

MULK RAJ ANAND'S TWO LADY RAMS

Mulk Raj Anand's "Two Lady Rams" was published in *Man Whose Name did not Appear in the Census and other Stories*. It is a humorous story about Lalla Jhinda Ram and his two wives, Sukhi and Sakuntala. Ram is a contractor to whom the government confers the title of knighthood for his service to the government.

Unfortunately, the news creates a conflict between his two wives. Both of them want to attend the award ceremony, but the government employee invites only one lady ram. Initially, it is not a matter of concern for Ram. He thinks of taking his second wife, Sakuntala, to the party. The servants inform his first wife, Sukhi, about his preference. She becomes furious and verbally attacks both of them.

After the incident, it becomes a matter of worry for Ram. Both insist Ram on taking them to the party. He can neither leave Sukhi nor Sakuntala. Therefore, Ram feels helpless and asks for help from the officials, but to no avail. It is not clear whom they refer to as Lady Ram, and he takes it as an advantage. Ram changes the letter on the invitation card from Lady Ram to Two Lady Rams and resolves the ongoing issue. He takes both of his wives to the party. The Governor and his wife give them a warm welcome. They become famous and attend every program in the town from that day onward. The status of Indian women in colonial times in the context of the Story. When Mulk Raj Anand wrote the short story, the authority banned polygamy in India. But a man could marry multiple times until he got his heir. The worth of a woman in the colonial era was determined based on her ability to procreate.

We can get an idea of the condition of Indian women in the short story. Though it seems the two Lady Rams enjoy equal status, it is Sukhi who faces discrimination. When Jhinda Ram discovers her infertility, her worth decays in front of her husband's eyes, and he marries another woman. Sukhi has no choice except her considering her husband's second marriage only for the continuation of the race. In those days, the Hindu Mitakshara Law allowed men to practice polygamy, but there was no law for women. It is not clear whether or not they can do the same. The white officials had paid no attention to it. Moreover, they ignored a probable situation. That is if the government honors the husband with any high rank, could all or one of his wives hold the title of Lady?

The government honors Ram with Knighthood. They make it not clear whom they have referred to as Lady Ram on the invitation card. As a result, such negligence increases the conflict between the two wives of Ram.

Dowry system

The Dowry system was prevalent during the time. We learn about dowry when Sukhi charges Sakuntala. She goes to the other part of the house to accuse Sakuntala. Ram orders Sukhi to go to her room and he asserts he is the owner of the house. Then, in response, Sukhi reminds Jhinda Ram, “You had nothing before I brought a lakh of rupees in my dowry!... What did this bitch bring with her -nothing but a fair complexion and a snub nose.” (Anand 30) Sukhi comes to the house with a one lakh dowry, whereas Sakuntala comes empty-handed. Sukhi is more assertive than Sakuntala, and it is because the reputation of a woman lies in the amount of dowry she carries with her.

The Theme of Two Lady Rams

The theme of deception or trickery runs throughout the short story “Two Lady Rams”.

In the story we observe, it is not only Ram who deceives the people, but the colonial government also deceives him and the natives. We have examined the theme in the following paragraphs. In the short story, Sir Lalla Jhinda Ram practices dishonesty in his profession. He is a master in forgery. Ram’s deceptive nature in his works is highlighted thrice in the story.

For instance, when both of his wives insist on going with him to the garden party. He is in a dilemma, he cannot decide whom to select for the party. Then he calls the A.D.C to make an appointment to meet the Governor of the province urgently. The A.D.C who is busy managing things for the Garden Party thinks, “Sir Jhinda Ram was only after some deal or contract as usual, and though the commissions the sahib had received from this knight had always been generous, Captain Forbes had made his pile and did not want to get involved in these shady negotiations any more.” (Anand 31) Ram often meets the A.D.C for their official meetings. From the deals, the A.D.C always receives a fair amount of commission from “shady negotiations”. These negotiations are shady because they are illegal and against the interest of the mass. The next instance of his deception is when Ram alters the name on the invitation card from Lady Ram to the two Lady Rams.

It is an easy task for him and this is not a new thing for him “as he had altered many more intricate documents in the past.” (Anand 33) He also deceives his wives. Before the departure to the garden party, Jhinda Ram orders his driver to inform both of his wives to be ready for the party. The driver deceives both ladies into believing that only one of them will go with their husband to the garden party. When both of them realize he befools them, there is nothing left for them to do except go to the party. Besides Lalla Jhinda Ram, the colonial masters also befool him and deceive the mass.

As Jhinda Ram receives the news of Knighthood, he is exultant. He imagines transforming himself from a man of five-foot-five to a six-foot-six colonial sahib. We can measure his excitement by the way he looks in the mirror. He looks at the mirror stealthily and smiles with a sense of pride when none is around. He also thinks that the Knighthood will add glory to his personality. But his dream of becoming equal to English Sahib is a lie. Because when he needs the help of the Governor, he cannot meet him personally. Despite having the Knight title, he disguises himself to meet the Governor. This suggests such a title is only a deception and has hardly any value in real life.

Significance of the Title

“The two Lady Rams” in the title are Sukhi and Sakuntala. They are called two Lady Rams because they are the wives of Lalla Jhinda Ram. These two Lady Rams have been engaged in a constant cold war for numerous years. Both want the attention of their mutual husband. Their husband Jhinda Ram is a contractor who works with white officials and the government awards the title of Knighthood for his service. The governor invites him to come with his wife to the award ceremony. They address the invitation card to Sir Jhinda and Lady Ram. Ram initially chooses his second wife, Sakuntala, as his company for the party. But his first wife Sukhi thinks it is an insult to her, and therefore she protests. She too demands to take her to the party. Sukhi’s insistence makes him worried.

If he rejects Sukhi, then she will never let him live in peace. If he breaks his promise of going together with Sakuntala, he can never enjoy the company of the youthful Sakuntala. Since both of them want to go with him to the party, therefore it creates pressure on him. Ram can deny neither Sakuntala nor Sukhi. He is confused. Therefore, he thinks that “the Governor of the province, the king’s representative, the shadow of the monarch” (Anand 31) can easily resolve the issue. But he does not get help from the Governor rather, it is the driver of Ram who

proposes the idea of taking both Lady Rams. Since he marries them, therefore he undoubtedly calls them both Lady Rams.

Moreover, the Governor cannot stop them from entering the party. The only problem for him is the invitation card. Therefore, he alters the words to “The two Lady Rams”. This is how Jhinda Ram copes with the conflict between two wives. We can interpret the title in two ways. First, changing the words from Lady Ram to The Two Lady Rams implies Ram’s expertise in forgery. His alteration of the words from Lady Rams to “Two Lady Rams” is not his first experience of modification, as he had altered many more intricate documents in the past. This suggested his cunningness. Second, it points out the indifference of the colonial administration toward its subject. Because they have thought whom they should address as Lady in case of a man with multiple wives attains knighthood.

Through this comical story, Mulk Raj Anand points subtly to the social condition of that time. For instance, people practiced the Hindu Mitakshara Law in those colonial days. This law allowed the man to practice polygamy, but the colonial administration was not concerned about the women. There was no rule whether all or any of the wives of a knight could hold the title of Lady.

Two Lady Rams As A critique on Colonialism

“Two Lady Rams” is a simple short story that revolves around a conflict between two wives of contractor Lalla Jhinda Ram. However, after a close reading of the story, it unveils various interpretations. One of them is that we can read the story as a critique of India’s colonial era. Mulk Raj Anand sets the story against the backdrop of the colonial era in India. It was an era of deception, exploitation, and domination. In those days, to govern a colony like India, the foreign masters needed the support of the rich natives. In most cases, the rich merchants, contractors, employees, etc. cooperated with the white masters with no hesitation for the sake of selfish motives. For instance, in the story, Ram, a contractor, is a master of trickery who cooperated with the white masters in corruption. When Sir Jhinda calls A. D. C to arrange a meeting with the governor immediately to solve his domestic issue, it reveals his collaboration with the official. The A. D. C does not receive his call and presumes, “Sir Jhinda Ram was only after some deal or contract as usual, and though the commissions the sahib had received from this knight had always been generous, Captain Forbes had made his pile and did not want to get involved in these shady negotiations any more.” (Anand 31)

The above lines suggest Sir Jhinda usually meets the A.D.C for deal or contract purposes. Through him, the A.D.C usually receives a decent amount of commission. Not only the privileged natives like Ram but also the colonial masters engaged in duplicity to exploit the common mass, who were mostly uneducated and unaware of corruption.

The Government

The colonial government not only tricked the common people but also the rich native class. They employed them for their economic benefits. To continue their exploitation, they made sure they were in good contact with the affluent class. To appease them, they used medals and awards as tools to appease their subjects. It is like appeasing a baby with candy so that he would not whine. For instance, the government confers the title of Knighthood to Ram because he supports the white masters. They organize a ceremony, the Garden Party, to honor the title at the residence of the Governor. The Garden Party is organized “specially for the ceremony of investiture of all those dignitaries who had been granted titles, medals and scrolls of honour.” (Anand 28) In reality, the title of Knighthood is nothing but a mere decoration and medium to befool the rich natives. When Jhinda Ram calls the A. D. C to meet the governor in person, we discover the reality of his position.

After the first failed attempt through the phone, he goes directly to the governor’s residence. There he disguises himself as a contractor who has taken the charge of the management of cutlery. Despite his attempt, the gatekeeper prevents him from stepping into the residence because the governor is taking a nap. His position is of no use in reality. Neither the Governor responds to him in the hour of his need, nor the A.D.C who usually receives a fair amount of commissions from Jhinda Ram. Moreover, Ram does not deserve such a title. He has no such qualities as bravery, honesty, truthfulness, etc. Even the government is aware of that. Without people like Ram, the officials cannot engage in corruption and hide it from the common people. This is the only reason why the authority entitles him the title. Ram’s altercation of the words from Lady Rams to ‘The two Lady Rams’ on the invitation letter points out his dishonest practice. We learn about him that, “he had altered many more intricate documents in the past.” (Anand 33) Lalla Jhinda Ram is an example of the rich class of the pre-independence era of India, who is an expert in negotiation and forging official files.

The Administration

The colonial officials have never prohibited corruption. The reasons are: first, they are part of it. Second, they do not care about the welfare of the common people. Thus, they do not properly lay down and review the rules and laws. For example, although there was a prohibition of polygamy in India during the colonial era, the government has allowed the mitakshara law. According to the law, anyone who cannot have a child can marry multiple times until the birth of a child. It means a man can practice polygamy. Ram's first wife Sukhi cannot conceive a child, therefore Ram marries Sakuntala. The problem is not limited to that. The government is not ready for a situation like Ram's condition. What if a man like Ram with two wives attains Knighthood, who will have the title of Lady? In Ram's case, both of his wives insist on going with him to the garden party, whereas the invitation is only for him and his Lady Ram. Since there is no law, it creates a conflict between Sukhi and Sakuntala.

Having no clear policy points that the British government does not care about the natives. What they care about is the wealth and power that they gain by using their rich servants. Anand tells the readers in a light tone how the mechanism of the British government works in colonial India. The King-Emperor, who lives seven thousand miles away from its colony India, operates and controls India and its natives through some government departments. Since the King-Emperor is always far away from his colony, he never knows about the personal lives of colonized people.

However, the department which works on the King-Emperor's behalf keeps "fairly well-documented confidential dossiers about the temperament, religious, political and social opinions of almost all notable persons as well as notoriety and, particularly about the services rendered to the sarkar by them," (Anand 27) With the knowledge of one's religious, social, and political views, the colonial masters can easily control any notable or notoriety. So they are interested in that information which they can use for their benefit. However, they know nothing about their subjects personally through whom they successfully control the colony. Personal life is of no use to government departments. Therefore, neither the King-Emperor nor the governor has seen what has happened in Ram's house after the announcement of the Knighthood title. This shows the selfishness of the British government and the King-Emperor and the indifference they have for their subjects.

Mimicry

Their only interest is in colonizing their subjects, and they have successfully colonized the natives. Because of colonization, the natives look upon the white men as superior to them and they keep trying to imitate the colonizers. We observe the effect of colonization in the house's selection of Lalla Jhinda Ram and imitating "the English style gol-kamra or living-room." (Anand 29) Jhinda Ram has built his bungalow in the famous purdah style, which has become a common choice for houses in India. Anand writes, "Its front, which looked out into Lawrence Road, was like the front of an ordinary English bungalow, with a verandah decorated by palm trees and hanging plants, leading through a narrow hall into a large living-room." (Anand 29) Like Ram, other natives have also built their houses in the purdah style. The colonized attempts to imitate the external things like the house. They also try to be like colonizers. This is in postcolonial studies called mimicry. In the essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", Homi K. Bhabha comments, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite." (Bhabha 126).

Mimicry is man's attempt to be like the colonizer. The native seeks to copy the language, culture, and society of the colonizer, but in doing so, he often ignores his root and his identity. He can copy the colonizer but the imitation will never be the same. It is "a difference that is almost total but not quite." (Bhabha 132) Hence, they are called mimic men. You can read the novel *The Mimic Man* by V. S. Naipaul for a better understanding. We see another instance of mimicry when the government announces Knighthood to Ram. It makes Jhinda Ram excited. He looks at the mirror, thinking that this is another feather in his cap. He presumes that his five-foot-five height has become equivalent to that of a six-foot-six English master. That means he will attain the same position as that an English master.

In addition, he also thinks that the title will add more glory to his personality. His wish to be like the six-foot-six white master makes him a mimic man. He can mimic but he will not be like them. Therefore, from the above discussion, we can say that through the short-story Mulk Raj Anand criticizes not only the administration of the colonial era but also the brown upper class.

THE ABOVE MATERIAL HAS BEEN COMPILED FROM DIFFERENT OPEN SOURCES.