

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN ANNA BHAU SATHE'S FAKIRA

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Abstract:

Fakira, as a novel, is a male-centric heroic saga of an angry young man, *Fakira* who left an indelible mark on the minds of the readers. He fought bravely against the British colonial rule. Though he did not revolt or fight against the oppressive caste system, he has been shown as a defiant, angry young man and revolts against injustice.ⁱ The novel portrays several male characters from all strata of society and of all natures. The scope for the female characters is minimal here. However, Anna Bhau, as a novelist, was far ahead of his contemporary writers. The novelist was far away from the depiction of women as their protagonists. Even the Dalits, as a subject matter was not traded except a very few like S. M. Mate in '*UpekshitancheAntarang [Interior of the Neglected (1941)]*'; but that too was very sketchy.ⁱⁱ

Key Words: Women, portrayal, downtrodden, untouchables, protagonist, etc.

Introduction:

Until 1920, nobody paid any attention to the delineation of Dalit characters in their writing. Anna Bhau could be considered the first-ever writer who described not only Dalits but the nomadic tribes, the denotified tribes, tamasha artists, prostitutes, etc. He wrote almost about every subject of the downtrodden and made the untouchables, women, and other neglected people as heroes and heroines of his stories and novels. *Vaijaiyanta* was the first such novel on the life of a Dalit woman who was a tamasha artist. Before Anna Bhau, nobody thought of Dalit women as the subject of their writing. *Vaijaiyanta* was the first novel written by him where the protagonist comes from a low caste section of society and that too a woman. Anna Bhau, though not very distinctly, had delineated women characters in *Fakira*; he had depicted a host of women characters in his other novels and short stories. Mangala is one of his women characters in his first novel '*WarnechyaKhoryat*' who was a very upright and brave woman, was also rebellious. Chitra, Vaijaiyanta, Chandan, Durga are some of his unforgettable women characters who were brave, ready to struggle with the adversities of life and possessing an indomitable spirit for living life. Though they were poor, they had never succumbed to the vulgarities of life. Anna Bhau never delineated his characters as cruel, hate mongers, revengeful and immoral. *Fakira*, despite the chance, did not murder Khot and let him live. In this reference, Gangadhar Pantavane, a famous critic and writer says, "Even though had Anna Bhau delineated his character revengeful, it would not have been a mistake. However, he depicted his characters with utmost patience for the sake of creating a great scene. It is the success of the artist."ⁱⁱⁱ

Women Characters in Fakira:

Fakira, though, depicts exceptionally few female characters, successfully handles gender issues. Sattu Bhosale of Kumaj saves the life of a *Mahar* woman who was pregnant from MathajiChangula, an upper caste. While collecting firewood, a *Mahar* woman uproots some sticks from the compound of MathajiChaugula. He was beating her mercilessly even though she was pregnant. Fakira saved her and killed Mathaji in a fit of rage. This was a kind of new dimension to gender-caste intersectionality. Anna Bhau's writing established himself as a champion of lower classes, workers and women; his writings pertinently raised the issues of their exploitation. His writings, especially novels and short stories, were replete with gender and class intersection and caste and gender intersection. It was the beauty of Anna Bhau's writing which reflected in his multilayered portrayal of human relationships.

Sattu and MathajiChaugula both were of upper caste origin, but there was a fundamental difference between their ideologies. Sattu was a true humanitarian while Mathaji, a cruel oppressor. Mathaji did not pay heed to the requests of Sattu and continued to beat the pregnant woman. He kicked on her womb. When Sattu saw the possible danger to the life of the unborn child and the mother took an axe and killed Mathaji into pieces. He saved a woman and a child too. Sattu had great sympathy for the women who were oppressed by their in-laws for varied reasons. He solved those issues, sometimes threatened their husbands with dire consequences, sometimes chided their parents and let them live a happy life. Sattu, by his great humanitarian and benevolent work, had earned a deep reverence in the minds of women, whom they considered Sattu as their brother. The writer attempted a realistic portrayal of the plight of women through the hands of upper castes.

Fakira also had great respect for women folk and always considered them worthy human beings. While looting the Bedasgaon government treasury, he confronted Raghu Brahman who was standing in front of a door. Fakira was doubtful about the treasury in that room and asked to open it. Raghu Brahman told him that his family, including, his wife and two young daughters, were hiding in it. Rahu's wife requested Fakira with folded hands that her daughters were not married yet. "You can take everything but don't touch my daughters." She started taking out her golden ornaments. Fakira got emotional and said, "Mother stop! I have come here to loot the treasury and not you. It is not like the hungry people can survive on your dishonour and physical assault. Go and sit in your home." (*Fakira*120) Fakira looted the treasury but did not even touch the women; instead, he called Raghu Brahmin's wife, a mother. Fakira, depicted by the author as very upright and a great humanitarian, always believed in an egalitarian society.

Fakira's mother, Radha, was a great woman of courage who showed extraordinary patience in rearing up Fakira. V. S. Khandekar, a great writer, talks about her as "... (Besides Fakira) I appreciate two more characters from the novel, Fakira's mother Radha and Kulkarni Pant from the village. Radha meets us for a short time in the novel. She experiences both, happiness and

unhappiness, in being the wife of a great warrior and the mother of an equally brave son. Though, the writer had only passing remarks of her mind as a mother and as a wife, the readers receive her feelings in their heart.”^{iv}

Anna Bhau revolted against the current social setup through the communist movement and tried to search for answers for those social problems in his writing. Radha, Ranoji's wife, and Fakira's mother had been delineated as an upright, brave, and patient woman. However, at the same time, she was very emotional. Ever since she is married Ranoji, she had faced difficulties and fought bravely with the challenges. Ranoji got killed in an attempt to bring *Jogini* to his village Wategaon. He was successful in bringing honour to the village but was murdered by Bapu Khot in his foul plan. The whole village appreciated the efforts of Ranoji and sympathised with Radha. She also does not give up and kept herself busy in rearing up Fakira and ultimately grew him in as a brave young man like his father, ready to help the poor and needy. She was very proud of her young son, who had become the leader of the oppressed. Vishnupant Kulkarni had great respect for Radha and her family and stopped the procession of *Jogini* for Radha to pray. He ordered the procession, “This *Jogini* belongs to Radha and her family. Let them take *Darshan* or offer prayers.” (My translation 38) Shankarrao Patil was upset when he saw Radha going to work on the farm of others. He took his bullock cart to Daulati's courtyard and unloaded many bags of grains for Radha and her family and warned Daulati, her father-in-law, not to send her again on daily wages.

Radha was worried for Fakira and his intrepid behaviour. She feared that Khot might take revenge upon Fakira to whom he had left alive. She did not pester Fakira as she knew that her son was wise and intelligent but advised him for noble works. She arranged Fakira's marriage to a good and cultured girl, Saru and took excellent care of her as if she was her daughter. When the British government took the entire family of Fakira into custody, Radha did not shock, as she was aware of the happenings. She requested Pant not to inform Fakira about their custody as she feared for his life. However, Fakira had to surrender himself for his family members and he handed over his most favourite sword to his mother, Radha. She expressed her grief and remembered Fakira's childhood.

Rahibai was Fakira's grandmother and a mother of brave Ranoji. Through her sustainable efforts and hard work, Fakira and Sadhu, her grandchildren, had become brave, healthy and muscular young men. She was equally responsible for Fakira's growth into a heroic figure. Sarubai was Fakira's wife, who had great respect for her husband's noble works. She meekly witnessed the rise and fall of Fakira with utmost patience. She understood that Fakira's fall was not due to his destiny or his deeds, but it was because of the cruel nexus between the village upper castes like Raosaheb Patil and Khot and the oppressive British government.

References:

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- ⁱⁱⁱPantavane, Gangadhar. *VidrohachePaniPetleAhe*. (Nagpur: Vijay Prakashan, 1976) 83.
- ^{iv}V.S. Khandekar "Don Shabd" *Fakira*. (Pune: Suresh Agency, 36th Ed. 2013) 5.