Appreciation of the poem -Rice

Rice is a poem written by the renowned poet Chemmanam Chacko in which he expresses his protest against the drastic changes that has taken its grip on the agriculture sector, and the minds of the people in Kerala. The poem criticizes the farmers and the authorities for their exploitation of nature and being selfish and money minded.

The first half of the poem gives us a nostalgic picture of the past. The poet returns to his little village, with a doctoral degree, after four years of research work in North India. As he sits in the train, the poet thinks of his father, working in the paddy fields, soiled with mud. He imagines his younger brother holding the saplings in his hand. The poet’s mouth waters thinking about the ‘athikira’ rice of his fields. He was completely fed up by eating chapatis in North India. He imagines that his father, mother, oxen and his brother would welcome him. He gets impatient and wants the train to move faster. But when he reaches his village he is shocked. The whole scenario had changed. He sees the whole area planted with rubber trees. He notices his father installing a machine to make rubber sheets. His father proudly talks about the profit of rubber cultivation. Meanwhile his brother arrives home from the ration shop. He trips on something and the wheat he had got as ration is scattered all over the place. Eating ‘athikira’ rice remains a distant dream.

Chemmanam Chacko clearly depicts the selfish and greedy nature of the farmers. The poem is packed with sarcasm and scorn. He is shocked to comprehend the truth that the farmers have stopped agriculture to start commercial crops. We get a clear picture of the dangerous change that has happened in the modern society. Food crops are replaced by the cash crops. Farmers do not want to go to the fields and soil their clothes. Besides, their desire to lead a luxurious life is very clear in this poem. The image of the poet’s brother running in with the ration, tripping and falling down, is very much satirical. This kind of satire really suits the theme. Today we get our food grains, vegetables and fruits from neighbouring states.

The poem ending with the ironical note of the ‘ship of the skies’ carrying political leaders to the centre to beg for more rice is hilarious. The poem ends with his worry of getting husk as that was what he was working on, for the last few years. The husk which was in abundance before, was now a rare sight as the cultivation of rice had ceased.

The values and virtues of hardwork and pride is lost to the greed for money and easy life. His pungent verse is a dig at the contemporary society, who in their hunt for white collar jobs have forgotten their culture and tradition.

The poem is written in blank verse and is full of satire. He uses simile in his poem. Images like handloom, dhoti, oxen, athikara rice evokes nostalgic feelings. The poem also shows a contrast between expectation and reality.

With the news of farmers suicide increasing day by day, as cultivation becomes a non profitable income, the poem has contemporary relevance.