and caste. From such point of view, it is quite natural. Her obstinacy brings the ideal of Indian woman, unknowingly. Chanda's character is a remarkable creation by Petlikar. While advising Bhima to live in a death she herself receives the life-imprisonment by her husband. She cannot live dead-life. The writer suggests that she is pregnant and becomes both the crossbeam and support of the family. The novel seems alive in a rustic environment, but Petlikar does not show agreement with contemporary society, politics and its problems. Though proved better for him to do so, otherwise it would damage the balance of the novel.

The eminent writer Raghuveer Chaudhari in "Sheel and Shabda" considers *Janamtip*, 'a Janpadi novel' (Dave 84). This story is of distinguishing characters limited to time and place. Meghani observes that the features like the opening of story, incidents knitted with curiosity, art of characterization, the harmony of conversation and the remarkable judging factor in the form of a patience of the artist, etc. have shaped this novel a thoroughly artistic piece' (Dave 85). Though, while judging certain factors, one cannot claim it a perfect piece of literature, but should be noted as the charming novel due to its neat structure and artistic portion.

In an Introduction (*Praveshak*) of this novel the celebrated novelist Zhaverchand Meghani (10-20) notices certain things regarding the flavour of own land under the title: 'Nij

Dhartini Sodam'. Here is the summarized and Translated note of his observation on Petlikar's *Janamtip*. He examines that: 'Any writer, liberated from the fixed frame, suddenly shines and brings the artistic vision of self-experienced, small like folk-world, then new-light is spread in Gujarat; and it pleases us like flavour which raises from the wet land by the first rain in the month of Ashad. Such flavour of native land was brought by Pannalal Patel before seven years and now by Ishvar Petlikar in literature. Those farmers whom the banks of the rivers like Sabar, Vatrak, Mahi and Rava have stored in their laps and if we were the lawyer, we observe them mostly in the form of silent criminals or witnesses in the small court and more than that as changed, rejected, wearing criminal dresses, entering into Sabarmati jail in a raw and in the form of lifeless uniformity. Both Pannalal and Petlikar have observed them wallowing in the sand of their mother-earth, expressing love and anger, coloured with good and bad excitements, committing the secret murder, showing manifested sportsmanship, tumbling down by strange like prestige, hungry and wretched, graceful by valiance, subduing the weak movements and emptying the whole life-spirit in a great moment, whatever they are. He has neither decorated them with the ornaments of cleanliness and neatness nor attributed the 'new' feelings and ideals' (*Janamtip* 11).

Meghani further notes in context to the unique aim of the artist that the aim of the writer is quite different that of the police, the judge, the jailer or the social reformer. The writer aims at catching the essence of humanity by entering man's inner self after crossing the external layers. *Janamtip* catches such humanity. The writer of *Janamtip* directly enters in the real places of its life-style: i.e. enters in the farms because their houses are too narrow to catch the youth's colour of life and their sleeping houses also are suffocated (12). The common good is the ultimate aim of all art and literature, and if not, it should be. Life itself is a form of conflict. No one can fulfill the expected dreams. The favourable destiny becomes unfavorable. Despite man's desire to live a simple and straightforward life, he entangles in the whirlpools of life. *Janamtip* focuses on such discrepancy that suffocates the honest path of labour (17 Trans.).

The overall impression of this novel confirms that Petlikar shows his favour especially for the female character in the entire narrative. The novel *Janamtip* touches the social issue and seems to solve the domestic tie and preserve the female dignity. Petlikar aims at portraying social reality; recognize life-puzzles and its possible solutions. He truly proves Chanda a protagonist of the novel and justifies her female strength since she remains the directing force of all actions.

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