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**Place of Women in the Tribal Regions of Jharkhand in Rose Kerketta's Story
from *Pagha Jori Jori Re Ghato***

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Who is a woman? Does she need to represent herself? Nivedita Menon in her article "Is Feminism about 'Women'? A Critical View on Intersectionality from India" expresses, "Women" is neither a stable nor a homogeneous category" (Menon).

Women have been stereotypically represented and identified in society or literature as mother, daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, niece, or aunt. But such identification markers only limit her identity vis-a-vis relationships. They do not enjoy independence or a sense of selfhood outside the community they are born into. Rather, they are often deprived of human rights and constitutional rights. Often, they must sacrifice their happiness and ambitions to the responsibilities that are socially and culturally assigned to them sometimes by their community or their families.

Rose Kerketta's short story "Pagha JoriJ ori Re Ghato" speaks of tribal life and raises the issue of women's place in her house and society.

Rose Kerketta a tribal woman writer well-known in Jharkhand brings out the problems of women into the open and fights for them as a tribal activist. The complete collection *Pagha Jori Jori Re Ghato* in which the titular story is the last of the stories, takes as its subject matter from the natural surroundings, tribal lifestyles, and their problems among many other things. The text is Rose Kerketta's reflection on the indigenous people of her region, their problems and the inferior status that is accorded to them in a patriarchal set-up.

The identity of the characters in this story is determined by their natural environment, and their culture marked by their songs and their languages. Hardly anyone pays attention to economic

independence or the desire of women to be free from bondage. Rose Kerketta makes use of a tribal song to mirror the identity and history of tribal people.

पगहा जोरी-जोरी रे । छा...टी संखो किनारे, कोइलो किनारे उतरेले छा-टी ।

Here children don't sing but recite, and this represents their innocence of believing that the birds, the 'Ghatos' would spin around a place in the sky by the seven knots of grass in a breath. Indigenous people also called Adivasi are known to be residents from the beginning. The state of Jharkhand has a large population of tribals, and it would perhaps not be an error to call it a tribal state. According to some elders in the community, tribal people migrated to different parts of Jharkhand but in the beginning, the tribals were concentrated in Singhbhum which now comes under the state of Jharkhand. From Singhbhum people migrated to different states. They migrated along the rivers Sankh and Koel and moved to other states such as Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh. In the song and the story, the names of the rivers have been retained but the birds the "ghatos" are the tribes. People moved and settled down. Land and nature continued to become an integral part of their identity.

In this particular story under consideration, Rose Kerketta represents the oppression that people suffer due to age-old biases against women's position in society. Also, the story focuses on women's education. Kerketta is aware that women can be emancipated only through education. As the tribals are completely dependent on their surroundings for survival and are confined to their natural habitat, many of these people are not aware of the government schemes or the benefits of education which could give them economic independence. Their ignorance becomes a constraint on their progress and development.

In the tribal areas most women drop out of schools after their matriculation or sometimes after inter. This phenomenon is not peculiar to only Jharkhand but also to other states of India. However, in the name of responsibilities, women are pulled out of school to look after the family chores or the younger siblings. It is thought that the responsibility of the girls and women was to look after the family affairs whereas men are allowed to study and fulfil their aspirations. So, Rose Kerketta in the story narrates the life of a little girl from a patriarchal family who desires to go to school and get educated.

The protagonist of the story Daya, lives in a rural family with her parents and three brothers. Daya's duty was grazing cows and taking care of the household while her brothers went to school. Parents try their best level to educate their sons. But although Daya is eager to learn and even has the

aptitude, she is denied to be admitted in the village school because she was a girl and her duty was to learn the household chores properly so that she would prove to be a good wife or daughter-in-law after her marriage. Marriage was the ultimate goal for women. Her Mother says:

माँ, तुम बेटा होती तो तुमको भी भेजती। After some days father tries to convince her by allocating some lands in her name:

पिता, मैं तो तुम्हारे नाम खेत लिख देता।

दया, मैं तुम्हारा दिया खेत भी नहीं लूँगी।

पिता, गहिरन खेत लिख दूँगा। चालीस काठ धान होता है, उसे लिख दूँगा।

Since Daya was a brilliant girl and was better than her brothers, she had picked up language and learnt to read and write simply by listening to the teacher. She would stand outside the classroom where she had brought her cattle to graze on the school premises and listen to the teacher when he taught in the class. Little better than the cattle she brought to graze; she would be shooed away by the teacher, and become the laughingstock of the students. Her parents try to convince her to give up any hope for education. But because of her strong willpower and determination, she manages to mould her parents to allow her to go to school. She completed a four-year course in two years and she went for higher education and joined S.S. High School which was for the girls. She was the first batch in this school. She also stayed in a ladies' hostel with college girls, she cooked and studied too. She learned many things from girls over there.

According to G. Sandhya Rani and others in the article 'An Analysis of tribal Women's Education in India', "Tribal women's education has increased from 2.90% to 32.44% in the years 1971 to 2001. The dropout rate of tribal girls from schools due to poverty is indeed disappointing. But in the coming decades, tribal women's education ratio will be more than 32.44%.

India is a multicultural country with many different castes. The Constitution of the country makes provision for equal treatment of all castes and communities: "According to Article 15 of the Indian Constitution, discrimination cannot be made among citizens on the grounds of religion, race, caste, or sex. There is an elaborate system to protect the rights of Indian women.... Moreover, laws do not automatically change the social structure but rather only set a code of conduct" (Bharati122). And still, India's interior regions have not escaped the clutches of the age-old caste systems only because

of their ignorance and lack of information regarding policy decisions and development plans of the government.

In the short story from *Pagha Jori-Jori Re Ghato*, “Ghana Lohar Ka”, Rose Kerketta speaks of how a lower caste teenage girl becomes the victim of the greed and avarice of an upper caste man named Jagat Singh. Ropni, the protagonist of the story was the daughter of a maid-servant who later became the mistress of Jagat Singh. This happened because his wife was bedridden after giving birth to Chandru.

With time Ropni bore a son named Somaru. As the son of a low-born woman, Somaru was never accepted as the son of Jagat Singh. All things went well till Chandru got married and his new wife forced Somaru and his mother out of the house. She did not want to give Somaru a share of his father’s property.

In a caste system and the practice of untouchability lower caste people and women are used according to the whims of the upper caste. They are mere possessions and are there only to fulfil the desires of the upper caste. In this story, Ropni is treated as an alien. Although she fought for justice and equality, she was denied her rights in Jagat Singh’s house. The community members who supported her and called panchayat also at the end of the meeting abandoned her to her fate. Ropni was not even seen as a human being. “Human beings are granted rights by society not only as citizens of a state but because they are human” (Bharati 122). In patriarchal society or the interior regions “women often suffer in silence, often deprived of personal liberty and bound by the rules” (Bharati122).

कि छोटी जातवाले हम बड़ी जातवालों के सामने बैठना-उठना नहीं जानते, बिहउवा का अलग ही मान रहता है। रखैल कि कोई कीमत नहीं होती। आप जो भी कारें पर अपनी जातमें आदर पाने के लिए अंदर सोएँ। मैं बिहउता कि बहू हूँ इसलिए घर पर मेरा अधिकार है।

It shows that man has the freedom to live as he pleases. But a woman has no freedom or right to property of the man with whom she has lived for years and bears his child. Only the legally married woman can have rights to property as well as a dignified status at home. Taking into consideration this reality perhaps, the Supreme Court of India Civil Appellate Jurisdiction gives the judgment on 01 September of 2023 that “Section 16 (3) as amended does not impose any restriction on the property rights of the children born of a void or voidable marriage except limiting it to the property of their

parents. Hence, such children will have a right to whatever becomes the property of their parents, whether self-acquired or ancestral” (Part-B 6).

Even the Supreme Court realized the rights of the children born outside of marriage and to legalize the rights of these people and in its order on 01 September of 2023 passed this order. So, stories like this have been instrumental in bringing about reforms even in the legal system of the country. Such narratives make even the government and the authorities conscious of the requirements for reformation in society. Whereas, in the story, Somaru was deprived but Ropni stood for her son. Although she was not educated, she did not stop fighting for her rights and struggled that her son should get the share. At the end of the story, Ropni beheaded Jagat Singh, cut the left hand of Chandru at their dinner time and handed herself over to the police. However, these stories make us aware of the issues the tribal regions deal with and so such stories help spread awareness.

Caste, race, and gender inequalities all bring disparities within the society. However, “the discourse on gender equality has evolved with the times. With the advent of globalization and revolutions in the communication and technological fields, gender perspectives have changed” (Bharati123). As a social activist, Rose Kerketta has played a great role in fighting for the cause of women. Still, in the interior regions in Jharkhand as well as in other states of India, the local laws of specific communities are not sufficient to deliver justice and bring about equity. It is necessary to make people aware of their Constitutional rights. These reforms can be brought about, and welfare measures can be implemented only when there will be education for all irrespective of class, caste, creed, or religion is made possible.

Rose Kerketta’s stories are only a step forward to making readers aware of the prejudices against which women must struggle to claim a right to education and hence, freedom.

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