



Review of Literature



A LITERARY REPRESENTATION OF THE SUBALTERN : A STUDY ON GURUDEV RABINDRA NATH TAGORE'S 'KHATA' (THE NOTE BOOK).



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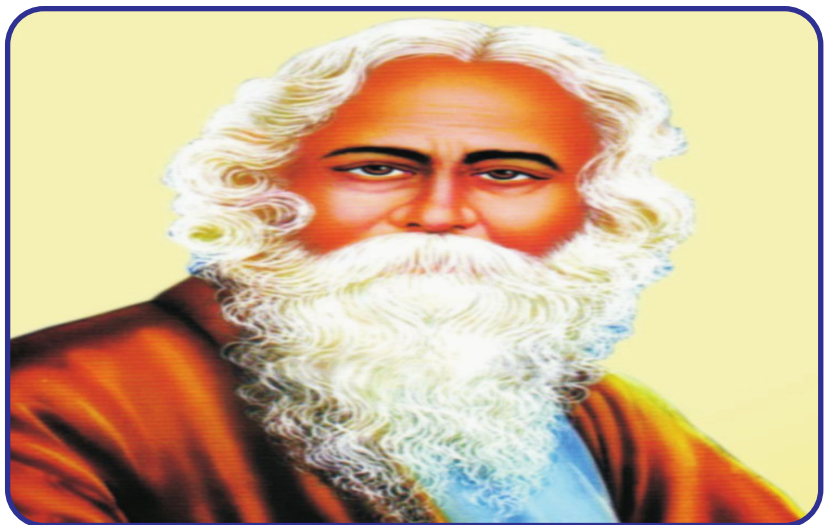
ABSTRACT

There is a tendency in subaltern studies to examine a variety of sources to re-write the history. Contemporary literature is not avoided in this case. When the renaissance attempts but was in vain, restoration of traditional culture was in theme for national unity among the colonial native Indian men. For this, they were ready to cut the wings of their female counterparts which had been grown by western culture.

KEYWORDS :Subaltern, renaissance, restoration, colonial, education, women.

INTRODUCTION :

The term subaltern had saturated from Antonio Gramsci's 'Prison Notebooks' who was an Italian Marxist philosopher and it denotes of inferior class that includes the entire people who was suppressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way. Subaltern studies had appeared in the last two decades of the twentieth century. It is dealing with a vast range of topics between



Mughal period to the Nineteen seventies in the Indian history. It is not an easy task to reverse the history of the subaltern classes. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the historians merely play a representative role of the subaltern. She could only present the subaltern class in the pages of history book as that class never speak on behalf of themselves. 1 So, the historians of this group find their sources among fables, myth & mythology, folklore as well as folksongs, superstition , songs, literature etc. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also thinks that a historian confronts a text of counterinsurgency or gendering where the subaltern has been represented. That type of work "must critically interrupt each other, bring each other to crisis, in order to serve their constituencies; specially when each seems to

claim all for its own".²

There is a trend of continued subalternisation of so-called third world literatures. This work is a revisit of Gurudev's 'Khata' or 'the Note Book'. This Short story was written in 1298 Bangabda or in the year 1891 ACE in the Hitavadi Patrika. The heroine of this story is Uma, a little girl. When she learned to write, she practised it almost everywhere like walls, panjika, novel (sister-in-law's), accountancy copy (Father's). But she accidentally practiced it on her brother named Govindalal's article. She was beaten and punished with snatching her writing weapons by her brother. When the punishment period was over, Govindalal with a little repentance returned her writing materials and gifted her good copy book. The seven year's old little girl made her classmates astonished and greedy for her new writing property.

In the first year she collected many prose and poetry in it. In the second year, the copy book witnessed some scattered feelings of its owner, But her romance period with the copy book as well as with education became endangered when her marriage (at the age of nine) was fixed with Pyarimohan who was a conservative co-writer of Govindalal. Her mother and brother, both prohibited her in education at the new in-laws house. Joshoda, the servant woman of Uma's father's house went with her new house for a few days with a responsibility to establish the little new bride in her new accommodation. She also took Uma's copy thinking that it had acquired a short history of her native place where she spent a few span of her life.

After returning to her guardians, the child wrote on her sorrow feelings of her new separation. Her request for returning to the previous life including her assurance that she would never spoiled her elder brother's writings framed silently and secretly on the copy. Uma's father tried to take his child for a few days. But Govindalal associated with Pyarimohan debarred the proposal as this was the time to teach her giving oblation to her husband. But her secret was revealed by her three sister in-laws (Tilakmanjari, Kanak Manjari and Ananga Manjari), who were devoid of goddess Saraswati's blessing, to their brother. Pyarimohan was thoughtful hearing this as he viewed that education caused a girl widow., He mocked on it. The girl ashamed with it and stopped writing. After a long span of time, she again got an earnest desire to write in a morning in the autumn. A beggar was singing a song on Uma's (Goddess Gurga) mother's calling for her child. The story's Uma used to write any type of songs to make up her desire of singing. She secretly called the beggar to note down her voice but again she was captured by her in laws. This time her husband ordered to give the copy to him and lastly snatched by him. Uma in her life time, never got back that copy.

The measurable condition of woman that reflected in Gurudev's Golpoguchcha series on the background of nineteenth century was not prevailed in the ancient vedic age. Harita Dharmasutra divided women in two groups –Brahmovadin and Sadyodvaha. The previous group enjoyed to be attached with education for the life time whereas the later group attached to the education at their maiden time. We find evidences of eight learned woman (Vishvavara, Apala, Indrani, Kakshivati Ghosh, Surya Savitri, Dakshina Prajapati, Vak Ambhirini and Ratri Bhardwaj) who composed vedic mantras. Rig-Veda includes passages regarding joint venture of husband and wife in extracting soma juice and supervising as well as participating in the various functions related to sacrifice. Upanayana without vedic mantras of ladies continued meaninglessly for a few centuries during the age of the Smritis and Puranas, Manu was in favor of this contradiction as he regarded it physical rather vedic ritual.³ But Yajnyavalkya- smriti debarred from this illogical ritual. It occurred illiterate bride and then husband or priest was allowed to utter vedic mantras on behalf of bride during marriage ceremony. Just before that period, women were allowed to learn by male members of their respected families who had not such time for it and the woman education confirmed in the cultural families. Women of higher families now engaged themselves in the secular and literary education. Lalita-vistara and Gatha-sapto-

sati referred that type of woman. Rajashekara's wife who was a kshatriya by birth, was a good critic of literature and was poetess. Some ladies preferred to be gynecologist. Vatsyana showed that the city-life demanded of females well-versed in vocal and instrumental music, dancing, painting, garland making, decorating etc. The ancient time witnessed some of administrative ladies like Queen Nayanika of the Satavahana dynasty, Praphavatigupta of Vakataka dynasty, Sugandha and Didda of Kashmir etc. During the muslim rule, the old higher class ruling families ruined by the new political revolution. It affected female education of the hindu families. Though daughters of Rajput chiefs tasted the sip of education down to the 19th century. Jaina widows were taught by monks. But the rapid decline of woman education which started from the 11th century caused a dangerous illiteracy among woman in the 19th century when hardly one woman in hundred could read.⁴

The Muslim women of India during the medieval period were much discriminated condition than their co-religionist medieval Damascus and Bagdad. Anisuzzaman told that the Bengali muslims became conscious of 'moderanization' only around the 1870's.⁵ The polar star among muslim women was no doubt Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. In her 'Sultana's dream' she pictured a Lady land where women ruled and men were kept in their proper places (i.e, Zenana). Though women learned merely Arabic and sometimes Persian for religious purposes as we see, Azfounnesa Begum, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's mother who was in strict Purdah, well-known of these languages.

William Adam in his Report on State of Education in Bengali (1836) mentioned of a funny superstition cherished by the ladies that educated women become widow in her early age. Men had the same kind of feelings. In the short story we find that Pyarimohan (Uma's husband) also included himself in that category. He made a theory that education rotted the feminist power and transformed it into masculine power. For this, intercourse among that type of couple (where educated woman who is masculine in nature) becomes destructive and makes the lady widow.

Impressed with the missionaries and philanthropic British, Indians (Men ofcourse) also agreed to establish girls school. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Pandit Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar played an important role. The former one also engaged himself in the revolution of preventing Sati whereas the later on fought for widow remarriage act. Though Raja Radhakanta Deb, the leader of the conservative section of Kolkata, was a patron of Calcutta female Juvenile society. He engaged a Vaishnavi to teach the women of his household. Adam examined that women from respectable families like daughters of Zamindars, courtesans and the female followers of Shri Chaitanya were literate. Pearychand Mitra, the great literary figure of Bengal wrote in the preface of his Adhyatmikas, "I was born in the year 1814... While I was a pupil in the Pathsala, at home I found my grandmother, mother and aunts reading books. They could write in Bengali and keep accounts. There were no female school then.⁶ Robert May of the London Missionary Society probably started the first school for girls in Chinsurah in Bengal in 1818. William Ward, one of the Srerampore Missionaries, urged his countrymen to put an end to the suffering of Indian women from infanticide, child marriage, Sati by educating them. For this, British School Society of London sent Mary Ann Cooke, a school mistress in 1821. Although, the society was ready to keep obstacles in front of it. Rasasundari shared her experience and wrote. " In fact older woman used to show a great deal of displeasure if they saw a piece of paper in the hands of a woman".⁷ Saudamini Roy also experienced in her life that even male native teacher share partiality and had a negative attitude towards woman's education.

When Tagore wrote this story, India just witnessed the enactment of age of consent act in 1891. Though we see Uma was a bride since her nine years old. After Derozio and his young Bengals, Raja Rammohan Ray, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Brahma movement, there was a wave of restoration of tradition among the Hindu intellect. Tilak expressed his view that there was no right of a

foreign ruler to interfere in our social and religious customs. But his logic was somehow false. As before that the conservative religious group requested to that foreign ruler for passing law against cow-slaughter and that must be the interruption in native mohammedan custom. This type of restoration mania was a part or way of gaining nationalistic nutrition. We must remember Tilak in his personal life was not so conservative and his elder daughter was married in thirteen years old. Whereas he himself fought against an act where the minimum bridal age was upgraded from ten years old to twelve years old.⁸

But the funny matter was that the active role of woman in participating in her own freedom was denied.⁹ Though Partha Chatterji thought that colonialism never entered into the native household life, but Spivak refuted it and viewed that Indian women were subordinated doubly. Their masters who were suppressed by the colonial ruler and they also dominated their women. So, the colonial ruler exercised indirectly its power over native women. In this story Uma's brother and husband, both were representative of that conservative class who were resulted by the failure of the previous reformist class. The little girl and her passion for writings was sacrificed by the intellectuals and the contemporary political needs. She could only assure that she would never write but could not protest by snatching his husband's copy book as Tagore indirectly suggested it to be humanist by punishing him such way. She could only weep on the floor in shame as an offender because the subaltern seldom speak and preferred to be silent.

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