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Intersecting Marginalities: Gender and Caste in Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari*

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Abstract: Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari* (1968) is recognised in modern Hindi literature for its strong satire about rural India after independence. The novel is most known for its look at political issues, but this paper focuses on the neglected yet important role of caste and gender marginality. Using intersectional theory and postcolonial literary criticism, the study explores how caste and gender are connected and influence one another in Shivpalganj. By not showing women and lower-caste characters, the novel makes it clear that inequality and exclusion are deeply rooted in rural Indian society. Although the novel's social and political setting is shaped mainly by upper-caste men, it provides many opportunities to study how various marginal groups are kept at margins and how it is considered normal.

Keywords: Marginality, Gender, Caste, Raag Darbari.

Introduction

Raag Darbari by Shrilal Shukla is recognized as a landmark book in Hindi literature after independence, highlighting the flaws in Indian democracy. The novel which was written in the late 1960s highlights the problems India faced as it tried to balance independence, modernization and old traditions. The village of Shivpalganj, where the story takes place, illustrates rural India, where caste and patriarchy are important. While most readings have centred on the politics in the text such as corruption, nepotism and a drop in education, this paper suggests that caste and gender discrimination should be examined as well. By highlighting these areas of marginality, we can see the novel as both a political satire and an account of the unfairness present in society.

Intersectionality and Postcolonial Critique:

According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, different forms of oppression interact and combine to create multiple types of discrimination. Caste and gender play a major role in India when it comes to power and

exclusion. Looking at Raag Darbari through the lens of intersectionality reveals where caste and gender-based oppression meet. At the same time, a postcolonial approach explains how colonialism left a mark on Indian society by maintaining old power systems and similar bureaucratic structures among the Indian elite (Crenshaw, 1241-1299). By looking at the situation from two sides, it is easier to analyse the social factors that affect Shivpalganj.

In Raag Darbari, women are hardly seen in the story and do not play active roles in society. In most cases, they play small, unnamed and silent parts, staying at home and having little impact outside the house. Not including women in the story is not by accident but a way to highlight the gender rules in rural India. In the story, Vaidyaji's house has women, but they are not given names and are only mentioned for their connection to the male character. Not being seen or heard in the novel reflects the way women were overlooked in society.

Moreover, when women are shown, it is usually to make fun of them or to focus on their sexuality. The village widow often faces rumours, is monitored by others and is controlled by unofficial social rules. For instance, the character of Bela, is more of a narrative device than an active participant in the political and social manipulations of the village.. This approach reveals that gender oppression is connected to other types of exclusions in society and among different castes. The rumour about another female character named Bela also provides a deep insight into male psyche and unjust treatment of society towards women.

The way caste works is the foundation of power in South Asia:

Caste is not given as much attention in the story as political corruption or the poor state of education, but it still forms an important part of the social system in Shivpalganj. Vaidyaji clearly demonstrates how caste privilege is deeply rooted in society. He is not only powerful in politics but also in ethics and knowledge which allows upper-caste elites to maintain their authority in rural areas. This shows that caste superiority is accepted and continues to exist in the community.

Alternatively, members of lower castes are often not seen at all, except when they play parts that maintain their position as servants, labourers or sources of humour. The reason they do not take part in important village activities is not by chance. This shows that a specific social order was created to exclude people. Because the novel does not develop any lower-caste character, it demonstrates the strong influence of caste in rural India, where it is nearly impossible for the oppressed castes to move up in life. Accepting these

hierarchies without comment in the text is a powerful way to criticize their acceptance as normal. Unlike women, Dalits in the novel are not merely absent but are actively suppressed and manipulated by the ruling elite, particularly through bureaucratic and political means.

How Caste and Gender Affect Each Other:

It is most obvious when we consider how lower-caste women are not only excluded but also overlooked in the novel. Those who are at the lowest end of the social hierarchy are overlooked and, worse, their existence is systematically removed. Even though upper-caste women face some patriarchal influence, they are still privileged by their caste. Alternatively, women from lower castes are victims of both caste-based and gender-based oppression. If we heard what happened to them, we would learn about the worst effects of social inequality in Shivpalganj, but their stories are not shared.

In the village school, readers can see how modernity fails and how people from different backgrounds meet. Education, meant to free people, is actually controlled by upper-caste men in India. Women and those from lower castes are prevented from joining the workforce by many barriers. The curriculum, management and staff show the same biases as the rest of the village. The cooperative society which aims to include everyone ends up excluding people based on their caste and gender. Instead of helping to break down social inequality, these institutions actually increase it.

Narrative strategy and satire to challenge ideas:

Shrilal Shukla uses satire and irony to reveal that rural leaders are not honest and lack morals. However, the way he writes the novel can be confusing for readers who want to hear from marginalized characters. The author often uses sarcasm, even in passages describing unfair situations. Because of this style, readers must deal with the contrast between humour and horror. Even though the political events in Shivpalganj are funny, they also highlight the serious issues they stand for.

Women in Raag Darbari are marginalized, largely absent from public life. In contrast, Dalits, though existent, are methodically suppressed and subjugated. Neither women nor Dalits have substantial assistance in the village's power dynamics. However, while women are mostly passive figures, Dalits are active but powerless participants in a corrupt system. Both groups suffer from subjugation, but the novel centres more on caste-based mistreatment than gender-based scuffles. The bureaucratic system, rather than patriarchy alone, is portrayed as the force sustaining caste hierarchy. The narrator's ironic tone suggests that readers may laugh at

the satire but not miss the main points it is making. Thus, the reader must be able to notice the hidden message in the jokes.

Comparative Perspectives:

The strengths and weaknesses of Raag Darbari are easier to recognize when compared to recent Dalit and feminist writings. Both *Karukku* by Bama and *The Weave of My Life* by Urmila Pawar share the experiences of people from marginalized communities. They give a platform to the oppressed so they can describe what they have gone through. However, Shukla comes from a place of privilege and does not experience marginality himself. Still, the distance between us and these writers demonstrates that these exclusions are found even in the most critical literary works.

The reason Raag Darbari remains important is that it reflects the lack of progress in rural socio-political matters. Despite many years of policies meant to promote social justice, the same situations as in Shivpalganj are found in many parts of India. In rural areas, tradition is still stronger than the constitution and both patriarchy and casteism are very common. For this reason, the novel teaches us that if we do not consider multiple forms of marginality, our democracy will not truly progress.

Conclusion

Raag Darbari is not only a criticism of politicians; it also, perhaps unknowingly, exposes the unfairness in Indian society. Studying the relationship between caste and gender helps to understand how power is maintained in Shivpalganj. Their marginality is not widely discussed, but it is very important. The fact that they are forgotten speaks to the lack of change in society regarding the main injustices of caste and patriarchy. The author's style of writing, full of wit and irony, encourages readers to notice the strange mix of modern ideas and old traditions in India. The novel inspires readers to reconsider progress and reform and to recognize and oppose the various forms of marginalization affecting Indian society. Therefore, Raag Darbari is an important resource for exploring how caste and gender continue to affect postcolonial India.

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