

Concern of Bishnu Prasad Rabha for the Emancipation and Development of Indian Women: an Analytical Study of Rabha's Works

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ABSTRACT

Bishnu Prasad Rabha (1909-1969) is an eminent revolutionary leader, cultural figure and a pioneer in the field of Assamese literature, music and art. Rabha examined that women in contemporary Assam and in India had been relegated to the lowest position by religion, the society, the politician and the government. He intensely realized that without the all-round progress of the Assamese women in particular and the Indian women in general, the normal momentum of the society was impossible to attain. In his essays Rabha shed light on the condition of Indian women and tried to identify ways that would ensure the emancipation of Indian women. Rabha observed that the unjust social regulations in the Indian society curbed the freedom of the women and crippled them. Further, Rabha's writings are of value in the theoretical scrutiny of Feminism. Rabha illuminated on the condition of Indian women through a comparative study of the Indian women and the women from the Soviet Union.

Keywords: Women, Feminism, Society, Gender Biasness, Emancipation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Charged with the philosophy of Communism, Bishnu Prasad Rabha (1909-1969) was ever vocal for the absolute evolution of women at all levels. Considering women as a foremost significant component of the society, Rabha intensely realized that without their all-round progress, the normal momentum of the society was impossible to attain. For the deprived state of the women, society is the prime catalyst - Rabha was himself a witness to this fact. In his writings including "Naarir Samasya Ki Hobo" (What About the Problems of Women), "Sovietor Naari" (Women in the Soviet), "Sovietot Shishu" (Children in the Soviet), "Samasaamoyik Bharotor Naari" (Contemporary Women of India), "Soviet Deshor Naari" (Women of the Soviet Nation), and "Soviet

Parliamentor Janadiyek Naari Pratinidhi" (Women Representatives in the Soviet Parliament), Rabha illuminated on the condition of Indian women through a comparative study of the Indian women and the women from the Soviet Union.

In his essays written during the time of the great wars in the pre-independence era, Rabha sought the way that would secure a reversal in the circumstances of Indian women. Further, these writings have their own weight in the theoretical scrutiny of Feminism. Feminism has its sway in the works of Rabha incorporated here.

1.1 Objective

The objective of this research paper is to critically analyze Bishnu Prasad Rabha's prose works in the light of the thematic views of the litterateur; and to identify how he has argued on the need for

the emancipation and development of Indian women upon comparing Indian women with the women from the Soviet Union. The aim is predominantly to recognize Rabha's concern about the low social status of Indian women, and the related predicaments, and potential approaches by which the women could be emancipated.

1.2 Methodology

The methodology adopted for study in this paper is basically analytical. The primary source used for study is the particular prose works of Bishnu Prasad Rabha in Assamese, which are referred to here. The secondary sources are books written by other authors and critics on Bishnu Rabha and his literary creations. Further, views and opinions in journals and other research papers available in various libraries have also been relatively incorporated.

1.1 Rabha on the Plight of Women in the Assamese and Indian Society

In the essay "Naarir Samasya Ki Hobo" Rabha brought to light the state of women in those times: "Today, woman is at the bottom of everything. Woman has been thrown to the lowest rung by religion, the society, the politician and the government. The women class has nothing to call its own. It has even lost its own independence. And a woman can do nothing according to her own desire. She cannot roam about, read or write freely. She cannot eat, wear, stay, give speech, organize political meetings, sing, dance or take part in dramatic acts. A woman today is imprisoned within her own house. Religion says women cannot be relied on. The society says women should always be suppressed. In the political view, a woman gets freedom simply to participate as unskilled labourers in factories." (Rabha 846) Although in the recent context emancipation from such a condition has been realized, in various ways women, as noted by Bishnu Rabha, are still within bars. She is still bound by the unseen shackles of the society and religion. Women in Assam and in India generally, are yet to stand

equally with men in every sphere. The perception fostered by the society has not been reversed even today. It is also marked in the society that women stand as the major barrier in another woman's path to progress.

1.2 Women and Marriage

In India, marriage is a woman's principal shield of defense, the path to live life. It is as if a woman's life is fruitless without marriage – our consciousness is restricted within such a traditional belief. Against this Indian frame of mind, mental advancement of women is valued highly in the Soviet. Bishnu Rabha says in the essay "Soviet Naari": "In our place marriage itself is viewed as a means of livelihood for women, whose human progress is then kept under suppression, while there (in the Soviet), instead of doing so, women are imparted complete scope, freedom and equal rights for the progress of their human qualities." (853) This comparative reflection of Rabha speaks in support of Feminism. John Locke (1632-1704) was a principal theorist of the individualistic feminism, the first segment of Feminism, in whose philosophy thoughts and considerations on woman's emancipation was initially conceptualized. In Locke's work *Second Treatise of Government* published in 1689, he expressed views against the traditionally held ideas on marriage. Locke said that marriage is a pact formed between two individuals. Both the individuals are of equal status and rank. These two are not the husband and wife as in our traditional conceptions. This means the wife is not the servant of the husband and the man too isn't meant for the service of his wife. This view by John Locke created great waves in the western perceptions related to marriage and on the basis of his discernment, feministic consciousness took shape. The contribution of feministic ideas is apparent in the opportunities, rights and freedom accorded to women of the Soviet for the development of their human faculties. Rabha was in favour of women being granted absolute prospects for their own development as in the Soviet or the West. In the essay under

discussion, he has said: "Here in our place once a girl is married – the thought comes to her parents that the provision of food and clothes, for which the girl is married off, did the girl actually have the comfort and happiness of those material supplies? Generally they catch a family that can provide food and clothes. And yet most of them have to regret. The meaning of 'swami' (husband) in our parts is 'the provider of food-clothes to the woman'. And the wife is one who engages in the praise and devotion of a man with an aim to secure meals and clothes. The meaning of 'Pativrata' (a devoted wife) and 'Satitva' (chastity) is that the man who supplies a woman with meals and clothes – the woman worshipping that man in all possible ways of deeds and speech. Since the husband makes food and clothes available for his wife, so the husband will have complete right over his wife." (853-854) Presenting a clear facet of the Indian mentality, Rabha has expressed that worshipping or serving the man isn't a woman's lone duty. This state of the woman must be transformed. A woman is not the slave of a man. Rabha believes that the boundless privilege of a man over a woman will be brought to an end by the woman's self-dependence. When she earns her livelihood, a woman will secure her courage and freedom.

1.3 Unfair Penalties for Women

Rabha has demonstrated grief at the fact that against the punishments established by the society for the female, there is no such punishment ruled for the male: "To whatever extent he might be a criminal and might have committed wrongdoings, there is no penalty for the man. In spite of already having a wife he can go ahead and re-marry end number of times, so much so that even without marriage he may keep any number of women he wishes. There is no amendment or trial required for that. All his ill actions are to be supported just because he is a male member of the society. Even when the husband is ailing, ugly, a flawed character or unfit, if at all the wife becomes unhappy and gets attracted to another man,

the society cannot acquit even that woman. There are horrible penalties arranged for her. When it comes to the man, every crime can be excused. In such a society of ours, the chastity of the Indian woman and man's good conduct and justice in relation to a man and a woman?" (854). As opposed to making a woman crippled, the unfair rules and regulations in the Indian society imparts limitless freedom to the male counterpart. The social convention observed by Rabha in the pre-independence era seems prevalent in the 21st century progressive (?) society as well.

1.4 Gender Biasness in the Society

Rabha puts forward a question why the responsibilities, which the males have towards the female members, are ignored. Why is a woman always pitied by a man? Why don't the guardians ensure opportunities of education and learning to the girl and make her capable? Rabha relates about the duties of the guardians in the Soviet: "There parents don't need to hang any girl to the neck of a person in search of food and clothes. For, they know the daughter is capable of earning and fending for herself" (854) Has a similar environment been created in India in every strata of the society? Even today we are destroying the female foetus. Our society still has the majority guardians who heave a sigh of satisfaction by giving away a girl in marriage to an accomplished man.

1.5 Status of the Indian Wife

Rousseau (1712-1778) was in favour of 'companionate marriage'. Rabha too gave his opinion in support of a man leading an existence together with a woman in a friendly way. Connecting a reference to the friendly relationship of husbands and wives in the Soviet, Rabha said that in India the woman is termed an 'ardhangini' (better-half) of the husband only for the sake of saying. Practically the implication is far removed. His clear view: "In our country, a woman is called an ardhangini simply in the word; a woman may be called an ardhangini only when the male counterpart is the woman's half. But has it ever been noted

that someone has imposed the rule of 'ardhanga' upon the man?" (854) Do we yet have in our hands the appropriate reply to Rabha's query?

1.6 Community Public Houses

The radical feminist Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) had said in *The Second Sex* that a child permanently establishes a woman's slavery. The individualistic feminist Betty Friedan had introduced in *The feminine Mystique* the idea of setting up child care provisions to relieve women of the struggles of rearing children. The socialist feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1936) in *Women and Economics* boldly introduced the need to establish child care provisions and social kitchen houses. Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952) further reaffirmed the need for public houses in the service of pregnant mothers, child care homes and community kitchen houses. It appears that following the appeal of the individualist and socialist feminists, child care homes grew in the West. Bishnu Rabha has brought to light the well-timed efforts of the Soviet government in the essay entitled "Soviet Shishu": "...those agricultural farms of the localized self-government – those government agricultural farms and factories and industries, silpanchal, in all those areas huge Shishu Sadan (child care provisions) are made and under the supervision of child specialists, foster mothers, nurses and doctors, till the age of 2-5 years they are provided support and care." (856)

Such steps taken by the government not only relieved the mothers but also endowed them with opportunities to concentrate on their own spheres of interests. Yet, the state of women in India has almost remained unchanged. After so many years of independence, similar public systems and provisions have not been contrived and actualized in the country. Rabha has written that the Soviet Union has accorded the education of a child the primary place of importance. The government has incorporated child care and children's education within its policies:

"According to the government, instead of leaving the liabilities and tasks related to child-rearing on parents and particular individuals, the government should take them up in its hands. More than the production of goods, they believe the production of human capacities is of a greater import" (855) Although Rabha has not made a comparison of Indian and the Soviet ways of bringing up children, it is quite evident from his views that it is a moral duty of our government as well. Then at least the women would be able to take out time to develop their personality. Otherwise, the mother of a child finds no scope for her personal progress, bearing the burden of motherhood for five-six hours daily. It must be admitted that the government of India has taken up the right to education within its policies; but, sadly, it has not been successful in implementing the strategy one hundred percent. Hence, the possibility of putting up child care centres and community kitchens seems far-fetched.

1.7 Illiteracy and Indian Women

Lack of education has had a negative impact on the stagnation in the Indian woman's condition. Even today, the rate of female literacy is at 65% in India. In the essay "Samasaamayik Bharator Naari" Rabha brought to light that in the times before independence, only two women out of one hundred could actually read and write. He further made it plain that during the same time, in Buryat Mongolia, the least developed region of Russia, 80 women out of a hundred were literate. For Indian woman's illiteracy during that period, the causes found liable were "child marriage, the superstitious rituals of the society and women's financial dependence and the like". Till this day many social grounds can be seen behind the meager percentage of woman's literacy in India. In the mentioned essay, Rabha shed light on the premature death of women, lack of health centres for women, the miserable state of women labourers, issues related to woman's marriage and separation, and hurdles for women in the field of jobs and in business.

Education and economic self-dependence alone can bring about a revolutionary transformation in the state of Indian women - this was reflected in the essays of Bishnu Rabha.

2.0 CONCLUSION

As asserted by Simone de Beauvoir a woman doesn't come as such in her birth, she is made into a woman: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". The society takes up the decisive role in constructing one of its chief elements to give it the form of a woman. It seems to us that Rabha hated this process of woman-creation by the society, from his heart and soul. Without doubt, Rabha felt like Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) that women must not waste their lives simply in getting married, serving their husbands and in production of kids and rather be enriched with a wholesome existence, engaged like men in explorations of utmost value and worth.

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