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The Punishment Review

ENG 202: Global Literature II

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The Punishment is a story written by Rabindranath Tagore an author that explored in his writings political, cultural, and economic situations. He also explored the society that gives minimal rights to women. The Punishment is the story of a poor Indian family that goes through tough times regarding money, trust between them, honesty, and difficulty trying to give women more freedom and respect. The Rui brothers are married, and their wives are responsible for the house shores. In India is a common, part of the culture for the woman to take care only of the house and please the husband while he works and provide. It is hard to believe that woman in India is mostly “used” to procreate, be a housecleaner, and please their husband, this has been happening since India was founded. The rights of women in India are still under construction, but at least today include equality, dignity, and freedom from discrimination.

The two brothers with two wives are Dukhiram (Older brother) and his wife Radha, and Chandara with her husband Chidam. They lived together and the brothers were supposed to provide while the wives had to complete their chores, which include fetching the water from the river, cleaning the house, and washing clothes, and Chandara assisted her sister-in-law Radha in cooking. Radha got married before Chandara and since they didn't have a mother-in-law, the law was to follow the older wife. Chandara was always criticized by Radha because she was not paying attention to things and was not doing the chores properly. India has a society that gives the minimum rights to women as we all know, so Chandra wasn't even able to defend herself by saying something to Radha, especially because she was older than her and got there before her.

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Also, Chandra had little education and no choice besides getting an arranged wedding to live the rest of her life, but the bigger problem is her husband wasn't even that rich to provide enough for her. The two brothers were farm laborers getting a job here and there with not enough money to provide for their wives, they were paid less than the minimum wage rate making it less hard. They also had to do additional jobs like fixing leaky roofs to pay for their rent, which was also not being paid in time. Because they did not have power at work, they used the little power they had with their wives. That's when the real story begins.

One day after a hard day of work, the brothers went back home to their wives and Radha's asked his wife sarcastically: Where is my food? And she was clearly not happy and answered basically saying: You are not providing, so I don't have anything to cook. She also asked him if she should go to work to earn money and buy food. That type of behavior is unacceptable in India, because is a very conservative country. Number 1, women don't work because husbands should provide, number 2 you never reply to your husband like that because is disrespectful.

Dukhiram did not like it and stabbed her in her head, Radha falls and dies in Chandra's lap. The Landlord, Ramlocham opens the door to receive the rent and see the crime scene. Later, his brother, Chidam unexpectedly opens the door and sees the scene as well and everyone there trying to decide what to tell the police. Somehow Chandra gets involved, all the guys start creating a new version to cover up what really happened. The most choking is Chidam's comment: "If I lose my wife, I can get another, If I lose my brother, I can't replace him." How can a human being say something so cold and so unfair. So here we have a few points, the wife is good to cook, give pleasure, have babies and clean, and out of the blue in a situation where it will be a life penalty you just throw your wife in the middle? They are all creating a lie to protect a

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very bad husband and worker. They are incriminating a poor girl that has nothing to do with the story, she lives in a society that gives her no voice or protection and she is under the responsibility of her husband that could not care less about her and is defending a criminal.

India is a place where the death penalty is active, and Chandara has no other choice than take responsibility for the murder she did not commit, just because her husband can do the same with her, but there will be no other woman to blame on it if you think about it. The brothers are looking out for each other, while the wives are paying the price for their actions and infidelity toward them. This case is about domestic violence and the family covering the situation by blaming women, which is common these days. It's pure abuse. Nowadays "The actual number of executions in India remains comparatively low. Since 2000, India has carried out just eight executions in total." It is getting slowly better. Chandara decides to stick with the lie and take the responsibility that she did commit the crime, even if this was a lie. She was probably thinking, how will people believe in me? How could I possibly escape from that if I have no voice in this house, in this country, her father passed away but arranged the wedding before he died to make sure she was ok, but she was not. It was much easier for her to just said I did this and die, maybe her life after death would be better with more freedom. It is hard to understand exactly her point of view because it was not specific in the story, but we can understand that she was also scared of the situation, and she was not sure about how to escape from it. According to Tagore: "her individuality was denied and mute" which is true she had to die quietly.

In conclusion, Tagore's story is an amazing example of the reality of a poor country like India. It shows that women had no voice years ago, but are slowly getting some rights, basic rights. Tagore like other writers was brave enough to talk about situations like women's emancipation in a society that awarded minimal rights to women. It is important to read these

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types of stories because we still live in different ways and levels in every country. Women don't have a voice all the time, we still must fight for our rights several times. In America right now we are still trying to get the right of having an abortion if we need to, which is something that should not be discussed but still are in the air. Maybe in a few years, we will get over all of it and we will get our rights.

References:

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