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An analysis of the social condition of women as depicted in *Ikṣugandhā*

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Abstract

Literature reflects society with its all aspects. Indian society is very rich because it's belonging to distant past of human civilization. From the time immemorial, Sanskrit literature reflects the Indian culture. With due course of time, Sanskrit poets have been composed literary works and providing us the knowledge of change with regard to its theme and style. A literary piece is powerful enough to make an influence on society and likewise, society is capable enough to produce literature.

Sanskrit scholars have begun to publish literary works with new skills and ideas, delivering the situations of present day society. In 20th century, so many Sanskrit short stories are composed by several authors. Abhiraja Rajendra Mishra's Sanskrit story book *Ikṣugandhā* deals with different socio-cultural aspects of modern Indian society. This paper attempts to portray the condition of women in the present day society as depicted in the stories of *Ikṣugandhā*. The present paper focuses on the various social barriers faced by the women of contemporary period also. The effort has been made to exhibit the persistency of Sanskrit literature with the contemporary society.

Keywords: Women, society, *Ikṣugandhā*

Introduction

Ikṣugandhā, a collection of eight short stories viz. jīviṣā, sukhaśayitaprcchikā, anāmikā, ekahāyanī, śataparvikā, tāmbulakaraṅkavāhinī, bhagnapañjara, and ikṣugandhā; mainly written on the day today struggle of women except the story tāmbulakaraṅkavāhinī. *Ikṣugandhā* is a kind of grass called *kāsa* in Hindi language which blooms specially in the *Varṣā rtu* after the summer season. The significant feature of all the eight stories of this collection is that though the lives of women are abounded with sorrows but at last happiness appeared in their lives.

Each story presents various problems of society like economy, polity, religious customs, gender inequality, prejudice etc., which are very properly exhibited by the poet.

In this Modern time, the greed for money has surpassed every other aspects of human life. People have become materialistic and the value of life, relationship, humanity has reduced to a great extent. In the story, *Ikṣugandhā*, the heroine Vitti once loved a boy, belonging to a poor family. To secure Vitti's future, her grandfather arranges her marriage with the son of a rich family which ultimately ruins the relationship between Vitti and the hero. This shows that somewhere in Modern era also women are not independent with their choices.

The dialogue of the hero describes his economic incapability as –

tasyāḥ pitāmaho maṁ daridrāṁ prakhyāpya bhūmihīnaṅca samghoṣya kenacit dhanikapcetreṇa sārdaṁ tadvivāhaṁ niścitavān^[1]

In another story Jīviṣā the sudden death of father of Tapati led to very pathetic condition of her family which changed the course of her life. Due to insufficient money for the maintenance of her family, she began to satisfy the lust of lustful officers. For Tapati, servitude was the only choice as there was not even a handful of rice at home. She even had to leave her school halfway. This merciful condition of Tapati is depicted by Rajendra Mishra very suitably as–
muṣṭimitamapyannaṁ gr̥he nāvaśiṣṭam/ sevāvrittistu gr̥hyaiva / yena kenāpi vidhinā mūlyena va''dīyate^[2]

The title of the story Jīviṣā appropriately suits on it, in fact there cannot be any other alternate title which can able to justify the story. The desire to live in the mind of Tapati in spite of the calamities of her life, makes possible the construction of the story.

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The Bhagnapañjara, another story of, *Iksugandhā* portrays the sadness and dejected atmosphere, experienced by a girl who had become a widow very early in her life at the age of twenty. The very first paragraph of this short story depicts the pathetic condition of an Indian woman. Abhiraja Rajendra Mishra states that society does not admire character nor can appreciate beauty nor can acknowledge scholarship, this society works according to its own favor. The lies and decides are welcomed even love and good conduct makes no sense. Vandana's father always thought her as a burden on the pretext of being a girl child and even after becoming widow, he continued to treat her in very ill manner. The widow girl, Vandana thinks that even her father got lots of experience in his sixty two years of life, still he shows harsh attitude towards Vandana only because she becomes widow. From the behavior of Vandana's father it can be perceived that he was not in a way to accept the equality between a girls and a boy. In this regard the author cites a very beautiful folk song depicting this inequality -

kṣṇe kṣṇe snehādisāritastānayāḥ khalu gṛhadīpāḥ
Kanyā santi dinodayatārāḥ sphute ravou liyante /
Pañjaraśukāstata ! māṇavakāḥ phalarascāṭuvipuṣṭhaḥ /
Kanyāḥ kintu gṛhadrumacaṭakāḥ chotikayā ḍīyante
Annaṁ dhanam suvarṇam putrāḥ sarveśāmavataṁsāḥ
Kanyāstata ! devanaivedyaṁ dānairno śiṣyante // ³

Here in *Bhagnapañjara*, Rajendra Mishra strengthens his viewpoints in advocacy of widow re-marriage with some convincing illustrations as the house which has collapsed on account of a hurricane wind, everyone will rebuild it. The muddy water will be cleansed and used for the purpose of drinking. The body which has caught up with diseases will be cured by taking medicines. Why a widow could not be allowed to marry again?

Kim punarvivāho me pāpāyaiva prabhaviṣyati na
punyaya ? Vātyādhvastaṁ kutīraḥ sarve punaḥ
vyavasthāpayanti / Malīmāsam jalam nirmalīkrtya
pibanti / rogagrastham sarīramouśadhōpacāraiḥ
svastham vidadhati / Tatkiṁ vaidhavyameṇa
nirouśadham ? ⁴

Bhagnapañjara also reflects that in the contemporary Indian society, there are some people who stand against the social prejudices and accept the system of widow re-marriage.

Punarvivāhortham māṁ bahuśo mantrayate /
Matsatīrtho jayadeva idānīmapi matpaṇī yācate / ⁵

The title of the story *Bhagnapañjara* is effectively suited here, as towards the end of the story, Vandana experiences a thought that her father's house is a broken cage and her dreams have no value, it is better to fly out of that cage and make her life a better one.

In Modern era, girls are equal to boys in ability and intelligence. Women have proved their capacity whenever they have got a chance to prove. The short story *Śataparvikā* depicts that girls are no way inferior to boys. Hence, a daughter requires equal love and affection as shown towards a son. In this story the character Ramlal thinks that daughters are useless and hence he adopts his sister's son as his own, by naming him Shyamlal, who finally proves to be useless. By perceiving seven daughters, Ramlal became agonized.

Svakīyaṁ kanyāsainyaṁ dṛṣṭvaiva rāmalālo
dussahavedānameti putramekaṁ kāmaye / ⁶

Towards the end of the story, Ramlal's daughter Rama confronts him during his illness, transforms Ramlal's character and he starts loving his daughter. In this work, dialogues are forceful and the title *Śataparvikā* is fully justified in the words of Ramlal as the green leaves enhance the beauty of the house and cause happiness to the birds with its fresh sprouts and twinges with their variety of colors, though they have not been attended by anyone not being cared for, they come up with their own efforts, so also the daughter of Ramlal-

Śataparvikā iva me tanūjāḥ / yathā haritavarṇā
śataparvikā gṛhadvārasuṣumām samvardhayati,
śayane tulāstarāṇasāmyam dadhatī saukhyam
janayati, svanavanānkuraiḥ paśupakṣiṇaḥ prīṇayati /
ātmārāmatayā'poṣitā'pi anbhīṣiktā'pi
svādṛṣṭabalenaiva punarnavātamupaiti nityarahitā ca
samlakṣyate tathaiva putro'pi me vartante / ⁷

Anāmikā, another short story in the collection of eight short stories is based on an abandoned girl child on the bank of the river Ganga. Now-a-days abandonment of child has developed in the society. Poverty is often a root cause of child abandonment. Poor people who are not financially capable of taking care of a child banish them. Gender inequality is also a root cause behind baby abandonment. There are numerous causes that fuel the abandonment of a girl child along with social prejudices and fear for non-acceptance.

Abhiraja Rahendra Mishra cites that everyone is making fun and putting comments but no one is serious enough to take any decision regarding that little child. Everybody in the crowd starts blaming the mother of the child and child's fate, but nobody takes her in their lap. The old women in the crowd announced the mother of the child as sinner as she has left the child in the lonely place and does not every think that dogs or jackals may consume her -

Naitāvadapi cintitaṁ yat kukkurā bhaksayiṣyanti śṛgālā vā?
Asmākaṁ yuge tu īdṛsaḥ pāpācāro nāsīt / ⁸

For some people, following of religious conduct has much more importance than humanity. In this story, people are discussing that if that baby girl is born out of a foreigner, no Hindu youth will ever marry her. Again, if she is born to a Hindu lady and gets handed over to a Muslim, how her late mother will feel. But amongst these kinds of people, Abhiraja also portrays a person in whom the humanity is still alive, beyond any religious boundaries. The author, Rajendra Mishra cites a beautiful line through the speech of the hero that whether the baby is born to a Hindu woman or a foreigner, still the girl resembles a patala flower in her tenderness -

Na jāne hindukukṣijātā yavanvaṁśīyā vā tathāpi
pāṭalpuṣpasannidhā vartate sā / ⁹

Rajendra Mishra introduces his opinions regarding a man of righteousness in true sense in the story *Anāmikā*. He strengthens his argument with a beautiful *arthāntaranyāsa*, as Mahatma Gandhi declared a harijan girl by name Lakshmben as his daughter. Swami Vivekananda also accepted a foreign lady Nivedita as his sister, is nobody in the crowd to come forward and accept this abandoned girl child as daughter ¹⁰. In *Anāmikā*, the author wants to convey that if the learned person takes a step forward for social reforms or for solving social problems then it can influence or encourage hundreds of other people. Rajendra Mishra depicts that amongst the

villagers, a professor of Prayag University finally adopts that abandoned nameless (*anamika*) girl.

In *Sukhaśayitaprcchikā*, Rajendra Mishra depicts that amongst the unrighteous conducts, moral injustice, crime, hatred there are some people who possesses that golden heart with humanity. For the sake of helping others, they make their time and money. A boy viz. Sameer who is run down by a vehicle, then admitted to the hospital by two strangers, makes the plot of the story. The old man of the story has lost both his son and daughter in law and his granddaughter is the only life support he has got. He is very proud of his grand-daughter and by his speech, Rajendra Mishra seems to be hinting the present day status of a women who compete with men in all sorts of jobs. Even daughters are capable of earning these days. They are involved in all walks of life like offices, educational institutions, politics and everywhere, c.f.-

Vartamānayuge tu sarvameva adharottaram̐ jātam /
Idānīm putraputrikayama bhedaḥ / Kanyāpi samprati
vetanajīvinī vartate / śāsantantre'dhistāne kāryālaye
grhāpaṇe vā sarvatraiva mahilāḥ kāryarotāḥ vartante //¹¹

The contemporary social and political movements in India are vividly presented by the modern Sanskrit writers in their fictions. Sanskrit short stories like any other fiction of modern literature keep touch with barriers of modern Indian society. Sanskrit literary works also contributes to uplift the spirit of humanism. Most of the stories of the collection *Ikṣugandhā* exhibit women as the main theme. The problems of women are depicted in these short story are factually true. The story *Śataparvikā* portrays that only because of being woman they are tortured, humiliated by their own father. As depicted in the story *Bhagnapañjana*, society and family does not authorize a widow to possess and fulfill her own dreams. But the women characters portrayed in the stories of *Ikṣugandhā* are very strong and determined and all of his stories possess beautiful and happy ending. All the stories of *Ikṣugandhā* are based on socio-cultural state of India. As the realistic ideas are incorporated in these stories, the modern Sanskrit rhetoricians also have started new norms and regulations for their aesthetic appreciations. The remarkable feature of this work is that the author Rajendra Mishra has composed these stories with genuine thoughts and expressions by showing the harsh realities of Modern day society. In the name of Indian custom, the blissful social customs of Indian society experiences the journey from boon to curse. Some wrongly interpreted social customs deteriorate the social condition of women. It's the high time to analyse the Sanskrit texts properly, so that, the misinterpretation of these texts couldn't paralyze the growth of Indian society. The great law giver Manu states in his *Manusmṛti* that where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards' cf.-

Yatra nāryastu pūjyante ramanta tatra devatāḥ /
Yatraitāstu na pūjyante sarvāstrāphalāḥ kriyāḥ //¹²

Reference

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2. Ikṣugandhā., P.30
3. Ikṣugandhā, p.104
4. Ibid.p.106
5. Ibid., p.109
6. Ikṣugandhā P. 85
7. Ibid., P.96

8. Ikṣugandhā, p.62
9. Ibid.,p.63
10. Ibid.,p. 68
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