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THE REPRESENTATION OF RAJBANSHI WOMEN IN RAJBANSHI POEMS

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Abstract:

Marginal literature does not always contain a single dimension. Rather there may be the layered marginality working into it. Similarly, Rajbanshi literary tradition, if considered so, belongs to the different Dalit dimension. But inside this marginal literature, a different form of marginality sketches itself—the Rajbanshi women or gender question in respect of the mainstream literary tradition. Their ‘doubly’ or ‘triple’ subjugated and colonized self ventures around the path of suffering, oppression, deprivation and neglect often ‘Reducing’ them to the mere ‘Body’—a dump of flesh killing off the very ‘Possibility’ inside them if Deleuzian phraseology suits here. Their voice does not even come out of their mouth—leaving a ludicrous question upon the ‘hearing’ theory of Spivak in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* They are being ‘represented’ in the collection of poems by the male Rajbanshi poets such as—Nikhilesh Ray’s *Kalnattir Kabita*, Santosh Sinha’s *Dotrar Dang* and *Kabita Kungkurar Suta*, Abhijit Barman’s *Shak Tulinu Bechhi Kuchhi* etc. But the social change inside the land is instigating the female poet like

Dhritishri Ray to engage with archiving the ‘Presentation’ of the women—their subjective and first hand experiences accelerating a start of a journey from ‘margin’ to a ‘Symbolic Center’ in her collection of poems—*Betir Dar Takat Na Hay* and *Mue Nari Mue Nodi*.

Keywords: (Re) presentation, Language, voice, Reducing, Body, Doubly Colonized, Marginality, Symbolic Center.

Politics of ‘exclusion’ and ‘reduction’ is a general tendency in case of the marginal literature. As a part of the progressive literary tradition marginal literature often forgets to render a place and articulate the voice of the ‘doubly marginalized’ into it. They have been thrashed further towards the brink of periphery and towards the margin of the margin itself. As a result, it gives birth to a colonial discourse inside the marginal literary field itself—where the ‘brilliance’ of the great exponents of marginal literature play the part of the colonizer colonizing the wretched who can never have a ‘voice’ of themselves. They have to wait for the ‘representation’ done about them by the

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selected writers and poets often end up sympathizing with the marginal marginalized. In Rajbanshi literature this tendency of ‘representing’ the women of the community is there. There were no remarkable self portrayals of the women by the women. They are being ‘represented’ in the collection of poems by the male Rajbanshi poets such as— Nikhilesh Ray’s Kalnattir Kabita, Santosh Sinha’s Dotrar Dang and Kabita Kungkurar Suta, Abhijit Barman’s Shak Tulinu Bechhi Kuchhi etc. But the social change inside the land is instigating the female poet like Dhritishri Ray to engage with archiving the ‘Presentation’ of the women—their subjective and first hand experiences accelerating a start of a journey from ‘margin’ to a ‘Symbolic Center’ in her collection of poems—Betir Dar Takat Na Hay and Mue Nari Mue Nodi.

These collection poems reveal the sordid sagas of Rajbanshi women at the individual and collective levels with detailed description of the squalor brutality of their experience in the gory and gruesome language. They are usually offered ‘silence’ and ‘distortion’ in dominant discourses. Sometime they have dared to bring out the ugly truths. They are the brutal exercise of casteism in society and the sexism exercised ‘within and outside’ of the community. They are oppressed by the male within the community and the male from the society itself or from the outside of the community.

For instance, education in the Rajbanshis is a great uplifting thing—but they are consciously denied to that. They are deprived of this education with utmost care. As a result the Rajbanshis think that this deprivation is very much ‘inevitable’ to those who belong to the lower caste as them. Their acceptance of the situation or condition makes them permanently ‘disable’ and this makes their ‘self-esteem low’.

The oppression on the Rajbanshi women is casted upon them in two different ways—physically and psychologically. Rajbanshi women are easier to be humiliated than the Rajbanshi men. So here ‘caste combines with gender’ comes to play a role in the humiliation of the Rajbanshi women. They are not like the women of the upper caste or class in Indian context. The upper caste women do not go out of the household chores to perform in the field usually. They stay inside the home. But in case of the Rajbanshi women, they have to go out of the room or house to get the livelihoods and the means to live. Abhijit Barman’s poem Malti can be a good example in this respect—she was a woman whose husband had left her and she took shelter in her father’s house where the best companion was the poverty. She shouldered the responsibility of the old father and the younger sister by performing the household works in the ‘Babus’ house. Her helplessness and poverty made her an easy prey to the village brothers and uncles who

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used to lure her showing their money and riches—Village brother, Gopal uncle are very good

Often throw the bait of heavy amount

Then Malti spit on the ground willingly

For this everyone glances at her angrily. (Shak Tulinu Bechhi Kuchhi 12)

But her wretched fate of being born in the poor Rajbanshi family did not stop there. One night she was abducted by the lustrous monsters of the village and they made a feast on the body of Malti and hang her from a tree—

Suddenly one night ruffians with sticks and arms

Abducted the village girls threatening firm

In the morning Malti's body hangs from a tree

Neighbours and all can't sigh in free. (Shak Tulinu Bechhi Kuchhi 12)

But there is no protest in the village—their long habit of maintaining 'silence' pushing them towards conferring on them a different Dalit dimension—nobody cares for Maltis—they are the forgotten bubbles of history and society—

Even then all are silent in the village

The Maltis can't pass their black days. (Shak Tulinu Bechhi Kuchhi 12)

On the other hand, when back to home Rajbanshi women have to perform the household chores. The cultural practices now confine her in her domestic sphere. Their sons and daughters are waiting for her to return with the food as evident in Santosh Sinha's poem My Village My Mother—

Wrapping up the dirtiest clothes

Who are you? How unrecognizable you are!

Are you my mother? (Kabita Kungkurar Suta 9)

She can perform only two things—'reproductive' and 'domestic'. This is very similar to Beauvoir's domestic slavery" (Beauvoir 57). In the mainstream dominant patriarchy, another patriarchy becomes active—that the patriarchy of Rajbanshi men – who has the power because they can communicate with the outer world—so they are entitled to exercise the power over women. Thus, Rajbanshi women are subjugated by the double patriarchy. If we consider the Rajbanshi literature as a different facet of the Dalit literature, Sara Sindhu Thomas in "Witnessing and Expressing Dalitness" rightly said—"this reveals how Dalit women are resisted by entrenched holders of political power whose reluctance to accept Dalit women in a position of power has both caste and gender aspects of oppression."(Thomas 244)

The bodies of the Rajbanshi women become easily 'accessible and unresisting'.

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Astonishingly enough when the men from the upper caste talk to a Rajbanshi women, they use the vulgar language—automatically their standard language goes down in the parameter of its standard, and they (men from the upper caste) begin to use mundane, rude and vulgar language as if the women are very much easy prey for them. Their bodies become their first and foremost target—usually their ugly and unclean bodies lure the upper caste men into sexual fantasy that is wild and normal and the men from the upper caste imagine that this sexual fantasy can be very “natural” and “primitive” very much unlike they do with their own women who belong to the upper caste. And from that natural or normal and primitive sexual urge in their mind, they speak with the lower caste Rajbanshi women in that language.

The Rajbanshi women, thus, fall in the same line with the Dalit women and the other black women oppressed and subjugated in the hegemonic patriarchal and colonial discourse. Not only that Rajbanshi women are sometimes oppressed by the women from upper caste as Arpita Chattaraj Mukhopadhyay points out in “Literature of Suffering and Resistance”—“the repressive experiences of the women are usually conceived to be common to all women. However, the subalternity of Dalit or black women is symptomatic of greater discrimination, violence and torture not only at the hands of patriarchy but often times in

complicity with women of upper caste and dominant race.” (Mukhopadhyay 252). The suffering of a Rajbanshi women is completely different from the suffering of the upper caste mother, though the western feminist complacently used the homogenous umbrella term—‘Woman’ without taking into consideration the differences in historicity, class, caste, race and sexuality. Rajbanshi women are very much dubious about ‘Indian Feminism’ which does not include them and which is described as the ‘Savarna’. Gopal Guru calls it—“politics of difference.” (Guru 80). There is a huge difference between the sufferings of the Rajbanshi women and the upper caste women in general. For the Rajbanshi women there is no hope or aspiration for themselves; everything in them revolves around for the others as evident in Basanta Barman’s poem My Mother—

My mother is waiting for me
Lighting lamp in that broken house
Even in the days of storm she does
not let the lamp extinct. (Abhiman 27)

This tolerance by the Rajbanshi women gives birth to a ‘Habit’ through the agonizing repetition of deprivation while ‘Naturalizing’ it. Their ‘silence’ plays the part of an instigator there as Lizardo in “The Cognitive Origins of Bourdieu’s Habitus” points out—“Habitus is a system of embodied dispositions, tendencies that organize the ways in which individuals

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perceive the social world around them and react to it. These dispositions are usually shared by people with similar back ground in terms of social class, religion, nationality, ethnicity, education, profession etc. as the habitus is acquired through mimesis and reflect the lived reality to which individuals are socialized, their individual experience and objective opportunities.” (Lizardo 387)

But not only the meek representations of mother prevail the pages of the Rajbanshi poems, but also a very bold and angry look out of the Rajbanshi women is there in the representations of some poets. Santosh Sinha in his poem Shankini depicts the Rajbanshi women as bold and courageous to protect herself from the lust of the upper caste men and the men from her own community too. In this poem a Rajbanshi woman is portrayed as the shankini or very much venomous who works outside the domestic boundary in order to save herself and the half fed children of her despising the neglected attitude of the patriarchy—

I've been named shankini and I'll perform accordingly

Before leaving this world, I'll drive the ghost from your body

I nourish my children and face every problem

And you roam here and there for the whole day. (Kabita Kungkurar Suta 42)

This revolting spirit in the Rajbanshi women does not only restrict itself to protect her own body and the bodily feelings, but also it extends towards protecting her own community from the black hand of the upper caste. And this is why she never recedes back from joining in the mass movement for the cause of the community and this is the different feministic dimension shown by the Rajbanshi women in the poem People by Nikhilesh Ray:

Young, old, the aged aunties, when will they get a full belly food?

They are gazing at vain, when will you say about you to rule

Trusting your land to others how long will you be a fool?

Empty belly bonny body, they stand back turning and shouting

When grew thus they so big the little sapling! (Kalnattir Kabita 16)

In regard of this revolting spirit of Rajbanshi women, in Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature Sharankumar Limbale (translated by Alope Mukherjee) writes—“Revolt is the stage that follows anguish and rejection. ‘I am human, I must receive all the rights of a human being’—such is the consciousness that gives birth to this revolt. Born from unrestrained anguish, this explosive rejection and piercing revolt is like a flood, with its aggressive character and an insolent rebellious attitude.”(Limbale 31). Actually Jyoti Lanjewar’s entire poems are pain of praise to the hard working Rajbanshi women

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who in spite of illiteracy and many forms of back-breaking hard work give great dedication and strength to the resurrection movement begun by Thakur Panchanan Barma.

But the question of representation is there. The Rajbanshi women are being represented in the Rajbanshi poetry by the male poets who represented them from a male or patriarchal view point. Their voice and their bodily sufferings are not being directly reflected. Although their representation is realistic, there can be some sympathetic glimpses upon their deprivation. Their heterogeneous or multidimensional experiences can be homogenized and this is a 'Reduction' tendency as to use Deleuzian term and which leads to the 'epistemic violence' as to employ Spivak's terminology. But the scenario has been changing now— with the changing social, political and economic agendas of the third world countries, the position of the Rajbanshi women is now getting up to a point where they will not be 'Represented' anymore; rather they will 'present' themselves—a self presentation—self articulation of the self sufferings. They begin to write poetry. For instance, Dhritishri Ray in her two poetry collections— portrays the sufferings and pains of being born not only as a woman but also in the neglected Rajbanshi community. Her poem *Woman Life is like a River* asserts that self identity—

Producing mazy waves

I walk with my mind

I don't know where I'll stop.

I'm mine

Only I've right on myself—you beware! (*Betir Dar Takat Na Hay 21*)

Now the question is that will somebody be willing to listen to that voice? Or is it just an unheard 'shouting' just like the picture of Edward Munch? As Spivak states in an interview, "the subaltern cannot speak" means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she (here the Rajbanshi women) is not able to be heard" (Spivak: 292).

As the part of a revolt literature the Rajbanshi women writers experience their Dalitness and when they witness, they experience that similar Dalitness in the Rajbanshi men. Thus sometimes the Rajbanshi women become the spokes person not only about themselves but also the spokesperson for the men of their self community. This shifting of their 'subjective' (I) experience to the 'collective' (we) is there in the Rajbanshi literature. And that is the way out from their perpetual subjugation. Their collective self is much stronger than their fragmented identity; and this collective self can lead them towards a common struggle good for all of them. This is the greatest 'possibility' embedded inside of this (re)presentation of the Rajbanshi women as enunciated by Gilles Deleuze—

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the possibility of a 'minor' literature. So, what needs for the Rajbanshi poetry is the 'scope' to flourish its possibility and more and more 'different' voices of the neglected women from the nook and corner so that their actuated and actualized 'Being'(done by the centre) becomes 'Becoming'—a virtual plane of potential—a symbolic 'centre' so as to use the conception of Deleuze—" life begins with pure difference or becoming, or tendencies to differ—such as the differential waves of sound and light, and these differences are then actualized by different points of perception: such as the human eye. Our worlds of beings, the extended term that we perceive, are contractions of flows of becoming" (Deleuze 126).

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