

A Critical Analysis of Radical Feminism in Jaishankar Prasad's Play Dhruvswamini

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Abstract - The purpose of this research is to analyze the representation of radical feminism in early 1930s Hindi plays, a time period before the phrase was ever introduced to literature. Dhruvswamini, written by Indian author Jaishankar Prasad, is an attempt to promote Radical Feminism to traditionalists in India. By writing this play, he sparked a sober debate on controversial topics including domestic tyranny, polygamy, sexuality, the freedom to divorce, and remarriage. Although the term "Radical Feminism" did not appear in western literature until the 1960s, this study argues that the germ of these ideas may be seen in Prasad's plays from the early 20th century. This study highlights his debt to Buddhism and the ideas of contemporary Indian feminist activists. The drama Dhruvswamini has been analyzed by doing a literature study. The final product of this research would be an analysis of radical feminism as it appears in Hindi theater.

Keywords - Dhruvswamini, literature, Radical Feminism, drama, Indian feminist, Jaishankar Prasad.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Famous in his native India as a poet, dramatist, and essayist, Jaishankar Prasad was active in the first decades of the twentieth century. The radical feminist themes of ancient India are explored in his 1918 historical play "Dhruvswamini," which has since become a classic. Prasad's play explores the intricacies of women's life and provides a scathing criticism of patriarchal norms in contemporary society; it is rooted in the Chhayavaadi literary movement. When it comes to breaking down barriers for women and promoting equality, "Dhruvswamini" has stood the test of time.[1]

Jaishankar Prasad, an important figure in Hindi literature, was born on January 30, 1889, in the city of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Prasad, a leading figure in the Chhayavaadi movement, was known for his deeply spiritual and passionate poetry. Prasad was an accomplished poet, but he also wrote excellent plays that delved into a wide range of societal topics and human emotions.

His drama "Dhruvswamini" is considered one of his best works. The drama, written in 1918, is based on the Mahabharata and takes place in ancient India. The protagonist of "Dhruvswamini" is Princess Dhruvswamini, who marries King Dushyanta and faces many challenges in a patriarchal culture. As the story progresses, Prasad expertly creates likable protagonists and provides an insightful look at women's difficulties, ambitions, and search for emancipation in a patriarchal society.[2]

Understanding the tenets of radical feminism is crucial to appreciating "Dhruvswamini" for what it is: a radical feminist work. During the second wave of feminism, which began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, radical feminism developed as a significant school of thought within the feminist movement. It was a huge break from liberal feminism, which advocated small, gradual reforms to establish gender equality within established institutions. However, radical feminism aimed to completely transform society by tearing down existing structures and institutions that perpetuated gender inequity.

Recognizing patriarchy as the major root of women's subjugation is central to radical feminism. Feminist radicals argue that the status quo of male authority in society must be radically rethought if gender inequality is to be eliminated. They advocate for women to unite in order to change the status quo of patriarchal institutions including the nuclear family and conventional gender roles.[3]

Even though it is set in ancient India, Jaishankar Prasad's "Dhruvswamini" incorporates various radical feminist ideas into its plot. The struggles endured by the play's female heroine, Dhruvswamini, serve as a devastating indictment of patriarchy. Prasad portrays an unconventional heroine in Dhruvswamini, a lady who stands out for her independence, sexual appetite, and quest for esteem. In doing so, the drama captures the spirit of radical feminism by reclaiming women's autonomy and posing a challenge to traditional gender roles.

The power of sisterhood and female unity in challenging patriarchal systems is also highlighted in the play. Dhruvswamini builds strong bonds with other women, who help her overcome obstacles and break free from patriarchal norms. The centrality of female friendship highlights the radical feminist ideal of mutual aid in the fight for freedom.[4]

The female protagonists in "Dhruvswamini" are strong, independent figures who transcend gender stereotypes. Dhruvswamini is not a helpless victim of circumstance just because she is a princess. Instead, she takes initiative to control her own fate, doing it with bravery, intellect, and tenacity. The radical feminist ideas of opposing gender conventions and demanding equal status with males are shown by her courage in declaring her affections for King Dushyanta and her unwillingness to be silenced.

Further, by allowing women a platform to share their perspectives on historical events, the play questions the dominant male narrative. By using Dhruvswamini as a narrator, Prasad reimagines history to highlight the experiences of women who have been marginalized and ignored by traditional accounts of the past. Play's message is similar to that of radical feminists who try to rewrite history from a female viewpoint and challenge the dismissal of women's achievements.[5]

A number of social and political groups in India sought independence from British colonial control in the early 20th century. Reform movements promoting social transformation and the empowerment of oppressed people, especially women, were gaining steam at the same time as these patriotic activities.

During this pivotal time, Jaishankar Prasad's "Dhruvswamini" appeared, furthering the conversation regarding women's place in society and the importance of women's education and empowerment. In addition to being a piece of literature, the play mirrored larger societal arguments about women's rights and their position in a modernizing India.[6]

The strong female characters and feminist topics explored in "Dhruvswamini" were well praised. The play was well received by both spectators and reviewers, and it helped bring equality for women into the spotlight. Prasad's complex examination of women's agency and the ways in which patriarchy and power intertwine made this play significant in Indian literature.

The ideas and lessons presented in "Dhruvswamini" are still relevant today. Gender discrimination, violence against women, and restrictions on their personal freedom are all issues that persist in today's society. A powerful reminder that the fight for women's rights and freedom is a never-ending path that requires constant conversation and activity, "Dhruvswamini" is an important addition to the canon.[7]

The drama "Dhruvswamini" by Jaishankar Prasad is a groundbreaking examination of radical feminist topics set against the backdrop of ancient India. Prasad provides a scathing indictment of patriarchy and conventional gender roles via the persona of Dhruvswamini. The play supports the idea of women taking control of their own lives and stresses the need of women working together to achieve equality. A classic piece of literature, "Dhruvswamini" continues to spark debate and discussion on gender equality and women's empowerment today.

In 1933, Jaishankar Prasad wrote the drama Dhruvswamini, which is based on a real tale from the Gupta dynasty. Prasad (1890-1937), a native of Kashi who wrote in Hindi, is considered a Romantic writer. According to Vajpai (2013), his plays not only focus on real-world or historical events, but also include societal norms and ideals. According to Ras-togi (2008), the Dhruvswamini is unique among plays from the same time period because, although being based on a historical narrative, it shows the truth of existence. Prasad composed this play to show the truth of Indian society, despite the fact that he is associated with the Romantic Period of Hindi writing.[8]

The notion of feminism was first introduced to the literary canon in the West, and only later did it make its way to Indian writing. Radical feminism, which seeks women's independence, is generally considered to be part of the second wave of feminism, which spans the years 1960 to the present. The purpose of this article is to investigate whether Prasad incorporated radical feminism, which had not yet been introduced to the literary canon at the time of the play's composition in the early 1930s, into his work on Dhruvswamini. The present investigation makes use of books, magazines, and journals on Hindi theater, Buddhism, and feminism as supplementary materials to Jaishankar Prasad's play Dhruvswamini as its core source. This play has been examined through the lens of Radical Feminist theory, and a literature study has been conducted to do so. The purpose of this research is to analyze the presence of radical feminism in early 1930s Hindi play.[9]

2. CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURE

During the Victorian period, feminism emerged as a social movement in the United States and Britain. In England, females did not have the same legal and political protections as their male counterparts. At the time, it was illegal for them to even possess land. All of these factors contributed to the emergence of first-wave feminism in the 1850s.

'Radical feminism' was a new women's movement that gained traction in the late 1960s. Forging their own identities in a patriarchal culture, radical feminists spoke out against domestic violence. Proponents of the new women's movement called

"radical feminism" argued that it addressed the systemic causes of women's oppression, and thus it became an influential strand of the movement. This remark suggests that radical feminism as a new ideology emerged in response to the mistreatment of women. explaining radical feminism and how "it explores gender-role stereotyping, women's oppressed position in the family and the workplace, the political significance of lesbianism, and critiques of male violence in terms of power," as the author puts it. She puts her idea in context, noting that it may be applied to situations of inequality at home and in the workplace.[10]

Child marriage was frequent in India, which is a male-dominated society, and widows were often forbidden to remarry throughout the Prasad period. Despite the absence of feminism in Indian culture, an increasing number of academics have spoken out against the subordination of women. In India, the fight for women's rights was spearheaded. In 1830, a social reform movement called the "Young Bengal Movement" was established in India with the goal of remarriage of widows as its primary focus. Widow remarriage was banned due to the efforts of social activists. It was in large part due to their efforts that the Widows' Property Act of 1856 was passed. However, it was not powerful enough to alter deeply ingrained stereotypes about widows in Indian culture. As a feminist who fought against the widespread practice of polygamy in high-caste Hinduism and Islam, Vidyasagar might be introduced in this context. These ideas motivated Prasad to write the drama *Dhruvswamini*. [11]

The first advocates for women's rights in India were males, making the country's Feminist Movement quite different from that of the West. It wasn't until the late 1960s that the term "Radical Feminism" began to appear in western literature, although similar ideas had already been floating about in the early Indian movement.

Lord Buddha introduced radical reforms about women to Indian civilization hundreds of years ago. Five years after Lord Buddha's enlightenment, Prajapathi, his foster mother, came to the Buddha with 500 ladies asking for permission to become nuns. Despite three requests, Lord Buddha still denied their request. In the end, they shaved their heads yet showed up in saffron garments. When they needed Buddha's blessing, Ananda thero made the request. Chullavagga explains it in detail in her book *Buddhism of the Patriarchy*.

In another arrangement, Ananda reportedly asked the Buddha, "Lord, are women, having gone forth from home into homelessness in the dhamma and discipline proclaimed by the Truth-finder, able to realize the fruit of stream-attainment, the fruit of once-returning, the fruit of non-returning, or the fruit of perfection?" [12]

She is the first woman to fight for significant social change, and this shows how seriously she took her vow of Bhikshunihood 1. The extreme feminism of Prajapathi's period, during the reign of the Lord Buddha, may be traced back to her actions. By paying special attention to women like Patachara and Rajjuma, who had hitherto been ignored by society, Buddha not only legalized Bhikshunihood but also introduced revolutionary reforms to Indian society. This reasoning demonstrates that profound transformation was already present in Lord Buddha's day.

All the above ideas and concepts examine how radical feminism has changed through time, both in the West and India. This research looks at how well they've been used in Jaishankar Prasad's play *Dhruvswamini*. Textual analysis using the aforementioned principles has been used to isolate the play's radical elements.[13]

Prasad was persuaded of the need of women's freedom. At the national sense, Gandhi and many other modernists urged women to abandon their traditional values and join the fight for liberation. Prasad did not see women as mindless animals to be herded about according to the whims of men. He strongly disagreed with the upper caste Hindu tradition of not divorcing the spouse.

Women should be given the right to leave unhappy marriages even if doing so was illegal at the time. She pointed out Prasad's radical views, saying he disagreed with the notion that women should always submit to the authority of males. Prasad really attempted to make significant societal changes by opposing patriarchy and legalizing divorce.[14]

Dhruvswamini elaborated, saying, "So far the kings and queens were painted with usual colors." The author delves farther than ever before into the dynamics of a married couple's relationship. *Dhruvswamini* is the queen who is married to a weak and feminine monarch. Her attraction to her ruggedly handsome brother-in-law is no secret.

The author began broaching serious issues for married couples to discuss. He argued that *Dhruvswamini*'s feelings for Chandragupt weren't wrong since they were a product of human nature. *Dhruvswamini* is an issue-based play. identified the play's themes as those of female identity, female empowerment, female independence, male oppression, and marital dissolution. All of these research point to the *Dhruvswamini* as a drama that deals with feminist topics. The radical feminist themes of *Dhruvswamini*'s play are explored in this study, making it an important read.

3. DHRUVSVAMINI, RADICAL FEMINISM, AND DOMESTIC OPPRESSION

To protect women from domestic abuse and oppression, the notion of radical feminism was

introduced. Through Dhruvsvamini and Koma, Prasad spoke out against women being abused in their homes in Indian culture. Dhruvsvamini and her servant, who also happens to be her husband's spy, have the play's opening conversation. The servant, Kadgarini, dislikes speaking with Queen Dhruvsvamini since she is forbidden to do so. Their brief exchange at the play's outset emphasizes how Dhruvsvamini is regarded like a slave even in her own home. However, the author took a stand against women's subjugation by having Dhruvsvamini question her husband's authority over her life.[15] Through Dhruvsvamini's words, Prasad (n.d.) introduced readers to these seismic shifts:

Men have traditionally seen women as their possessions, which led them to abuse them. But don't even consider engaging in such behavior against me.

Prasad uses this conversation to advocate for the release of women from repressive marital norms. Dhruvsvamini is a radical feminist because she speaks out against domestic abuse and insists on being recognized by her husband Ramgupta as both a queen and a married woman. Prasad brought attention to the seldom mentioned topic of husband and wife understanding in Indian culture. Dhruvsvamini is a radical idea in the Indian patriarchal culture because she realizes she can defend herself when she isn't receiving affection and protection from her husband.

In traditional Indian culture, a woman is expected to devote her whole attention to her husband and must treat him like a deity. Dhruvsvamini and Chandragupta, her husband's brother, had an infatuation. However, Dhruvsvamini was obligated to wed Ramgupta per her father's wishes. When she becomes dissatisfied with her marriage, she does not hold back from telling her servant how she feels about Chandragupta. Through discourse, Prasad (n.d.) articulated the experiences of women everywhere.

Prasad, a man writing about women, manages to capture their inner lives and the complex emotions they experience in the context of marriage. Prasad argues that violence against women includes the rejection of a woman's right to have her own sentiments. He makes an effort to spread radical feminist ideas in India, a country where it is widely held that sex is exclusively the province of males.[16]

4. DHRUVSVAMINI'S RADICAL FEMININITY AND POLYGAMY

Another factor that contributed to the subjugation of women in India was the widespread practice of polygamy among both Hindus and Muslims. Women were seen as property under this legislation and might be exploited sexually at any moment. Known as the

"Indian feminist" who fought against polygamy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar lived from 1820 to 1891. Jayawardena (2009) stresses the following about polygamy in Indian culture:

Many petitions against polygamy were given to the government in the 1850s, including one from the Maharaja of Burdwan in 1855. The subject was initially highlighted by Hindu reformers who fought for its eradication and by Bengali playwrights and authors who satirized the practice. Vidyasagar, who in the 1870s penned pamphlets highlighting the dangers of polygamy, was instrumental in continuing the effort.[17]

Since the 19th century, Indian female activists have been vehemently opposed to polygamy. It demonstrates conclusively that radical feminism was familiar to the Indian feminist movement. Prasad's play Dhruvsvamini introduces radical ideas against polygamy because he may have been greatly influenced by early famine campaigners like Vidyasagar.

The author claims that King Shakraj's untimely demise may be traced back to the latter's insatiable need for polygamy. If Ramgupta presents Shakraj with Dhruvsvamini as a gift, Shakraj promises not to invade their territory. Shakraj wants not just Dhruvsvamini, but also all the wives of ministers in the Gupta emperor's court. On the one hand, he secretly married Kma, while on the other, he insisted on marrying Dhruvsvamini. Prasad stressed that women were seen as property by their male counterparts during the Gupta era. As an avowed opponent of polygamy, Prasad uses Shakraj's tragic end to warn against the practice.[18]

5. DHRUVSVAMINI'S RADICAL FEMINISM AND BUDDHIST THOUGHT

The drama Dhruvsvamini addresses the status of women in medieval India. Hinduism and Buddhism are two major influences on the authors of that time. Under the patriarchal rules of Hinduism, women have long been considered second-class citizens. The finest illustration of women's rights in Hinduism may be found in the Manu Smriti, often known as the Laws of Manu. It gives these descriptions of women:

When she is young, her father guards her, when she is middle-aged, her husband watches out for her, and when she is elderly, her sons take care of her.

A woman is recognized as a person but is seen as completely reliant on males. By allowing women to practice Bhikshunihood, Lord Buddha may have been the first great figure in history to do so. Despite the fact that Hindu texts talk about women's rights in this manner, Prasad rejects them and uses the play to question these ideas. According to Chobey (2009), "Buddhism and feminism can be seen as

particularly linked with each other," and she emphasizes the lyrics of enlightened nuns. Emancipation and expanding a narrow sense of self-awareness are essential to both.[19]

Lord Buddha established Bhikshu-nihood in Buddhism to provide women their a distinct identity, even though radical feminists in the late 1960s demanded their own. The historical drama by Prasad is set in the Gupta era, when Hinduism and Buddhism coexisted. That's why it's plausible that he used Buddhist philosophy into the play Dhruvsvamini in order to introduce radical feminist ideas.

Lord Buddha condemned the widespread practice of polygamy among nobility. Those who aren't happy with their spouse and look elsewhere will be disappointed, says the Parabhava Sutta. Prasad is deeply inspired by Buddhist ideas, and he stresses the destructive nature of Shakraj's sexual appetite. Important poetry composed by enlightened nuns, known as theri-gatha, advocate for women's independence from male authority. As the play concludes, Prasad, influenced by the aforementioned Buddhist ideas, gives Dhruvsvamini permission to dissolve their marriage. As a result, the reader is exposed to his extreme feminism.[20]

6. CONCLUSION

From the preceding sections, one may draw many important conclusions. To begin, in his play Dhruvsvamini, which was written during the Romantic Era of Hindi literature, Prasad brought radical feminism to Indian culture by legalizing divorce. Despite the fact that the Act of 1856 technically allowed widows to remarry, the practice was not common in Indian culture. Prasad wanted to socialize the aforesaid Act and create dramatic changes to society by introducing the remarriage of Dhruvsvamini with Chan-dragupta. The second point is that the roots of radical feminism may be traced back to Buddhism, namely to Prajapathi, the foster mother of Siddharth who sought Bhikkuni-hood from Lord Buddha. Finally, he utilized Buddhist teachings to attack polygamy and the plight of women under patriarchal domination, which led to domestic tyranny of women. Therefore, it is evident that Prasad had made an admirable effort to legitimize marriages between divorcees and widows. All these characteristics make it clear that radical feminism is present in Dhruvsvamini, the drama.

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