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Discrimination and abuse against women in West Bengal: A study on selected Bengali short story

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Abstract

Violence against women and girl is a common phenomenon in orthodox Indian society. Women are taught to endure torture from a young age. Surprisingly they have no age to accept this torture; as a daughter, as a sister, as a wife, as a mother, as a neighbour or even as a stranger, they easily reach the limits of oppression. Since then, the central and state government and NGOs have started to take numerous steps to eradicate this crime, but it not only continues to persist in the society but it also increasing over time.

As we all know, literature is the mirror of society. Therefore, it is natural that the nature of the oppression of women over the ages will be reflected in the mirror of literature. All these exploited-tortured women of Bengal come up in Bengali short stories from this source. On the other hand, Bengali storytellers have also told the readers about the sufferings of women with great emotion, and have also highlighted the reasons for the condition. This study confirms that most of the Bengali women face some sort of violence in her whole life; sometime they experience multiple types of violence which is truly reflect on Bengali short story as document of life.

Key words: violence, women, short story, West Bengal.

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1.0 Introduction

Discrimination and abuse against women become a critical issue in India. The violation of women's rights in the patriarchal society is happening in different parts of the country. Also in a West Bengal, most of Bengali family females are discriminated, dominated and exploited. In the Manu Sanhita that women is given a place with Shudra, the modernization in the life of that women has changed a little, but even today her overall appearance is the same as before. However, there is no racial distinction in this inferior condition of women; basically the status of women among all the major ethnic groups was tied in one thread. In the relationship between man and women, it is an individual with powerful personality who acquires position of dominance. Generally, it is a man who commands power over women. In daily life, women are continuously defined by sex; there is almost no woman in Bengal who has not admitted to harassment in any way. There are many type of harassment such as sexual harassment, abuse for marriage dowry, contempt for body colour, age discrimination, racial discrimination, Acid attack, rape and many more.

2.0 Research problem

So far there has been a lot of discussion about women in Bengali literature. A lot has been written in books and magazines. It cannot be said that all the discussions among them are of high value, but many of them are fat. Apart from the eternal traditional discussion, the proposed research article has highlighted the nature of oppression on Bengali women, as well as trying to find out the cause of this condition of women.

3.0 Objectives of the Study

This study tries to focus on-

- Socio-economic background of the women in West Bengal.
- To outline nature of discrimination and abuse against women with the help of selected Bengali story.

4.0 Methodology

4.1.0 Data

This study is based on the discrimination of the women in West Bengal. This survey mainly consider the women in West Bengal as respondents, the all female member of the family who are the victim of such violence are all included in this study. Bearing in mind the sensitivity of the violence-related questions and to avoid non response, the maximum women are simultaneously interviewed in separate. Along with in this study, the compatibility of the characters and their problems reflected in the Bengali short story with the current situations is sought. The current study concentrates only on the data on women of the state West Bengal.

4.2.0 Methods

This paper is based on descriptive and systematic analysis. The main data is the Interview of the women & selected short story of Bengali and secondary data collected from different secondary sources such as magazines, e-journals, newspaper, research article, government report and many secondary books.

5.0 Women in the Bengali Society

Almost half part of world population is women. In a society a women has many identity like mother, sister, daughter, wife, girlfriend etc. In West Bengal, women are given the status of goddesses. Women also received respect and dignity in ancient India. But during medieval periods somehow it had been lost. There is some social system in India which violated the right of women. 'Satidaha' was a major example of narrow social system which violated the right of women in one time. In Bengal the socio-economic and political perspective is different from rest of India. Because West Bengal has endured the pain of partition, also the crisis of the refugees had to be endured. Political turmoil did not abate on the soil of West Bengal. Before we go through the Bengali short story , let us quick look at the picture of the violence against women in West Bengal in all India basis published by the NCRB (National crime Records Bureau, 2018).

Table No-1 : Crime against Women in India 2016-2018

Sl. No	Crime against Women	No of Crime against Women in 2016	No of Crime against Women in 2017	No of Crime against Women in 2018
1	States	322949	345989	363817
2	Union territories	16005	13860	14460
Total		338954	359849	378277

Source-NCRB Report-2018

As per NCRB data drawn for the above shows that the total crime registered against women under (IPC+SLL) in 2016-2018. Now we quick look in the state wise crime list against women.

Table No-2 State wise case violence against women in india from 2016-2018

Sl. No	States/UTs-wise crime against women	In 2016	In 2017	In 2018	Total
1.	Uttar Pradesh	49262	56011	59445	164718
2.	Maharashtra	31388	31979	35479	98846
3.	West Bengal	32513	30992	30394	93899
4.	Madhya Pradesh	26604	29788	28942	85334
5.	Rajasthan	27422	25993	27866	81281
6.	Assam	20869	23082	27728	71679
7.	Delhi UT	15310	13076	13640	42026

Source-NCRB Report-2018

Total case register In 2016-2018- 637783, West Bengal share- 93899, Percentage- 14.73

NCRB reported various crime against women in the report. In this study, we look into some of the major case from 2016 to 2018.

Table No-3 Types of registered case

Sl. No	Crime Heads	2016	2017	2018
		Year-wise cases registered under IPC (In number)		
1	Dowry Deaths	7621	7466	7166
2	Acid Attack	223	244	228
3	Attempt to Acid Attack	60	65	59
4	Sexual Harasment	27344	20948	20962
5	Kidnapping abduction women to compel her for marriage	33732	30614	33354
6	Rape	38947	32559	33356
7	Attempt to commit Rape	5729	4154	4097

Source-NCRB Report-2018

So we see that West Bengal stands third number on crime against women. We all know that it is official data, besides that, the number of women who are victims of different types of violence may not be included in all official data. But beyond this there is another type of data, and it is written on the pages of literature. Bengali short story writers have placed those data in their stories at different times.

6.0 Women in Bengali literature

Many activism and human qualities can be noticed in the female characters of ‘Mangal Kavya’, which is composed of folk deities. Although the character Behula in ‘Manasamangal Kavya’ maintained chastity, but her character also had other feminine traits. Yet this omnipotent Behula had to go through the most difficult tests of her life as she was the only women to be chaste for the sake of chastity. There is no Bengali literary reader who does not know about Radha’s sincere adversity. Radha’s sincere weeping was described in the verses of the eternal Vaishnava verses. However, the creation of literature in the name of women’s liberation in the literature of the royal court of Chittagong at that time surprised the environment of medieval Bengali literature. Even after this, women’s liberation was announced in various literatures like ‘Shakta Padavali’, but the position of women was not taken seriously in medieval Bengali literature. The character identity of modern Bengali literature says something completely different. Because in the context of the colonial rule that became modern Bengali literature. So in a new context of renaissance, modern Bengali literature has in many cases wanted to talk about women’s emancipation. But in the meantime, the social position of women came up as an obstacle. In fact, the social position of women has not changed as fast as the renaissance has changed people’s thinking. So a picture of decay was present in Bengali society. And we all know that literature is the mirror of society. And it is in this context that a picture of the decline of women’s position in society emerged very clearly in Bengali literature. As a lively branch of Bengali literature, therefore, the story of women in the contemporary society has come up very naturally in short stories. Below we will try to highlight the position of Bengali women of that time by adopting some selected Bengali short stories.

7.0 Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘Hoimanti’ & ‘Denapaona’: The image of oppressed married women

Rabindranath Tagore was a uniquely talented man in Bengali literature. He was a captive personality not only in Bengali literature but also in world literature. Poetry, stories, novels, songs- in which branch of literature does he not wander? He has left his mark on every branch. It will not end if we say something about Rabindranath. Here, therefore, one of the many features of his writing will be discussed. Women in Rabindranath’s short stories. How did the famous writer present women, what was the condition of Bengali women of his time? The women in his short story were extremely sensitive. Although he also mentions women in his poems, novels and songs, he presents women a little more specifically in short stories. Rabindranath’s women character will

be the victims of any injustice in the society. In no way can they protest that injustice. Understands and tolerates everything. Here, Rabindranath's skill is beautifully portrayed in his short stories about the deplorable position of women in the society of that time. The attitude of the society towards the bride at that time, the kind of behaviour that existed is also beautifully reflected in his short stories.

Among the female characters portrayed by Rabindranath, the first one to appear is 'Hoimanti'. The story of a beautiful and talented young women becoming a bride. But due to the negligence of the in-laws, she fell like a faded flower. She grew up with her father in a mountainous country far from Bengal. Hoimanti, who is very confident, she has been neglected and neglected by her in-laws ever since she got married and went to her husband's house. This is certainly not to be expected when the bride is moving into a new world. Her husband also does not speak out and does not speak for her. Maybe he understood that his wife was not being treated normally but he did not take any positive action. Hoimanti also silently endured everything. The two families did not talk about dowry during their marriage. But the people of Hoimanti's father-in-law's house thought that being the only daughter of the father, their son might get a lot of money from his father-in-law's property. They thought the responsibility of the father-in-law's property would fall into the hands of their son. But when they find out that the reality is not like that at all, they start behaving so badly with Hoimanti.

There is no doubt that Hoimanti's husband loved her dearly. But in the society of that time, the man of aristocratic families could not talk about the elders of their family; they did not have the right. Even if the elders did something wrong, it was considered right. The man of the society at the time did not have the determination to protest against injustice. Hoimanti's husband is the narrator of this story, through his words this medieval social system unfold before us. When he says about the reason of not protesting- "Yadi lōkadharmēr kāchē satyadharmakē nā ṭhēliba yadi gharēr kāchē gharēr mānuṣakē bali ditē nā pāriba, tabē āmār raktēr madhyē bahuyugēr yē śikṣā tāhā kī karitē āchē."¹ (translate- If I don't push truth to folk, I can't sacrifice my people to the people of the house, so what is there to do with the so-called social education of many ages in my blood.) So Hoimanti dropped out prematurely without getting any support from her husband. In this way, through this story Rabindranath painted a picture of the terrible impact that the dowry system of the time had on the society. So the story is not only of a Hoimanti, but also an impeccable depiction of the untimely death of thousands of Hoimantis in Bengal. In fact, through these stories Rabindranath seems to be talking about the traditional way of thinking of women as products.

Nirupama of his 'Denapaona' story dies for the same reason. Her moral rights are also curtailed because she is a women. And so the correct realization of Nirupama,- "Ṭākā yadi dā'ō tabē'i apamān. Tōmār mēyēr ki kōnō maryādā nē'i. Āmi ki kēbal ēkaṭā ṭākār thali, yataṣṣaṇ ṭākā āchē tataṣṣaṇ āmār dām. Nā bābā, ē ṭākā diyē tumi āmākē apamān kōrō nā."²(translate- it's an insult if you give money. Does your daughter have no dignity? Am I just a bag of money, my price is as long as there is money. No father, don't insult me by giving this money.) This worthlessness is become the fate Bengali women.

8.0 Jagadish Gupta's 'Payomukham': A replica of helpless oppressed femininity

Jagadish Chandra Gupta is a powerful contemporary writer of kallol era of Bengali literature. His real experiences with society enliven his short stories. The mentioned 'Payomukham' story is an impeccable expression of the real experience of the author. Krishnakanta, who is the main character in this story. He practiced Kabiraji treatment. Women have been mainly oppressed by his hands. He wanted to get a lot of dowry by marrying his son to a rich family. And this story tells how terrible his greed can be. At first, he got seven hundred rupees in cash by marrying his son Bhootnath to a nine-year-old Manimala. After the marriage, when he realized that there was no chance of getting any money other than dowry money, he took the opportunity of a slight fever and killed his son-in-

low with kabiraji medicine. A few days later, krishnakanta gave his son Bhootnath a second marriage with Anupama. This time the dowry amount is five hundred and the reason for the loss of this two hundred rupees is that Krishnakanta said that Manimala's death has caused some damage to his son's identity. So he had to marry his son at a small loss. So he could not accept this loss with such an easy mind. Moreover, his greed has increased day by day. Like Manimala, beautiful Anupama has also been secretly killed in Krishnakanta's conspiracy. After Anupama's death Krishnakanta was preoccupied with remarrying his son. Since Bhootnath refused to remarry, Krishnakanta forced him to agree to the pretext of religion. Because he had already fixed both the bride and the dowry. This time the amount of dowry is eight hundred rupees. Although Bhootnath marital life was a bit shaky, this time the amount of dowry suddenly increased for the bride to be black. This time daughter-in-law Binapani skin colour was black but her character had some virtues though it could not shake the heartless Krishnakanta. So he used to collect money from Binapani's father every month as compensation for his daughter's skin colour. On the other hand, on the pretext of fever, he wants to kill her with cholera medicine, for the purpose of higher income. But this time all his conspiracies were caught by his son. Bhuthnath said to his greedy father –“ Ēkaṭu hāsiyā balilō, 'ē bautār paramāyū āchē, tā'i kalērāy maralō nā bābā. Pārēn tō nijē'i khēyē phēlun.”³ (Translate- He smiled a little and said 'this girl has a long life, so father did not die of cholera. Eat it yourself if you can.) Jagadish gupta has pointed to a shattered society cantered on Krishnakanta. The author points out that in a society where women have no place, their lives have no value. Women are only considered as products there, they are only considered as a source of profit and loss. The mentality of treating women as products is nothing new; the storyteller only highlights its tragic side.

9.0 Mahasweta Devi's 'Bishalakshir Ghar' and 'Droupadi' : a real picture of women harassment

Mahasweta Devi did not reveal the history of women separately. She can basically reach a class from the story of women effortlessly. In this story, Bishalkshi alias Bishu, the daughter of an aristocratic family, did not get anything in her hand. People used her on the one hand and abused her on the other. Bishu is not a self-conscious girl, so it was her nature to scarifies her life for those who hurt her. So Bishu was deceived in various ways in the society. The history of that deception is in a way a document of the socio-economic history of this country, through which, losing the class, Bishu one day reaches the poor fasting class. Mahasweta Devi has shown inside this story, a special sense of politics is the controller of this story. The author identifies this politics everywhere in history, at present, in patriarchy, in statehood.

The story 'Droupadi' has the strongest picture of state rule over women. The fact that rape is not only a perverted symbol of masculinity, but also the shame of the state is expressed in the immense skill of the storyteller. The story could have been extraordinary because of the description of the mass rape of state power and male power. But her extraordinariness is where Droupadi uses her naked body as a weapon; the ruling power is forced to fear there. The whole things was creating a protest backdrop. At the end of the story, Droupadi says to the Commander-in-chief, “Kāpaṛ kī habē, kāpaṛ? Lēṅṭā karatē pāris, kāpaṛ parābi kēman karē? Marad tu?”⁴ (translate- what about clothes, clothes? You can made me naked, how do I dress now? Are you man?) then we see that “Drōpadī du'i mardita stanē sēnānāyākakē ṭhēlatē thākē ēbam ē'i pratham sēnānāyāk nirastra ṭārgēṭēr sāmanē bhay pān bhīṣan bhay.”⁵ (Translate- Droupadi continued to push the commander on the two wounded breasts and for the first time the commander-in-chief was terrified in front of an unarmed target.) In fact these commander can strip girls, fulfil their desires but cannot respect them. Droupadi herself wanted to claim that honour- the commander was defeated there. Through

this story, the issue of women's protest comes to our notice in a different way. Droupadi protested by tearing the Sari used by girls with her teeth or protested by throwing a jug of water upside down. Through these obscure behaviours of her, the protest seems to have been announced loudly. In this way, the image of helplessness of women's takes shape in the story of Mahasweta devi. Basically, all these stories tell about the fact that women did not have suitable place to live. The importance of these stories of Mahasweta Devi is immense to understand the real condition of women of that time.

10.0 Ramapada Chowdhury's 'Rebecca Sorener Kabar' : Document of humiliation of women in terrible social norms

'Rebecca Sorener Kabar' was Published 1957. In the story, the helpless and cruel life of a Santal women has emerged. Madho Soren's daughter Rupmati. Her extraordinary beauty attracts men's attention. Rupmati loves Laloya Kurukh. However, Rupmati had a friendship with Maku, the vagabond son of miner Farno White, which the Santal society could not accept. Because the Santals think— "Sāhēb ō āmādēr śatrurēr jāt. Cāndō bōngā pāpēr jal chīṭiyē diyēchē ōdēr ōpare. Dharma nā'i ōdēr, tā'i sāōtāladēr dharma naṣṭa karatē ēsēchē ōrā. Cāndō bōngār kāchē bhuliyē niyē giyē khistēn karē dēy ōrā. Yēman karachē ō'i mariyam, sēbāstinikē."⁶ (Translate- Saheb is our enemy. Chando Bonga has sprinkled the water of sin on them. They have no religion, so they have come to destroy the religion of the Santals. They take Chando Bonga and convert them into Christians. Like that Mariam, Sebastian.) So Santals could not really accept Rupmati's association with Maku. Once they plan to kill Rupmati. At this time Rupmati helplessly took shelter of Maku and Maku saved her life, in this incident the social punishment came down on her. Bura Chandu called Hansda Panchayat. In the trial Rupmati's 'Bitlaha' became. 'Bitlaha' is the judgment of Santal society, the cruelest punishment. Where the convict is not only ostracized, her dignity is robbed.

The youth and the older person of village all are enjoy her body, then she was killed by them. Maku saved Rupmati from this terrible punishment. Rupmati falls in love with Maku out of gratitude and they get married. The new identity of the converted Rupmati is Rebecca Ferno White. But this happiness did not last long in Rupmati's fate. Ferno White lost his job after proving corruption. Maku the unemployed son of Ferno, is afraid about his future. As per his father's advice, Maku leaves for Bangalore, falsely promising to take Rupmati with him. And Rupmati half-starved and starved to wait unsuccessfully for Maku's child. Maku never came back. Ex-boyfriend Laloya promises marriage but Rupmati turns it down. He said to Sonamiru holding on to the false pride – "Āmār nā myāku sāhēbēr sāthē biyā ha'iyāchē myāku sāhēbēr ijjata khatama karachōs turā."⁷ (I am married to Mr. Maku. You are destroying the honour of Mr. Maku." One day Rupmati died harbouring false pride. In the story, the author has drawn the extreme fate of a woman.

11.0 Samaresh Basu's 'Sahider Maa' : Symbol of helpless motherhood

Not only have women been seen as helpless in this society, but also the motherly passion of one of the sacred relationship of the people has been repeatedly abused in this society. Mother Bimala is the central character in this story. Although the story is written about a political instability, but at the end of the story, Bimala's motherhood has been insulted. Bimala lost her youngest child Badal due to political conflict. Therefore, on the first death anniversary of Badal, her memory has been filed with the memory of his son Badal. But no one else in the house has a headache with this feeling. So at the beginning of the story mother Bimala thinks,- "Tār yēna spaṣṭa manē halō, pētēr madhyē kī ēkaṭā narē uṭhala..... Samasta anubhūti diyē nijēr garbhē yēna kān pētē ra'ilēn, ār tār bukēr madhyē yēna niḥśabdē bājatē lāgalō, 'bādal. Bādal rayēchis?"⁸ (Translate- It seemed clear to her that there was a movement in his stomach.- - - With all the feelings, he kept ears in her womb, and in her chest it seemed sound silently 'Badal! Badal, Are you there?) And this may be reason

why the narrator arranged the story in the words of the martyred mother. To the mother, the value of her son comes first, beyond country-state-politics. There is no separate existence for women in the Bengali middle class. Her life revolves around the shadow of her husband and sons, but she has to fulfil all the responsibilities of the family. Badal's death did not touch his father and two brothers who believed in different political ideologies, maybe it was a political generation gap. Where the bonds of the relationship simply break. But on the other side, the mother's soul is torn, perhaps the tragic manifestation of grief is less, in this case also the surprising restraint of the mother character is observed.

12.0 Conclusion

In orthodox male dominated Indian society, women have been assigned to a submissive role and have been destined to serve the family since the later Vedic age. To carry on this legacy, women's independence is narrowed by controlling their marriage, rights and economic. Although today it has changed a lot, even now women are emerging as the cause of male violence in many places. But none of this is desirable in a civilized society. Many things have changed, but even today, the crime rate against women is alarming. This trend is still high especially in rural areas. In fact, until the gender difference can be erased in the light of knowledge and education, women will not be freed from this violence. But hopefully Bengali fiction writers are doing the same thing relentlessly. This attempt to tell the real fact to the society by portraying this tyranny and the tyrant in the mirror of literature is really commendable. We hope that this literary sense will be effective in protecting the honour of women in Bengal. In fact, the country that worships soil, cow, tree as mother, in the country of traditional ideals, the oppression of women will stop once. Bengali short-story writers will be in the front row of the revolutionary movement.

Source

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2. Shyamali Roy, Age-26, Po-Alokhari, Dist-Coochbehar, West Bengal, Date-25.03.2024
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