

## **GENDER ABUSE IN THE CHARACTER OF BIBHAVATI DEVI IN TARA ALI BAIG'S NOVEL 'MOON IN RAHU'**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Raja Romendra Narayan Roy achieves everything before he dies –everything that he lost except his wife's respect and love which had been offered to him without conditions but which he wasted away before he could even own them on the company of a dancing girl whose heart and body were both for sale .He could get the love and appreciation of dancing girl for life but not the love and heart of an innocent girl whom his depravity left scarred for life Raja Romendra Narayana Roy died without ever being able to conquer his wife's heart which he could have owned through his ruin and death had he but treated her with respect. On reading the novel one is haunted by Congreve's words : "Heaven has no rage like love turned to hatred, Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned ."

**KEYWORDS:** Traditional young Child-Bride, Playing with Dolls, Suffers Marital Rape, Her Little Education, is Stuck in the Swamp of a Huge House, Ceremonies and Strange People, Warped Culture to Behave, Turns to God

### **INTRODUCTION**

*The Moon in Rahu* is a wonderful novel that describes the downfall of a wealthy estate and the spiritual levitation of one of the members of the feudal family who owned the estate .It is as if life brings him back only to face the consequences of his indifference and callousness towards a helpless woman Bibhavati Devi.

Rani Bibhavati Devi is the beautiful, elegant, suave, traditional young child-bride of the second son of the Raja Rajendra Roy of Bhowal Estate. Bibhavati Devi enters the story and the house when Mejo Kumar or the Romendra Roy's, the second son of the Raja flouts all tolerable limits of naughtiness grows with age into depravity .She is an adolescent girl who has not had her heart's fill of playing with dolls. She becomes the doll in a large and rich house and in the hands of a depraved young boy and later her brother who uses her to gain control over the riches of the Bhowal estate that belong to her and to enjoy a luxurious life at the cost of her miserable life .She suffers marital rape at the hands of her husband. Traumatized, and in a state of terribly numb agony after the night of her wedding, she astonishes the reader with her amazing inner strength which is weathered by her brother's cunningness, her little education .The calm stoical tenacity and authoritarian grace is renovated by her passionate hatred for her husband.

" She could remember nothing her mother had told her ,what to do ,how to behave .She had just curled up like a pariah dog ,helpless and rigid with fear .How were they to know all this ?How were they to know what depth of despair she suffered .But this was not to be revealed .That much at least she will remember now .Words made fiery with her lack of sleep , exhaustion and violation ."Whatever the inner sorrow of a woman she must never show this .Pray and you will have the strength. Do what you must do with obedience and devotion ....Something snapped like a bamboo between the

hands She would not do as she was told. Her mother had not told her it would be like this, dirty, defiling ugly and hurtful. A dry whisper of a sob rose in her throat. One of the maids looked at her curiously, but she looked back proud and defiant. She would not be pitied. "Prepare my bath ", she spoke quietly ....The quiet authority of the soft voice penetrated them all."'<sup>1</sup>

She resolves to never be the obedient daughter-in-law and obedient wife. She resolves to rebel, but this is easier said than done. Romendra, her husband cannot understand the delicate and sublime mind of a young girl who has left the shade of her loving family and is stuck in the swamp of a huge house, ceremonies and strange people. He wants her to give him the same sexual companionship that the prostitute and dancing girl Elokeshi gives him. But unfortunately it is an ironic demand that the Indian men make that a woman may be brought up as a modest girl and be kept away from her own sexuality and her sexual choices until she is fit to be a modest bride. They then expect her to change overnight on the wedding night into a willing and entertaining wife aware of her husband's thirst for pleasure, like a prostitute. They expect her to change into the role of a nymphomaniac to match their sexual hunger which has been quenched at many hells of depravity. When she has been forbidden her natural sexual desires until some stranger is discovered to be moneyed enough to pay for her virginity in the name of a marriage own her for the rest of her life. Even more ironic is the fact that the British men understood the predicament of the Indian brides better than the Indian men or the bride's mothers. A conversation between the British officers Hughes and Lindsay raises the shameful denial of the sexual rights to women in a culture where statues of women are worshipped in temples but women of flesh are treated like lifeless statues. Referring to Rani Bibhavati's perspective about the arbitrary issue of a wandering Sanyasi being declared as the Romendra Narayan Roy, Hughes says: "And the wife has refused to acknowledge him as her the husband."<sup>2</sup> The remark that this statement is able to elicit from his compatriot Lindsay shows the pathetic plight of the Indian women and the healthier attitude of the European men who come from a culture which was notorious for allowing women immodest behavior according to Indian women themselves:

"Damned right too", Lindsay poked Hughes in the ribs. "Pretty grim having a chap you've never seen suddenly given the right to hop into your bed ....?"<sup>3</sup>

Rani Bilasmoni is rendered incapable by her early marriage and her conservative upbringing in disciplining her three boys, Ronendra Roy, Romendra Roy, and Robindra Roy. After the death of her depraved husband who succumbed to his alcohol addiction, his children and his Bhowal Estate both are thrown into the hands of an incapable, confused lady Rani Bilasmoni. The estate is slowly eroded by the incapable management. The children, grow into willful, lazy, undisciplined and uneducated adolescents. The eldest boy falls a prey to lust, gluttony and indolence. Romendra Roy, the central character whiles away his life in the company of depraved dancing women, hunting and shows more interest in his pilkhana or the animals that he has captured than the estate. All of the three Kumar's are uneducated as they were more interested in tormenting their tutors by playing tricks rather than studying. In India marriage is always thought to be a purgatory of sorts which purges the soul of all evil or a reformatory institution. But a thirteen year old bride Rani Bibhavati Devi, lonely, although forced by a warped culture to behave in a mature manner that would not suit her age was driven more into the softness of her dolls world by the animal like lust of her husband.

Her husband's wayward ways and her oblivious mother's concern and preaching letters drive this thirteen year old frightened girl into the lairs of her brother's unfeeling plots to use her to secure his financial future and access to her share

in the Bhowal estate as well as Romendra's insurance money. Bibhavati Devi, raped and humiliated by her husband, turns to her brother for protection and turns into a puppet in his hands for the rest of her life. Bibhavati Devi who begins to appear as a strong woman in the making at the beginning of her life as the second wife of a depraved and irresponsible Mejo Kumar and is almost reckoned as a small beam of light of a bright dawn of a good future of the Bhowal estate disappoints the reader by the end of the novel when one considers her as the pawn set on her brother's chess board.

Tara Ali Baig who was a tireless advocate of child welfare and has received accolades for her work in this sphere, point out the detrimental consequence of child marriage. One may be expecting too much of a child married at the age of thirteen, having undergone the trauma of marital rape and neglect at the hands of a depraved, immature, repulsive husband and watching him rot with syphilis and fearing his touch in such a state, living each day in a hell where nobody cared for her. But in spite of such a married life that Rani could treat only with fear and loathing, widowhood stomps painfully into her life in the initial moments and days when it begins to suck all the colors in her life but later it replaces the riot of the nuptial colors with a calm whiteness. After the death of Kumar Romendra Roy who apparently died of biliary colic Rani Bibhavati calmly floats into a content widowhood and as was the approved decorum for widows sedates her soul with the addiction of religion.

One cannot certainly call Rani Bibhavati Devi weak. The gothic ambience of the novel however, when read more closely clearly creates a doubt in the mind of the author. If Rani Bibhavati Devi was a puppet in the hands of her cunning brother who reminds one so of Uriah Heep from Charles Dickens' novel *David Copperfield*, the reader does feel that Satyendra Banerjee, her brother was also used as a tool to achieve the Rani's revenge. The Rani Bibhavati Devi who is the inspiration for the character of the same name in the novel is described by Tara Ali Baig thus:

"She came into the room quietly and with a peculiar dignity for one so small. There was grace in her bearing. Grace, placidity and beauty, but she did not look like one to be used. The eyes were oddly light and steady. Not Bengali eyes at all ...."<sup>4</sup> Page 1 Tara Ali Baig remarks upon the self – same pair of eyes and the light in them in the Epilogue when she discusses Romendra Roy's second tryst with death. Tara Ali Baig remarks: There was a sudden glint like the sun on a rapier in those beautiful light eyes."<sup>5</sup>

Rani Bibhavati is the representative of an Indian widow who is abused by her husband and her brother and whose strength is wasted in fighting herself, her parents and her relatives and society only to be able to live. If the Indian women use their mental and spiritual strength, of which there is no dearth in them, to throw off the yoke of male chauvinism and to scream out their opposition to an outdated, misogynist society, they would not have been eroded by suppressed tears. She reminds one of the plights of Sita and Draupadi. Both of them are always being used by men and left defenseless by the men who have the responsibility of protecting them. But Sita and Draupadi had to seek their own recourses to hide themselves from shame. Sita found shelter in the folds of the earth and Draupadi had to call out to Krishna. When the woman is in trouble apparently it is only the forces of God who have mercy upon her while protectors of her honor, who apparently consider it their right to chaperone and preach her morality, look on as spectators would do. Bibhavati also finally turns to God and piety for internal peace.

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