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FEMINISM IN MODERN ORIYA (ODIA) LITERATURE

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Feminism is a collection of movements aimed at supporting the rights and equality of women. The theory intends to understand the nature of gender inequality and seeks gender equality. It focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests. It includes discrimination, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression and patriarchy.

During the age of Epic, women are symbolized for sanctity, devotion towards her husband and what we call 'Pativratyam'. The stories of Nala-Damayanti, Sita-Rama, Savitri-Satyavanta are the good examples of the ancient women. Sita entered fire when Rama ordered her. Harischandra sold his wife, Chandramati and Droupadi became Panchabhartruka. If we go through the Indian Literature, women has played a prominent role. Sadananda Kavisurya Brahma, an ancient Oriya Poet of 17th century in his "Jugala Rasamruta Lahari Kavya" opined

"Kavyare Sina Nayika Pradhano,
Thaku gheni Sobu Rasamano".

It means ancient poetry of Indian Literature based on the beauty of Kavya Nayika. For every Kavya, the description of Kavya-Nayika is very important. So the Poets of that particular age described Kavya-Nayika as vilasa Samagri (Luxurious thing). The Hindi Riti Kavya, Telugu Prabandha Kavyas and the Oriya Riti or Alankarika Kavyas are the best examples of that period.

During British Rule the Oriya Girls in the contemporary society were not allowed to study. According to the Society, the girls must learn only cooking, sewing, singing bhajans and participate in religious activities. If anyone wanted to send their daughters to schools, the elders of the family as well as the villagers used to oppose her and they would not allow them to study in the school or at home. They felt that any unfavourable incident happened; it was the result of her education or study only. At that time the Social Reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Kandukuri Veereshalingam, Gurujada Appa Rao, Durgabai Desmukh, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Ramadervi Choudhury, Kuntalakumari Sabat, Sarala Devi, Sarojini Sahu fought for the equal rights of women without gender discrimination.

In Odia Literature, Fakir Mohan Senapati is known as Vyasakavi. His short story "Rebati" is one of the major modern works. The story contains the theme like 'Feminism', women education, love, desire and superstition. The story moves around the desire of study of a young girl, who wants to study. But the same is not accepted by her grandmother. However, Rebati decides to study under a teacher named Basudevo. She falls in love with Basudevo. But when the village is hit by cholera. Rebati's parents die; her teacher and lover also die. Her grandmother points out that all the things happen due to Rebati's Education. Girls and their education are the most controversial issue of the Indian society. As narrated by the writer, Rebati is a ten year girl. She is very talented and intelligent. Syamabandhu Mahanty is the village elder, what we call Village Karanam of Patapur village in Cuttack Paragana. He is respected by all. He is a man of modern philosophy. He believes that girls should be educated. So when Rebati expresses her desire for education, he immediately agrees and decides to send her to school. But her grandmother opposes it stating that girls shall not study. They shall be engaged all kinds of domestic work. She believes that women education is a curse to the society. Meanwhile the Government appoints one Basudev Mahapatro as the School Teacher of that village. He is an Orphan. So the mother of Rebati treats him as their own son. He has also regard and respect towards Syamabandhu's family. He visits the house daily to teach Rebati. The grandmother of Rebati does not like it. In the meanwhile a silent love starts between Rebati and Basudevo. Syamabandhu's family likes to perform Rebati's marriage with Basudevo. The Village is hit by cholera. Syamabandhu died and his wife also died due to cholera. The only hope for the family is Basudevo. He also dies due to cholera. The family is put into troubles. The Zamindar takes away all the property and leaves the family at their own mercy. Rebati is suffering most and she has the sustainable pain of her parents' demise.

On the other side the grandmother accuses Rebati that whatever happens is the result of her education. At the end Rebati also dies. It is a tragic story. So Fakir Mohan Senapati fought against the social evil and wanted to remove it from the society. He fought for women education, women rights and gender discrimination. In another story 'Patent Medicine' the writer gives the women full freedom. The woman tries to bring change in her drunken husband, who comes home late every night. She tries to get change in his behaviour. But there is no use. At last she takes a broom and starts to punish her. Similarly there is a novel "Matira Manisha" of Kalindi Charan Panigrahi basing on social elements. In the novel women characters are highly degraded. There is a small village named "Padhana Pada" and Syama Padhana is the village elder. He has two sons namely Baraju and Chhokodi. Baraju and Chokodi are married. Baraju has two female children namely Hara and Sunna, but Chokodi has none. Padhan Budhi, wife of Syama Padhana takes much care for the young daughter-in-law, i.e., Chokodi's wife. The eldest daughter-in-law cannot tolerate this. She feels. Then Padhan Budhi says to their daughter-in-laws that born as women is a great sin for them. The women shall work hard as servants, they shall bear all the burdens of the family, they should be treated as slaves, and they shall have no freedom. In this contest it is clear that how the life of women in the contemporary is.

Another prime figure Sarojini Sahu is also one of the trend-setters of feminism. For her feminism is not a gender problem. She accepts feminism as a total entity of

femalehood in her works 'Upanibesha', 'Gambhiri Ghar' Her novels project the feminine feelings like restrictions in the adolescence, the pregnancy, modesty etc., In her novel 'Upanibesha' (The Colony) she revolted against sexuality. Her 'Gambhiri Ghar' was translated into English with the title 'The Dark Abode' which has got feminist outlook and sexual frankness. She appealed that gender discrimination should not be as opposition to men. The Next feminist writer is Sarala Devi, the first Oriya freedom fighter, who contributed for welfare of women. From the beginning she rebelled against women restrictions like child marriages, sati, purdah system. She was the first woman who showed political awareness through her writings. Among her works, the Utkala Nari Samasya (Problems of Women in Orissa), Nari Dabi (The Rights of Women), Bharatiya Mahila Prasanga contain her deep sympathy towards women. She says that no man can keep a woman under his control on the basis of marriage. The women are no longer slaves to the men. Her role is Janani (Mother), Bhagini (Sister), Prana Priya Sangini (Wife), Nanhi Ruddha Vihangini (Not a bird in a cage). She is free from all the confinements.

Janani, Bhagini, Prana Priya Sangini

Nunhe Rudhdha Bihangini, Nunhe Dasi Nunhe Dasi.

(Pralaya Prerana by Annada Sankar Roy)

According to here the success of marriage depends on mutual understanding. She appeals that she will fight for emancipation of women through her writings.

In the same way Ramadevi Choudhury through her autobiography 'Jeebana Pathe' advocated women rights. She protested child marriage, purdah and untouchability. She fought for the Women Education. She said that among our two hands, one is long and the other is short, is it shown good? Like that if men are educated and women are uneducated does the Society become good? That's why women education is needed for the development of the society

The another brightening star who twinkled for a little period in the literary sky of Orissa is Kuntala Kumari Sabat. She is known as the 'Bulbul of Odia Literature. She started writing poems during her School Career. She wrote many poems and among them are 'Anjali', 'Ganga Siuli', 'Ahwana', 'Prema Chintamani', 'Uchchwas'. 'Spullinga' etc., Apart from the poems, she has written the novels based on feminism. Some of them are 'Kali Bohu', 'Parasamani', 'Bhranti', 'Raghu Arakhita' etc., Most of her writings depict patriotism and social issues. She has also raised her voice against wrong beliefs. Besides a very eminent poet, she was a Social Worker. She worked for the down trodden. She always advocated for the women rights and women empowerment through her writings. She protested child marriage, purdah system and untouchability. He encouraged widow marriage. She was a follower of Gandhi. Like Ramadevi Choudhury she participated actively in their Indian Freedom Struggle. She did not live long. She left the world at the age of 38. For her works, she was compared to Sarojini Naidu. Sarojini Naidu is the 'Nightingale of India'; similarly Kuntala Kumari is the Nightingale of Orissa.

In the Telugu Literature the women have been described as slaves to men and their children. She only feels free in the mother's womb only, which can be found in the following lines.

Balyam Nundi Banisatwanni Jeerninchukuni

Banishagane pelli chesukuni

Yavvananni Kooda Banishatwamga bharta mundu unchi bratukeedustundi

Mrutyuvutho vanukutunna vrudhapyanni kooda

Thana Biddala chetullo petti thanu banishagane thanuvu chalistundi

Ee srustilo eeme swetchaga bratikedi Thalli Kadupulo Matrume.

(History of Telugu Literature by Prof.V.Simmanna).

Conclusion:

Apart from the above, there are some other writers, who made efforts supporting women education. They are Bidyut Prabha Devi, Malati Devi, Annapurna Devi, Godavari Devi, who played significant role for their feministic and sexual approach through their writings.

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