

Discuss the portrayal
of indian society in
this poem

Society



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Deception, written by Rabindranath Tagore is told through the eyes of a narrator, who is the husband of Binu. He tells a story of Binu and her husband and their life together in Indian society. In the poem the portrayal of Indian life, is illustrated through various aspects, such as arranged marriages; the class distinctions, Lakshmi the goddess, the poverty and dowries.

The class distinctions in Hindu society are called the Caste system. This is portrayed in the poem at several occasions. When Binu introduces Rukmini to her husband and explains that Rukmini needs money.

'She looked me in the eyes, Bowed, withdrew to the platform where she stood clutching a pillar'

This shows that obviously Rukmini was in a lower class than Binu's husband because of the way she reacted, she bowed to and then withdrew from his presence and stood at a distance. I think that Rukmini might have been in the 'untouchable' caste because she did not consider herself worthy enough to even stand in the presence of Binu's husband. She had to go and stand at a distance while Binu explained Rukmini's need for money.

The way that she bowed in front of him also portrays that she was lower class than him because she was showing him a sign of respect. In The Caste system the Jats determine which range of jobs you do. Marriage usually took place between people of the same Jat and people normally died in the same group. There are certain rules that say that people in different Jats cannot eat, drink or even smoke in each others company. The word clutching shows

the fact that Rukmini was desperate and that she really need help, this also supports that she was in the untouchables caste.

There are four groups which are called the Varna. There is also a fifth which are called the 'untouchables'. The untouchables did not belong to any caste. They were called the Dalit. They were untouched by the four other castes. In some areas even their shadow touching a member of the Varnas was considered polluting. They worked in what was considered polluting jobs and were never accepted by society. The Highest status was called the Brahmins and this consisted of priests and intellectuals. I think that Binu's husband and Binu herself were part of this caste because it says in the poem

'And began to read an English novel that I had bought'

This shows that Binu's husband was very well educated because he spoke English and only the rich and high powered could afford to learn to speak English. This therefore supports the fact that Binu and her husband are from the Brahmin's caste. In the quotation

'Whoever heard of such a thing? The woman was probably a sweeper or something equally disgusting'

The harsh sounding of the word disgusting shows the contempt and hatred that the upper caste show towards the untouchables.

It shows the fact that Rukmini was part of the 'untouchables' caste because Binu's husband was saying that Rukmini had some equally disgusting job

such as a sweeper. This therefore would have been considered a polluting job so she would not have been fit to be seen associating with.

There is another quotation that supports the fact that there were huge distinctions in class.

"Where is Rukmini?" They reacted blankly"

This shows that Rukmini was very unimportant because even the people in the lower castes of the Varna did not have any sort of idea who Rukmini was, when Binu's husband asked after her at the station. The word blankly shows that even though Rukmini had worked and lived at the train station for years, she was still so irrelevant that no one had even noticed that she was there and that she had gone. The only recognised who she was when Binu's husband said

"The wife of Jhamru the coolie"

Rukmini was obviously so insignificant that they did not even know her by name and she used to work at the station. The only reason that they recognised her was because Binu's husband remembered the name of her husband. Then they only barely remembered who she was because they recognised the name of Rukmini's husband.

'She lives in the row of huts by the well over there;'

This also links the fact that Rukmini is in the 'untouchables' caste because she lives in poverty. She did not live in a very respectably, she lived in a shack, by the side of the train station; she had no land and no money, not

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even able to find 25 rupees for her daughters dowry. She did not belong to one of the four Varna, so she was nobody of importance to bother about.

The next subject that I am going to discuss is arranged marriages. I think that perhaps Binu and her husband had, had an arranged marriage because it says in the poem that

'Left her parents-in-laws house for the first time since marriage'

'Our meetings furtive'

This shows that the couple had not met of their own accord, but that their parents have arranged for them to meet. They have only met secretly and on very brief occasions. This shows that there was an arranged marriage because you do not marry someone that you have only met a few times in your life. Parents when looking for a suitable husband for their daughter in arranged marriages have to look for certain things such as the social castes that they are in and financial status.

It is the girl's parents that traditionally pay for the wedding as a gift to the newly wed couple. They shower the girl with presents that she is to give to the groom's family when she moves in. It is traditional that the bride goes to live in the groom's family. When the couple marry everything that once was the wife's now officially belongs to the husband. The quotation above says that Binu after living with her parents-in-law left there house for the first time. This supports the fact that Binu and her husband have had an arranged marriage. Another quotation that supports the fact that the couple had, had an arranged marriage is

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'The airless sequestration of the joint family'

This portrays that the family have lived in very close contact with Binu and her husband. I think that maybe the family have been interfering with the couple. The word sequestration suggests the fact that the family have been interfering with the couple, because sequestration means enclosure, which suggests that Binu and her husband were enclosed with the family they did everything together.

'Like the everlasting vermilion in the parting of laksmi's hair'

Laksmi is the goddess of wealth and beauty. Laksmi is the household goddess and she is a favourite among women. She is depicted as a beautiful woman who has four hands. She is either sitting or standing on a full bloomed lotus, which stands for beauty purity and fertility. Her four hands represent the four ends of human life

Dharma- righteousness

Kama- desires

Artha- wealth

Moksha- liberation.

In the Krishna avtara Laksmi comes to earth as Rukmini. This is particularly interesting since the Lady that Binu's husband was meant to give twenty five rupees to was also called Rukmini. I think that maybe the goddess Laksmi was testing Binu's husband to see whether he had any compassion for the

people who were in lower castes than him. If this is so then the husband failed the test because he treated Rukmini with contempt and only out of pity did he give her two rupees?

He then however, told Binu that he had given Rukmini the whole twenty five rupees. Rukmini based the whole of her last two months of life on the fact that her husband loved her so much that he would give twenty five rupees to a complete stranger who Binu had met and befriended at the train station. However, just before Binu died she told her husband this. Her husband was filled with guilt and repentance. He went back to try and find Rukmini and pays her the twenty five rupees that he owed her, so that it would ease his conscience. Rukmini had moved on and this was the husband's punishment. He had to deal with the fact that he had lied to his wife and now had to live with the guilt and desperation. This I think is the meaning of Laksmi being mentioned in this poem.

The dowry is quite significant in the poem since it is the reason that Binu asks her husband to pay the twenty five rupees to Rukmini, and the whole reason that the husband feels so guilty at the end. A dowry is a gift that the bride's family give to the groom's family upon marriage. In some of the richer castes dowries are an exchange of wealth between too families which are intermarrying. In many countries the dowry is a large part of property which is either exchanged or given to the family. The dowry insures that the wife will not be badly treated by the husband because it acts as a forfeit from the wife's family to the groom's.

'Bracelets, bangles, armlets for the dowry'

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This is what Rukmini asks the money for so that she can buy a suitable dowry for her daughter so that she will not be rejected by the husband. The dowry that Rukmini wants to give is not particularly extensive, so this also supports the idea that Rukmini is not particularly rich since in wealthy families large amounts of land and property are given as dowry presents. If the bride's family do not give a dowry then it is seen as disrespect and the whole wedding can be called off, since the groom's family do want to marry into a family that either disrespects the rules of the dowry system or they are not wealthy enough to supply a sufficient dowry for their daughter's wedding.

This is therefore what Rukmini is saying in the poem, she is pleading to Binu because I think that perhaps she feels that she will get a better reaction out of a woman who has never really seen the world and has lived rather a sheltered life, than a man who is in one of the highest groups of the Varna. She is saying that if she cannot afford the dowry and if she does not give one then her daughter will be rejected from the marriage, which will be embarrassing for the family.

Therefore, I conclude that the poet has used the portrayal of Indian Society to try and make people who are reading the poem understand the way that Indian Society actually works. The poet portrays the caste system in this prejudiced way because maybe he feels that the system is principally unjust. The Caste system has many floors, but it has brought some sort of order to Indian Society meaning that people are recognised and distinguished. The poet uses the portrayal of Indian Society very well to get the effect of the

drama and desperation in the poem. The poor lady Rukmini needs money so that her daughter can get married she is desperate for help and pity from the rich. However the uncompassionate husband feels that Rukmini is unworthy of even touching his shadow.