

## REVIEW OF RESEARCH

### REPRESENTATION OF AGONIES OF THE MARGINALIZED IN ROMENBASU'S SELECT POEMS



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#### **Abstract :**

Marginalization is the term used to denote the multidimensional process of social rupture and exclusion of individuals or groups from the normal human rights on the basis of race, class, gender, religion, education, economic condition, politics, physical disability, etc. It is a well thought process of alienation and discrimination of such people who are victimized on various grounds and at different walks of life.

RomenBasu, an Indian poet writing in English has dealt with the complex menace of marginalization in some of his poems. These poems are marked by the sense of profound sympathy for the oppressed and the marginalized that have been sidelined by the mainstream forces. The poems selected deal with poverty, oppression on economic ground, unequal and unfair treatment to women, colour discrimination, slavery, racial segregation, political apathy, etc. While presenting such issues the poet has shown genuine sympathy to and understanding of the agonies of the marginalized people.

**Keywords:** Marginalization, alienation, discrimination, humanitarianism.

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## INTRODUCTION

RomenBasu (b.1923) is one of the most prolific authors in English literature. As a creative writer he has handled the important literary genres like novel, short story and poetry. His poetry is marked by the sense of profound sympathy for the oppressed and marginalized people who have been sidelined by the mainstream forces. Basu being aware of the injustice meted out to people at various levels of society uses poetry as a tool to chastise the forces and institutions that are responsible for it. There are some poems that present social issues like poverty, oppression of the poor, unequal and unjust treatment to women, colour discrimination, pollution, slave trading, etc. All of them present some social menace but there is a single thread i.e. the sympathy for the sufferer and a sense of revolt against the oppressing forces. Poems like 'T.P.', 'Why Not', 'Threatening Sky', 'One Voice One Heart', 'Calcutta Street', etc. present the pathetic condition of the poor.

'T.P.' presents the picture of a poverty stricken person living in a metropolitan city. He has no home and no source of income. The incessant heavy rains have shattered his life completely.

He stands in mud soaked rain  
Rent due six months  
Food stamp exchanged  
For last morsel  
Hard to separate tears from raindrops. (1998-19)

The poem ends with an ironic comment that such a hungry person who has been without food and shelter has no use of social values like honesty. What he needs most is the food for survival. Another poem 'Why Not?' also presents the issue of poverty. It presents the contrasting perspectives of the poor and the capitalistic people about wealth. It is the poor who realizes the need of money and the agony of poverty.

Tormented with one and the same question  
What little comfort  
Challenging might could claim  
Wrong to be right. (1998-20)

The poor have the 'voice of silence' that wanted 'to be set free'. 'Threatening Sky', another poem, presents the sympathetic attitude towards poverty stricken people in the world. It underlines the social injustice by the people in power in developed countries towards the poor in the undeveloped countries. They hoard the food materials and keep the people hungry and begging

To act at will  
They suffer from hoarding  
Will it change  
When there's nothing more to ask? (1998-36)

'Calcutta Street' presents the miserable plight of the poor, hard working, and labour class people including coolies, rickshaw pullers and cart pullers. They have been beaten, oppressed through all means. The problems of urbanization like traffic jams, pollution and filth have added to their misery. They think life to be a doom.

Tears and laughter coexisting  
Without recrimination  
When their Gods share  
Each one's noose  
Life is not doom. (1998-61)

'One Voice, One Heart', presents the pathetic case of a child born in a poverty stricken family. He has to face despair from its birth. He is unloved and has to suffer hardships and sorrow. He has been denied the juvenile joys and life's small gifts. The darkness at physical and mental level occupies his existence.

A moment's wisdom  
Holding the hand of comfort  
Where to earn  
But a single day's hope  
The freckled child sleeps. (1996-55)

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'Where?' presents the misery and pathetic condition of the poor and homeless people. They live in metropolitan cities like Mumbai or Kolkata. They have to live in the most uncomfortable, unhygienic conditions. Fights over water; hungry children eating thrown away bones and vegetable peels are the usual pictures, here. Unfortunately, the rich, high profile, educated people in power neither care for nor think of a solution to such problem. They are busy, self centered and self seekers only. The speaker feels deeply hurt. He gives expression to his agonies,

The poor still sleep without expectations  
Truly, the joy of being,  
And the joy of being at all,  
Are two disparate propositions (1988-92)

'Market Place', informs us of the common people like laborers, cart pullers, beggars and such other manual workers who solely depend upon the market. The speaker exhibits sympathy, companionship and compassion towards these unlucky fellows who are the victims of unjust, cruel social order.

These hundreds like me,  
That brother hood of communion in tatters  
A feverish search for the Holy Grail  
Of the potato peels.

The poet ironically distorts the mythical, Biblical reference of the Holy Grail and points out that the poor are in search of it but that consists of potato peels. His sympathy and love for the Man is stated as

I live for the day  
And not for the morrow,  
My restless steps  
Lifting forwards in the hope  
Of a just measure of the good earth's harvests. (1990-04)

Along with the poor, women are oppressed, exploited and marginalized in the social context. Basu's poems show sympathy for the women who form half of the human society. The poet strongly asserts that without complete development of woman's personality and potential, full-fledged advancement of the society is not possible. 'Born Equals', denies the Biblical myth that woman was made from man's rib. It further states that 'she' committed the sin and hence was banished from the Garden of Eden. The poem on the other hand, strongly advocates that 'they' are born equal. Unfortunately, woman is discriminated and has been considered inferior on many grounds. In the male dominated society, woman's voice is either suppressed or has been neglected. The poem strongly asserts that times have changed and women work side by side with their mates. It ends with a positive assertion that a change in attitude towards women is in view.

Oh yes, that can happen here and there-  
In some corner or the other of this benighted planet-  
But the horror of the great lapse  
Is far from over! (1990-25)

'Protest', registers the feminist protest against patriarchy and male chauvinism. It attempts to explain the agonies and sufferings that a woman undergoes in male dominated society. She feels to be 'imprisoned and weeping within' since there is no one to listen to her. Every appeal made by her for fair treatment has been denied through ages.

I weep, but not through eyes,  
Only within--  
For how can I bear the pain of watching  
The suffering of another! (1988-56)

The speaker's sensitivity and humanitarian approach is clearly visible in the last stanza. The woman asserts that a day will come to change her lot.

Shall the wheel come  
Full circle one day,  
The denied voice of the sisters  
At last overheard? (1988-56)



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'With a Difference' speaks about the injustice and discrimination of women on various grounds. They have to work under multiple pressures and fears. Yet, they have proved their mettle. The poem appreciates and glorifies the womanly qualities like calmness, steadiness, honesty, dedication, hard work, etc.

They walk silent paths  
Never to surrender  
Religion bonded them closer  
Graffiti's will soon dissolve  
In winds of wisdom  
They came conquered  
Championed truth. (2001-70)

The speaker feels deeply concerned and grieved by the agonies of people experiencing social, racial discrimination. The issue of apartheid has also been dealt with in poems 'When Will It End', 'Born Equals' and 'Then and Now'. A group of Negroes sitting at a roadside and waiting for something has been described in 'When Will It End'. They have

Deep furrows carved on their faces.  
Anguish and despair registered  
In hearts.

The Negroes have been segregated, discriminated and dehumanized. They have been treated like animals. Their land, ruled by naked force  
From the very first day of the conquest ....  
But perhaps that straight slavery of old gave better hope  
For liberty than this unholy separation  
Of man from man...  
They with rights of the citizen none,  
Because of the vital difference in pigmentation. (1988-55)

The poem also speaks about the arrogance and supremacy of the Whites. They warn the Blacks that weapons will be used to keep them under control.

They used to brag,  
We are rulers, we are angles  
We are snow – white. (1988-55)

The poem ends with an appeal to treat the Blacks on humanitarian ground. 'Born Equals', also raises the same question

Gosh, when will Blacks look  
As beautiful as Whites? (1990-25)

It forcefully asserts that everyone in the world is of equal status and importance. All of us are born equal. So discrimination of any sort is unacceptable.

Basu had the privilege to witness and observe the contemporary political problems at international level. He speaks about the power politics of the Cold War, the wars in Vietnam, Korea, and Cambodia, Afghanistan and the role and intervention of powerful nations in international problems. He also presents the pitiable condition of those people living in undeveloped countries. In all these poems, one clearly notices that the speaker has genuine sympathy for the oppressed. 'In Solitude', deals with the theme of racial injustice and the plight of Jews in the colonial regime. The poem reveals the rich, historical legacy of the people who had erected many works of beauty and had a very fine culture. But, under the colonial tide, they lost everything. The poem beautifully sums up the fact.

Quiet dignity a blueprint  
Of electrifying constellation  
Overcoming symbols of injustice  
Under the Caribbean sun. (2003-69)  
Cultural constraints also function as oppressive agents. There are many examples, all over the world in

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which people were made to undergo cultural domination and cultural hegemony of the powerful nations. The poems like 'Smile', 'Catching Its Tail', 'Welcoming Song', 'Calcutta Street' and 'Ecstasy' underline the adverse effects of the modern, urbanized, industrial socio-cultural set up. They present culture clashes between the rural, agrarian, but pure and pristine culture with the urban, high-class, advanced but commercial culture that has no place for simple and working class, common people.

In this way, the poems selected present the issue of marginalization of some individuals or groups on various grounds. They include almost all forms of marginalization like denial of human rights, opportunities and resources, social exclusion, economical exploitation, material deprivation, etc. Such issues not only affect their physical condition but the mental well being also. While presenting such concerns, the poet has shown genuine sympathy to understanding of the sufferers.

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