

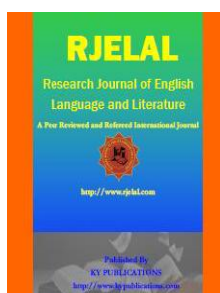


WOMEN IN DOGRA SOCIETY: A STUDY OF PADMA SACHDEV'S STORIES

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the position of women in Dogra society with reference to the short stories (*Caretaker* and *Are You O.K Bu?*) of Padma Sachdev, a Dogri writer. Women have their own position in Dogra society but due to some old rituals and traditions in earlier Dogra society they get oppressed by the society. In earlier times when a girl got married she was not allowed to come back to their maternal home again. The girl child was debarred from their maternal home. There was also a practice of *dohri* (reciprocal marriage) in Dogra society due to which the women were not able to express themselves. In Padma Sachdev's stories women felt as a stranger or alien in their own home. The role and behaviour of women is determined by our social structure, cultural norms, and values to a great extent. However, the male characters in the stories emerge neither villain nor as object to ridicule. The writer criticises the social structure not the individual for the oppression of women in Dogra society.

Key Words: Dogra, oppression, ill-matched marriage, reciprocal marriage.

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INTRODUCTION

Dogri literature is one of the emerging literatures in India. It has created a place of its own in New Indian Literatures. Dogri is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Northern Punjab. Dogri speakers are known as Dogras and the region where Dogri is used as a dialect is known as Duggar. Basically Dogri belongs to the Indo-European family of languages of India and is derived from Sauraseni Prakrit, but with the passage of time many Persian, Arabic and English words have been gradually absorbed in the Dogri language. Dogri literature was started to be written in the eighteenth century, during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Dev. Dogri language was recognised by the Sahitya Akademi in 1969. It was inculcated in the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution in 2003. Dogri language is spoken in the

region of Jammu, Himachal and some parts of Punjab like Gurdaspur and in the Pakistani towns of Sialkot, Zafarural and Shakargarh. The literature of Dogra region is known as Dogri literature. Regional identities have always been dominant features of the Indian cultural matrix. Dogri literature can be said to be a complete literature in itself as it clearly defines to the reader about Dogra society, their culture, values etc. Dogras are famous for their bravery and their valour on the battle field and Dogri literature reveals its identity.

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(reciprocal marriage) in Dogra society due to which the women were not able to express themselves.

Padma Sachdev is one of the finest poetesses as well as a short story writer. She has got several awards like the Sahitya Akademi Award at a very young age of thirty and then Soviet Land Nehru Award, Hindi Academy Puraskar, U.P Hindi Academy Puraskar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy Puraskar, Joshua Poetry Award, Hindi Ratna Award and the Jammu and Kashmir Government's Robe of Honour. Padma Sachdev was born in 1940 in J&K. Her father Prof. Jai Dev Badu was a Sanskrit scholar. She has not published any individual collection of Dogri short stories but many of her short stories are appeared in journals. Her short stories are mired in problems of poverty, *dohri* (marriage of reciprocity), ill-matched marriages, domestic tensions, rural setting, typed characters with romantic and idealistic approach. Her main concern is family life and domestic problems faced by women. She is one of the Dogri writers who have beautifully painted Dogra society in their fiction.

Padma Sachdev in her fiction has taken up those women characters who are victims of old rituals and traditions and of ill-matched marriages. She has presented them as survivors against the various forms of social oppression. In her stories, she presents the inequality and injustice heaped on women because of the society. The women characters of her stories are sensitive and thoughtful individuals who very easily accept their fate and position in a conservative society. They do not even dare to know what they are and how the others behave with them, why they feel alienated, why their feelings are not understood by others and why they slump into inanity and desperate?

In this research paper two stories of Padma Sachdev *Caretaker* and *Are You O.K Bu?* are discussed with Marxist feminism method. Marxist Feminism explains the ways in which women are oppressed through society.

Caretaker is the story of ill-fated Nuri, who is a victim of ill-matched marriage. She is a young girl married to a child and after that her life becomes hell. Sher Khan is the husband of Nuri or Nur *Begam* but he never accepts her as his wife as she is ten years older than him and he is very small

to understand this relationship but still he has some affection with her. When Sher Khan is sending away from Nuri the pathetic condition of Nuri is shown as:

No, no Sher Khan, you should not weep. I will weep. I am used to weeping and I like it. I will not allow you to spend your nights weeping the way I passed the nights of my blighted hopes weeping. You are my little beloved. I have also brought you up. You were always my husband. Only I was never your wife. It is true that I have seen a husband behind your name but he is not you. You gave me a home, my own home and I am happy with this much. I will not allow your dreams to be shattered. I know that your uncle wants you to get married to Sarwar. (169)

The primary focus of attention in the short stories of Padma Sachdev is woman her tensions her irritations, pains, anguish and her sufferings. Nuri the protagonist of the story is like a puppet in the hands of the society. Firstly she is married to Sher Khan a boy ten years younger than her and the marriage is not a success. Then she is again married to Maulavi Saheb who is twenty years older than her only to bring up his child. In spite of all this she smiles at Sher Khan and tells him to not weep on her condition as it is her fate:

Don't weep. I will leave tomorrow morning. It will be a month tomorrow since Maulavi Saheb's wife died. I shall be able to save his infant son. Maulavi Sahab also needs a woman, not a wife. But I'm not destined to be a wife, it seems. I am going to get a second husband who is older than me by twenty years. He has four daughters also who need a mother. (170)

Meenakshi Mukerjee says, "social conformity has always been more obligatory for a woman than a man, and generally a woman's identity tends to be defined by herself as well as by others, in terms of relationship with men-as a daughter, as a wife and as a mother" (98). Nuri shows that a woman can fulfill herself in a loving and harmonious relationship with others and by giving happiness to others. What governs her is the act of giving, going away from oneself and a deep concern for the happiness of

others. Nuri sacrifices herself for the happiness of others but still she has some feelings in her heart for Sher Khan and for the home where she spends fifteen years of her life.

This house is my home. Call me here sometimes. The walls of this house are inscribed with the story of my fifteen years' life. There is not a single wall of this house which I have not embraced to weave the dreams of my past, not a tree in the backyard of this house in whose blossoms I have not seen the face of children, not a rafter of the ceiling of this house which could stand my stares. Each night of this house I have absorbed in my heart and each day I bequeath to you. (170)

The story depicts the aching void in the life of Nuri, who is feeling lonely in the world. She is a wife, a mother but all the relations are for namesake for her. She is not emotionally attached to anybody. She is only performing duties of her life without any complains and regressions.

Are You O.K Bu? is the story of two innocent sisters Masan and Patu who were married in a very little age and at that time once a Rajput girl was married they were not allowed to come back to their parental home. The parents used to pack sandalwood along with the dowry so that the in-laws could cremate the girls without the presence of their parents. Masan and Patu, too, were carrying sandalwood along with their dowry but, they were very small to understand the meaning of in-laws and those rituals. But the girls were taught how to behave in the in-laws house as Patu advised Masan, "Look you will have to learn to tolerate hunger and thirst. Manjee said, 'Don't ask for food when you are in in-laws house'" (157). The girls were very innocent and they behave as their mother told them not to ask for food or anything. Masan was very hungry so she ate up coconut from her *kaleeras*. The innocence of Masan is shown very beautifully in the story.

Didi, shall I tell you the truth. I ate the first coconut as we were approaching Kondali Nagrota and the second one when the *tonga* was going up the Johar Kotli's ascent. I would have given a piece to you

but you were looking at the horse. Do you know this *kaleera* was given to me by Makhani Bhua. I had noticed that her coconut was not a fresh one. But it turned out to be very sweet. (156)

Sense of femininity develops in the girl child at a very early age when she is not even old enough to realize that there are two different sexes. The parents of girl child brought up in such a way that they are not allowed to speak loudly and are not even able to express their views not even for their needs. They possess all the capabilities and abilities but the only thing they know is politeness, tenderness, shyness and all other feminine qualities. At the very early age the burden of family is put on the shoulders of these tender creatures. Both Masan and Patu now reaches at their in-laws house and adjusts themselves according to them.

After fifteen years the daughter of late Maharaja Partap Singh was married to Raja of Channeni and the rituals of the marriage were performed by Raja Hari Singh and he gave a lot of property as dowry to the Raja of Channeni. The girl was very upset as she knew that she was now not allowed to come back to the family so she begged for coming back as a gift of marriage from Raja Hari Singh "Maharaj, please allow me to visit you"(160). And king replied, "Buarani, you will come for dinner tomorrow night" (160). And since then girls were allowed to visit to their family members. This one sentence of Raja changed the whole atmosphere of Dogra society. This news spread like a fire in the wood and when this news reached to the ears of the brothers of Masan and Patu they went to meet their sisters. Both Masan and Patu were unaware of the news as they were far away from the city and when they saw their brothers approaching them they commit suicide as they didn't consider it good if someone from their parental home meet them. So to save them they end up their lives. This is very beautifully shown in the story.

Masan *Moyi*, just look, they look like our brothers, they look just like *Bapujee*; just look they made an enquiry and the Chota Pandit pointed towards this house. Hurry up Masan. Both were a bit flustered. "What will they think about us, when they see that

the Colonel's daughters are making cow dung cakes." Patu deep in thought said, "My brothers have come here on the sily, they do not know that they will be punished by the Maharaja. What should we do? . . . "I can sacrifice myself for my brother." As the riders once again disappeared behind the hill both decided" we will not let our brothers be punished by the Maharaja. Our dear brothers, we have seen you. That's enough for us. We have no regrets. May you be blessed, may the Maharaja be blessed too." And then they held each other's hand and jumped into the valley. (161-62)

Both stories are heart touching and also throw light on the evil traditions of Dogra society. In Padma Sachdeva's stories women feel as an outsider in their own home. The role and behaviour of women is determined by our social structure, cultural norms, and values to a great extent. Patriarchy and the values it implies are criticized explicitly as well as implicitly. However, the male characters in the stories emerge neither as villain nor as object to ridicule. The writer criticises the social structure not the individual for the oppression of women.

CONCLUSION: Women in Dogra society in not a victim of oppression by individual but it is the oppression of society. Padma Sachdev as a short story writer honestly portrays the human emotions with the simultaneous depiction of the society. Her stories delineate the social and moral restrictions which Dogra women have to contend within their life.

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