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FEMINISM AND SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN FAKIRMOHAN SENAPATI'S REBATI

Dr. Tapan Kumar Panda

Associate Professor,
RITE, Bhubaneswar (Odisha, India)

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Prof. Sushree Swagatika Mahapatra

Assistant Professor,
RITE, Bhubaneswar (Odisha, India)

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Abstract:

Feminism is a struggle for equality of women to make them equal with men. In this writing, I have chosen to depict the effort and the struggle of Rebat, the designated character in the novel of Fakir Mohan Senapati to get equal status in the male dominated society. It depicts the entire education system of early 19th century India and particularly Odisha. The study of the Indian famine psyche evolves a change from tradition to Modernity. The great as well as the first short story writer in odia language has immortalized the character of Rebat by seemingly simple yet powerful narrative. He has delineated the dark side of women's plight prevalent in the social milieu of pre independence India. It can be taken as an allegory for women's education and identity. It is considered as a milestone in the literary feminist world. It depicts the mindset of the people regarding women education and the blind belief relating to it. The whole family gets destroyed with the epidemic cholera and the prejudice of education becomes the only cause of its devastation. No doubt it depicts the female education system of the time, but it depicts the struggle and conflict of identity in the subjugated world of men.

Keywords: *Feminism, prejudice, identity, conflict and epidemic*

Introduction:

Rebat being the first odia short story written by Fakirmohan Senapati brings attention of the readers about the dogma ridden society of the time. The burning desire of a small girl of 10 years old to study has been trampled on foot by the conservative attitude and the superstitious belief of the people. The story contains the theme like superstition, love, desire and education. The story revolves around the character of Rebat, a Small girl, who wants to study despite the vehement opposition from the family member specially her grandmother. The story moves a turn when the father of Rebat, Shyamabandhu sets out to fulfill the desire of her daughter to educate her daughter. On the other side Shyama bandhu is a symbol of modernism, who wants her child to get educated and according to him, all the girls have equal right to get education. Meanwhile Basudeb Mohapatra, a young man of 20 years old joined the village school as teacher. As the story goes Shayamabandhu

gives Basudev the responsibility of tutoring Rebati. This type of progress in the field of education was not liked by the Grandmother of Rebati as well as the neighbors. They thought that girls are born to learn cooking, paste and churn. They do not have the right to get education. If anybody dares to go for education, it will destroy the whole dynasty and becomes a symbol of sin. It is considered as a blot mark on the face of the family. As the ill luck had stored something bad for Rebati, his Father as well as the prospective teacher of her village school died of Cholera. As was expected, all the people started blaming Rebati for getting educated. Rebati has struggled to get an identity of her own in the society but everything happened contrary to her expectation. Feminism as a way of struggle to be equal with men has become the major part of discussion. Many writers have already written about the status of women and the feminism of India. This particular story of Rebati brings out a renaissance in the mind of the people of odisha and forces all the readers to see the fate of Rebati at the end. It not only highlights the plight of women in the early part of 19 the century India and odisha but also brings out a revolutionary spirit among the people to provide equal right to women.

The story "Rebati" written in the year in 1898, almost 125 years ago bears the symbol of first short story written in odia language. Fakir mohan Senapati is the pioneer of education. Much before the realism came to dominate the world; he had shown the reality of life in his village. He has depicted the naked truth relating to the education of the women at that time. Rebati is a symbol of education, who dared to break the age-old blind belief in relation to the women Education. Women were presumed to serve the men and had no right for education. In the story Rebati nurtures her desire to learn and get educated at any cost. She is the symbol of feminism in the dogma ridden society. She struggles to get out of the society by bringing a change in the tradition. She breaks the age-old chain and tells her desire to learn before her Father. She wants to be equal with men. Towards the end of the story, she is convicted for the destruction of the family. Basudev, who helped Rebati in her education at school died just after Rebati's Father in the cholera. Everyone thought of girl's education as the cause of the incident. People are dying only because of girl's education, which was started by Rebati. In the story, she did not leave hope for education, but the fate has already made it so.

In 'Rebati', Fakir Mohan Senapati deals with the social taboo against women education in the rural society of Odisha. The eponymous text has a Rebati that faces the severest criticisms of her grandmother when she decides to get education. The grandmother, a symbol of old world order and orthodoxy, does not favor the decision to educate Rebati. She becomes the principal impediment on the way of Rebati. Further, with her superstitions about women education, she creates a "fence" around Rebati. In truth, she herself embodies the reckless "fence" to confine Rebati from the emancipating embraces of modernity knocking at the door through education. On the other hand, Rebati as the lone "force" against the social taboo undergoes several trials and tribulations. Rebati

withstands humiliation and accusations in her enthusiasm to study. It is interesting to note that the exploiter and the exploited being women does not dilute the severity of women subjugation in this story. On the contrary, it sensitizes in a comprehensive way the real problems of feminism.

In the whole story the author has not supported the character Rebati but he has proved that women have energy to fight against the anti-human society and cultural norms. Rebati is suffering in the whole story, she has lost her father and mother but the psychological torture of her grandmother is affecting her more. There is no one to morally support her. She has lost everything, her dream has spoiled and her grandmother's taunts are venomous. Here one can understand the problem of a woman and the internal pain of a woman. Rebati became victim of such Psychological torture and abuses because she inherited inequalities and discrimination, being born as a girl in a traditional and conservative Oriya society. The tragic consequences of Rebati's life are symbolic of a highly oppressive, conservative social order. Fakir Mohan Senapati as a social reformist, knowing the contemporary social philosophy very well, he did not dare to endow Rebati with an identity of her own.

After the publication of Rebati in the form of story, people of odisha at that time started giving importance to the female education and it become a trend setter for all of them. Feminism as a part of the struggle has delineated beautifully through the character of Rebati in the story. No doubt it was the story of the early part of the Nineteenth century; still it is prevalent in the 20th century. Female education and equal status of women in the society is still a distant dream. Govt. is taking a lot of steps to alleviate the status of women; Reservation for women in every sector is providing an opportunity for them to stand up on their own. They can stand and tread on the same track keeping their dignity and integrity at large.

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