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THE EPIC OF THE SOIL IN PEARL S. BUCK'S *THE GOOD EARTH*: A STUDY

Abstract:-

Pearl S. Buck is a distinguished American novelist of twentieth century who became first American to be recipient of Nobel Prize in literature in 1938. Pearl S. Buck spent almost her precious forty years in China, and wrote to interpret China for the Western world. Her works are mainly Asian way of life. Her third novel *The Good Earth* published in 1931, it became worldwide popular and critical success and winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1932. Pearl S. buck was awarded Nobel Prize in literature in 1938 “for rich and truly epic description of Chinese peasant life and master pieces of biography”. Thus she became first American woman to be awarded Nobel Prize as well as Pulitzer Prize in literature. These awards were given to her not only admirable biographies of her parents but for her true depiction of the Chinese peasant life. *The Good Earth* is the story of poor farmer Wang Lung who works hard and established himself in the society and became a landlord in his village. He had intimacy with the land. He puts all his effort, love and devotion for the land and became a prosperous man in his region. The paper aims to present the emotional attachment to the land of Wang Lung and how he becomes land owner in his village.

Key words:- intimacy, Land, O-Lan, relationship, Wang Lung, etc.

Introduction:-

Pearl S. Buck is first American woman to be awarded Nobel Prize in literature in 1938. This award was given for her true depiction of Chinese peasant life and masterpieces of biographies of her parents. She is daughter of Presbyterian missionary namely Absalom and mother Caroline Sydenstricker who was born on June 26, 1892 in Hillsboro, West Virginia. Pearl S. Buck was belonged to two cultures, American and Chinese because when she was an infant her parents returned to China from U.S.A. where she lived until she was seventeen years old. Her parents liked to live among Chinese rather than missionary compound.

“Happy for me that I had such parents, for instead of the narrow and conventional life of the white man in Asia, I lived with the Chinese people and spoke their tongue as I spoke my own. We learned by example to judge people by character and intelligence rather than by race or sect.”(My Several World 20)

Thus she grew up in the bilingual environment. At the age of four she learned to speak Chinese then English. She was lovely taken care by Chinese Amah who taught her popular tales, stories, Chinese reading, writing and Confucian principles which helped her to understand the Chinese people. She was very curious to learn stories from her childhood. She also learned Buddhism, and Daoism stories. While she was a child, she was very much interested to listened stories as she remarked:

“Even then I had intended to be a teller of tales- a writer to be teller of tales,-a writer of novels, though how that and was to be achieved I did not know one longs to make what one loves, and above all I loved to hear stories about people. I was nuisance of a child I fear, always curious to know about people and why they were as I formed them.”(MSW 75)

Pearl S. Buck's home environment was very suitable to learn so many things; it provided her a very healthy environment for learning variety of things. Numerous experiences molded her way of thinking. She learned American history from her mother, Bible verse from her father and Chinese stories, tales from her Amah. Her tutor also taught her Chinese subject. In Sunday she attended her father's church. They used to pray and worship at night in the home. Her father used to read the verse from the Bible every night. Her father also told his wonderful experiences while he visited remote regions of the country for missionary works. The rare experiences and adventures which her father faced as a missionary, she listened from her father very carefully and amazed and surprised. These real stories filled her with thrill and curiosity to know about the people. Thus pearl s buck grew up in such environment which helped to become a writer. She was being prepared as a distinguished author of the World. She observed both Chinese and American culture. "She rose up close intimacy with the Chinese people, speaking Chinese, playing with Chinese children, visiting their homes, listen their ideas and observing their cultures."(Doyle 16)

The Good Earth is a moving story of poor farmer who is a very poor farmer. He cannot manage to marry O-Lan who is a kitchen slave in great land lord House of Hwang. O-lan is not a beautiful but she is very obedient and dutiful. She does house chores but also helps her husband on the farm. When she becomes pregnant, she still continues working at home and on the farm regularly till minutes before her delivery.

In *The Good Earth*, protagonist Wang Lung is portrayed as farmer of twentieth century in China, where farmers were neglected and exploited by land lords. They had no identity in the country as well as society. Society had divided by two group one group was rich land lord and second group was very poor farmers who were working very hard in their fields. On other hand rich were living a luxurious life and spending money lavishly. The Poor farmers faced natural calamity, plagues and droughts. In the very beginning of the novel Pearl

S. Buck depicts the very poor condition of farmer and their life in the village through protagonist character of the novel namely Wang Lung. Wang Lung's home is made of earth; his gods are also from the earth. His mother was died before six year he and his father lives in the earthen home whose roof is covered by straw "the kitchen was made of earthen bricks as the house was, great squares of earth dug from their own field, and thatched with straw from their wheat." (T.G.E.2)

Pearl S. Buck has realistically shown here difference between the poor and the rich. Poor lived in hut but rich lived in palace made of bricks. In other hand poor lived in hut covered by straw made of clay. In the beginning it was well described by authoress in her novel.

"Drawing on decades of experience and observation, Pearl filled *The Good Earth* the sights and sounds of China's daily life: the landscape and house of a small village, the tools of the working men and women, the cloths the people wear and the food they eat, the rituals of marriage and death" (Peter Conn 131).

Mrs. Buck saw the China in her own eyes and experienced it all. So her experience worked as a raw material for her award winning novel. How realistically she described the Chinese peasantry farm and family any one can agree that she was an eye witness of Chinese peasantry farm and family. As an American anyone how can write so realistically about rural china and its people. Definitely it is a result of her curiosity and longing for knowledge. From her childhood she was very curious to know about people and stories.

Wang Lung knows the very thing that the land will remain forever. He has great love with the land; he realizes that everything is out of the earth. Even the land is larger than life in his view. When Wang Lung gets prosperity he gives first priority to buy lands. He buys land from the House of Hwang the leading family of the village. Thus he makes a large state and

becomes a land owner in his village. Buck tries to show the journey of poor peasant to the prestigious land owner of his own village. It is just because of hard work and love for the land. By the little while the natural calamity strikes him by drought, famine and hunger he departs to the south to earn his livelihood. Eventually he earns some money by looting the rich man. They returns to the land

Wang Lung's uncle tries to create problem to Wang Lung and blackmail him in order to get money. His uncle takes advantages of being his uncle. In Chinese custom one has to care their elder. He brings some people from the city to create problems. His uncle becomes a millstone round his neck. His uncle is idle and very lazy person. Whenever he has not enough money for him and his family he depends on Wang Lung. Once his uncle calls some bad people from the market; Wang Lung looks at the men who are well fed; Wang Lung says that he will not sell his land. When he asks one of the men how much he would pay for the land. The man states a price that is hardly anything for a piece for the land. Wang Lung tells that he will never sell his land

“I shall never sell the land! Bit by bit I will dig up the fields and feed the earth itself to the children and when they die I will bury them in the land and I and my wife and my old father even he, we will die on the land that has given us birth”(TGE 86).

Because of famine his family goes to south to find food. They can no longer grow anything on the land because of famine in his region. In the city they must go to the public kitchen for food and begging in the city. Wang Lung works by pulling rickshaw to earn money. Kiangsu, the city was very strange from Anhwei, Wang Lung's birthplace; another thing that Wang Lung learns about the city is that there is a prosperity and abundance of food. In the city, markets are filled with various foodstuffs and no one seems to starve. Wang Lung and his family go to the public kitchen to be fed because they can never afford to get enough

to cook in their hut. Whenever they have any extra money, the family purchases some cabbages to cook and the boys steal fuel from the fuel carts in the street. Wang Lung's family and many others live in poverty, unable to participate in any of the luxuries of the city, working at the services of the rich. The children steal whenever they can. They work all their lives only to be living on the fringes of poverty, barely able to feed themselves. The father tells Wang Lung that they should return to the land. O-lan tells him that it is possible to return if they would only sell the girl child.

To Wang Lung, there is always the land. His happiness lies in his land. Now he is in south part of China far away from his land because of famine. But his heart is always longing for his own land but the circumstances are not letting him to return home. His father tells him to return the land and his wife even says that if we want to return home so we will have to sell girl child. Then only it would be possible to return home in their town.

Once Wang Lung gets a chance to loot a rich man's home he does not miss the chance. He and his wife loot some hidden silver there. He plans to return home that they will back to their land. He prepares homecoming by buying wheat, rice, and corn seeds from the south, vegetable seeds and an ox. Having reached his home they start work hard in the field and they become rich in his town.

The rural life of China was set in her award winning novel *The Good Earth*. It is own life experience that gave vast insight into the minds of Chinese farmers. Her protagonist is not a rich man and not a very famous but he is a poor farmer who learns to depend on the land for his livelihood. He is a universal farmer of rural China of twentieth century. Mrs. Buck tries to show a love and compassion for farmers and his lands. For the Wang Lung the land becomes the ultimate source of joy in every situation. Therefore he purchases some land even in the time of famine from the House of Hwang. He worships the earth and the earth

gives fruit and food to the living being. He knows that earth is everything that's why he says once "land is once flesh and blood" (T.G.E.37). He can't even imagine a movement to separate himself with the Land. His life is fully connected with the land. He considers land as his own soul.

House of Hwang was the leading family of the village but they spend lavishly money on opium and on the prostitutions in the novel *The Good Earth*. Thus they become poorer when Wang Lung hears that they are growing poor he is shocked. But he does not miss the opportunity to buy the piece of land from them. When he purchases land from the house of Hwang and he becomes immensely happy.

Mrs. Buck tries to show that the success of Wang Lung is lies on deep love and devotion towards land and Hwang's decline is his disinterest on the land and spending money lavishly on prostitutes and opium. Mrs. Buck tries to show a love and compassion for farmers and his lands. For the Wang Lung, the land becomes the vital source of joy in every situation. Therefore he purchased some more land from the house of Hwang even in the time of famine. He worships the earth, and the earth gives fruit and food for lives. He knows that earth is everything. Even his gods are also made out of earth. The attachment to the earth is a significant theme of the novel. Being a farmer he deems the earth as a mother. He can't live without earth. In every circumstance he wants to live in his village and work in the land. Pearl S. Buck tries to give transparent image of peasant life and its values and beliefs on the earth. She also admired his traditional methods of farming and strategies, which she believes there were no requirement of improvement. Pearl S. Buck carried out her genuine work and established herself as a prominent writer of her age.

Although she is an American writer but her approach to the life of Chinese peasant is brilliant. It is the result of her curious to know about the people and living with them.

She depicts the up and down of poor rural peasant life. She improves the image of China to the World as well as America. *The Good Earth* was drawn the characters so wonderfully that her contemporary native writer could not do so.

It is clearly evident that his great attachment with the earth is very significant. He has very deep respect on the earth, an intimate relationship with the earth. He worships the earth in the beginning of the novel. He was bought up and protected by the land. He spends a lot of time with the land and develops an extremely deep emotional attachment to his land, his values and believes are also associated with the land.

Wang Lung's attachment is not common but it was profound relation with the earth yet he is not without a man of challenges and struggle. His family gets struck by natural disaster. Wang Lung is state of dilemma because he finds oneself helpless as to struggle against the miserable conditions poured by the Nature. He undergoes the hardship due to the changes of calamity yet his beliefs and values are very strong upon the Earth. Wang Lung's family starves for a long days yet he denies to sell the lands. But he chooses to go to the Southern city of China rather to sell his land. He always has love for his lands and deep respect for the lands because he is true son of soil.

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