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## PORTRAYAL OF MARGINALIZED PAKHĪWĀS TRIBES IN IQBAL HASSAN BHAPLA'S NOVELS

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### Abstract:

This article examines the novels *Mehru* and *Basanti* by Iqbal Hassan Bhapla, focusing on the theme of class struggle and its impact on the *Pakhīwās* people. Through the lens of these narratives, Bhapla sheds light on the social and economic disparities that characterize the lives of marginalized communities in Southern Punjab. The characters in both novels navigate a complex landscape defined by systemic oppression, cultural marginalization, and historical injustices. *Mehru* highlights the intersection of love and class divisions, portraying the protagonist's struggle for identity and dignity against a backdrop of colonial influences. In contrast, *Basanti* presents a more direct representation of the *Pakhīwās* as they grapple with their societal status and the exploitation they endure. Through these works, Bhapla not only amplifies the voices of the oppressed but also critiques the broader socio-economic structures that perpetuate inequality. Ultimately, this article underscores the significance of Saraiki literature as a vehicle for social commentary, illustrating how Bhapla's storytelling reflects the enduring quest for justice and recognition among the *Pakhīwās* and similar marginalized groups.

**Keywords:** Class Struggle, Pakhiwas, Marginalization, Mehru, Basanti, Saraiki Novel, Social Justice.

### Introduction:

Saraiki literature serves as a rich tapestry that intricately weaves together the cultural, social, and historical experiences of the *Pakhīwās* tribes, often portraying their struggles against the backdrop of systemic oppression and class divisions. This literary tradition provides a voice to the marginalized, reflecting the lives of those who inhabit the fringes of society. In this context, the narratives often explore themes of identity, resilience, and the quest for dignity, highlighting the plight of nomadic communities in a world that frequently seeks to erase their existence.

The class struggle of the *Pakhīwās*, a nomadic tribe in Southern Punjab, encapsulates the broader social dynamics of a society divided along economic lines. Historically, these tribes have faced significant challenges, including land dispossession, exploitation, and cultural marginalization. Their stories, often articulated through the lens of love, loss, and aspiration, reveal the deep-seated inequalities that shape their realities. In many Saraiki literary works, characters embody the tension between personal desires and the oppressive structures that govern their lives.

The characters of Mehru and Bala, as well as of Basanti and Lajpal serve as a compelling microcosm of these themes. Set against the colonial backdrop, their love story highlights the profound impact of class division on individual agency and the inherent struggle for social justice. As they navigate a world defined by economic disparity and social

stratification, their journey resonates with the collective experiences of the *Pakhīwās* and similar marginalized communities. Through their struggles, the narrative sheds light on the enduring quest for identity, belonging, and liberation, offering a powerful commentary on the intersections of love and class struggle.

### Discussion:

"Mehrū is a tale of love. Its characters are ordinary people. The characters include nomadic tribes like *Pakhīwās*, two professional groups: the *Jogis* and the *Beggars*. From a class perspective, we see the role of women through *Mehrū*, whose parents arrange her marriage with a man who does nothing but sit and eat. *Mehrū*, to escape this, runs away with *Bālā*. *Bālā*, the hero of the story, stands by her. These nomadic people also face oppression. One example of this is their camel being taken away. *Bālā* brings the camel to the landlord and says, 'You must arrange its funeral.' The landlord replies, 'Take the camel and tie it up; come back the day after tomorrow.' When *Bālā* returns after two days, he finds..."

"اُوئے اُٹھ رات آتے کھول گیا بانویں۔" اے سن تے بالا ان تھیا اتے اکھیس: "سائیں! میں تاں آج آنداپیاں۔" میں سرکار! اُٹھ کینی کھول گیا۔ "زمیندار جینکوں مسر سڈو بندے ہن۔ بولا: "توں نی کھول گیتے دل فرشتے کھول گئیں، یا میں چور ہاں!" اے گالھ کر کے مہر نوکر کوں اکھیا جو او فقیر کوں پھدے بدھن۔ نوکر بالے دو دھسے۔ تاں بالے بچھیا: "سائیں! میکوں کیوں بدھیندے دے۔" مہر بولیا: "کل تھانیدار کوں سڈو اتے تیدی لٹریشن کرویاں اتے اُٹھ تیں کنوں گھنساں۔ جو تیدے بابے دی قل خوانی کرنی تھئی تاں۔" بالا دل وچ ساری گالھ سمجھ گیا۔ جو مہر دے ڈڈھ وچ میڈے پیو دے قل تھی گین۔ ہن کھلے کھانوں پوندن۔ "نوکر بالے کو بدھن لگتاں بالے اکھیا: "سائیں! میکوں نہ بدھو، اُٹھ کوں عادت ہئی جو منہ نال مہار کھلواتے اگے وی جھج ویندا ہا۔ میں وینداں اتے اُٹھ گولینداں۔ اے اُٹھ گول کر کے میں سائیں کوں آساں۔ اوں جھمپیاں پے کوں کوہ تے تہاں میڈے تے احسان کریو تے میڈے بابے دی قل خوانی کریو۔" بالا جان چھڑاتے و نجن لگا۔ تاں سردار کھیکھی مارتے کھلیا اتے نوکر وی سردار نال مل تے کھیکھی ماری اتے سردار دو منہ کریندے ہوئے بولیا: "واہ سائیں واہ! کیا گالھ ہے! ساڈے مہر دی، ڈاڈھا اُٹھ ڈتا ہویں سرکار!" جے توڑیں مہر ہک نوکر توں بچھیا: "اُوئے وجوں دے منہ آلے کجھ اُٹھ دا گوشت بھنا ہویا یا یاوی ہے۔ جو میکوں کجھ لگی بیٹھی ہے۔" (1)

He said, 'The camel came at night and broke free from its tether.' Hearing this, *Bālā* got anxious and said, 'Sāin! I've just arrived today. My lord! How could the camel have broken free?' The landlord, who is referred to as *Mehr*, said, 'If you didn't untie it, then maybe the angels did! Or am I the thief?' After saying this, *Mehr* ordered a servant to catch the *fakir* (*Bālā*) and tie him up. The servant advanced towards *Bālā*. *Bālā* asked, 'Sāin! Why are you tying me up?' *Mehr* replied, 'Tomorrow I'll call the police chief and have you beaten. And I'll make sure to recover the camel, for which we were supposed to have a prayer gathering for your father!'

*Bālā* understood everything in his heart—that *Mehr* was furious over the prayer gathering for his father and was now taking it out by demanding the camel. The servant moved to tie up *Bālā*, and *Bālā* said, 'Sāin! Don't tie me up. The camel had a habit of freeing its tether with its mouth and running away. I'll go and bring it back. I'll catch the camel, circle it around and return it to you, my lord. The camel ran towards the hills, but you will do me a favor if you hold a prayer gathering for my father...' *Bālā* managed to escape and was about to leave when the landlord burst out laughing, and the servant joined in with laughter too. The landlord, still laughing, said, 'Wow, Sāin, wow! What a story! Our *Mehr* has caught a mighty camel, my lord!' Then *Mehr* turned to

one of the servants and asked, 'Hey, is there any roasted camel meat by the fire? I'm sitting here starving.' (1)

These nomadic people are constantly subjected to oppression and exploitation. Even the lowest classes of society commit injustices against them, as these people are powerless. In the novels of Iqbal Bhupala, the exploitation of this class is highlighted. Iqbal Hasan Bhupala is a storyteller of this oppressed class, portraying their customs, way of life, and the cruel treatment they endure.

In times of crisis, whether it's an earthquake, famine, or flood, people trample over one another to obtain relief goods. In such situations, those who are stronger loot the goods. The same treatment is meted out to these nomadic people. Their financial hardships often force them to roam and beg for a living.

The theme of the novel *Mehrū* revolves around a class that lies even below the lowest class in the social hierarchy, a group that is not even counted in the social fabric. This class exists in large numbers—the Keel, Kattaan, and Mohān are part of a rejected section of society. They include the nomadic tribes like jugglers, beggars, and those who perform with monkeys and bears. These people faced a great betrayal. Their settlement was affected by invasions, and the incoming rulers either killed the local population or enslaved them. They were driven towards the forests. The invading raiders had their version of history written by their court historians, where they were portrayed as heroes and the local people as cowards. To preserve their identity, these local people kept migrating—from forests to deserts. This wandering life gave them the name *Pakhīwās* (nomads).

Iqbal Hasan Bhupala emerges as the storyteller of this oppressed and marginalized class. His novels shed light on the deceit and cruelty suffered by these nomadic tribes. He highlights the hardships of their lives. Saraiki poet Riffat Abbas, in his book *Maa Bolī da Bāgh*, engages in dialogue with this class in two of his poems and calls for their resettlement in the city. A significant portion of Saraiki literature gives voice to the suffering of this oppressed class.

تساں اپنیاں چھبیاں نال چھجاں نال  
تساں اپنے گھگھواں نال گھوڑیاں نال  
جتھاں چاہو شہر وچ رہو  
انہاں دے نیل کنٹھ، نولوں  
ڈوترے سڀ یا بھولوں  
کٹھے ساڈے رہ سگدن (2)

The story of *Basanti* is a love tale, where the characters are connected to different social classes. The hero of the story belongs to a landowning (zamindar) class, while the heroine comes from a *Pakhīwās* (nomadic) family. The *Pakhīwās* class holds an even lower status than the lowest social stratum in society. Pathānh, a servant of Malik Hasan Bakhsh, represents this lowest class. He interacts with his landlord (zamindar) and views himself as deserving respect and recognition, seeing himself as a chieftain. Similarly, *Lālo*, who is the father of Basanti and belongs to the *Pakhīwās* class, speaks about his own condition and says:

"باندراں داکم اسماں بعد اچ کرن لگے ہیں۔ کیوں جو لوک ہن باندراں پسند کرن لگے ہن۔ پہلے اسماں پتلیاں نچیندے ہاسے یا اٹھ ماہرے داکار وبار  
کریندے ہاسے۔ اے روہی دی نسل جو پتلی گچی والے اٹھاں دی ہے یا مڑ پیچے اٹھاں دی نسل اے۔ اسماں مسالیاں کول ہوندے ہن۔ سیں  
راجے مہاراجے اساڈے کولوں آپنی پسند دے ماہرے گھندے ہن۔ اے اٹھاں اتے گھوڑیاں دامنڈھوں ناچ ٹورے داکم دی اسماں مسالیاں

شروع کرتا ہے۔ جو آج وڈے سردار تھان تے گھوڑے بدھی بیٹھن اتے ہر کوئی سوار تے فنکار بنا کھڑے اے سارا کم پہلے اسان مساکگی قبیلے دے لوک کریندے ہاسے۔ ساڈا کم ہن سردار لوکاں گھن گھدے تے آساں باندر نیچیندے دے دے ہیں۔" (3)

"We only started performing with monkeys later because people began to prefer them. Before that, we used to make puppets dance or engage in the business of camel taming. These camels belong to the Rohi breed, the ones with small, graceful necks, or the Maricha breed of camels. We had close ties with the elite. The kings and princes would take camels of their choice from us. We, the people of the Masāgī tribe, were the first to start the tradition of making camels and horses perform. Today, great chieftains tie up their horses, and everyone is a rider or a performer, but in the past, it was the people of the Masāgī tribe who did all this work. Now, the chieftains have taken over, and we are left to make monkeys dance." (3)

Lālo represents this class in a profound way, where he is aware of their deprivation of resources. He is also familiar with the situation of being worshipped or revered. He understands that he and his fellow tribesmen are either forced to flee to save their lives or compelled to wander around aimlessly.

"اے باندر تے پتلیاں ساڈا جدی کم نہیں۔ اسان دھی آ! ہک ویلے سندھ، راجھستان توں لامتان تینیں دے حکمران ہاسے۔ ساکوں ہک جنگ وچ شکست تھنی، ساڈا راجہ ماریا گیا اتے اسان کلہوڑیاں دی کار رنگ وٹایا تے ساگی قبیلے وچ شامل تھی گئے۔ اتے باندر اں دا کھید تماشا شروع کر ڈتا۔ اتے سوانیاں پتلیاں دا کم کرن لگ پیاں، نہ تاں دھی آ! اولوک ساڈے لوکاں کوں چُٹن چُٹن کے قتل کر ڈیندے ہن۔" (4)

"This business of monkeys and puppets is not our original work. We used to have a kingdom! Once, we ruled from Sindh and Rajasthan to Multan. We suffered defeat in a war, our king was killed, and we were absorbed into the Kalhoras and became part of the Masāgī tribe. After that, we started performing with monkeys and began the craft of puppetry. But, oh dear! Those people hunt down our people one by one and kill them." (4)

When Lajpal's father is called to come, he thinks of himself as someone of high status and nobility. This dialogue from Lajpal's father reflects a class consciousness that is deeply ingrained.

"ہر وقت توں باندریاں والیاں دیاں پکھیاں دوویندیں کیا اے چنگی گالھ ہے۔ جو ملک حسن بخش دا پتر ہونویں اتے لبھیں باندریاں والے دے گھر، پتر اسان شریکاں والے ہیں۔ لوک کیا آکھسن، کیا اے ساکوں اُلا نہ جانیں؟" (5)

"You always visit the tents of *Pakhīwās*. Is it appropriate. You are the son of Malik Hassan Bakhsh and yet look for the tents of such lowly people. Son! We have rivals. What people will say about all this?" (5)

This class divide drives Lajpal into a state of wandering. His father issues orders for the *Pakhīwās* to leave, and Lajpal stands up in their midst. In this gathering, there is a British officer's daughter who is in love. Here, the novel presents views on the zamindars and chieftains born during the British era. This chieftain is a zamindar from Hyderabad, who organizes a hunting expedition for the deputy commissioner.

"سردادی خوشی دی انت نہ ہئی۔ کیوں جو انگریزی دا چاپ لوسی وچ اوکوں بہوں مزہ آیا تے ہن تاں او او نویں زمین توں اُتے ڈوفت تھی ٹردا ہئی۔ کیوں جو صاحب بہادر آج شکار دے انتظام وچ اوں جنگل دا علاقہ جو سرکاری ہئی۔ جاگیر دار کوں ڈیون دا وعدہ کیتا۔ کیوں جو جاگیراں انگریزاں انہاں چا پلوں لوکاں کوں ڈتیاں ہن۔" (6)

"The joy of the chieftain knew no bounds. This was because he greatly enjoyed the English hunting party, and now he was practically walking on air. This was because the honorable gentleman had promised the zamindar the

land of the forest to arrange a hunt in this area. The zamindars were favored by the English, who give these sycophants these lands for their flattery.” (6)

After a major examination, Basanti and Lajpal got married. They returned to their area, and thanks to the kindness of the Deputy Commissioner, the local people received government jobs, which led to an increase in wages. This news was not well-received by the zamindars of the region. The opportunities for employment and education created ease for the lower classes. All of this was against the interests of the zamindars and landlords. Consequently, there was an increase in wages, which was beneficial for the labourers. This action was contrary to the interests of the zamindar class.

ایں طرح لچپال انگریزاں دامحور بن گیا۔ ڈی۔ سی دے نال کڈاہیں مکشنر آنداہیں، کڈاہیں ایس۔ پی۔ ایں طرح نال تقریباً گھوٹیں جھوک جٹاں اتے شریفیں دے لوک چھوٹیاں موٹیاں نوکریاں لگ چکے ہن۔ اے سب اللہ نے لچپال دی صوراج پیش کی تاہا۔ جو کافی لوک نوکریاں تے آون و نجن پئے گئے۔ اے حال ڈیکھ تے زمیندار لچپال کوں کنڈھ پچھوں مندھے کڈھیندے ہن۔ جو ہندی وجہ کنوں نوکراں دی تنخواہ ڈبل تھی گئی ہے نہ تاں لوک کچھ مردے پئے ہن۔ اتے ڈوچار من دانے گھن سارا سال کنڈھ کٹویندے ہن۔ اجن تاں اے بئی بد معاشی سوچی کھڑے۔ اتھاں چھوہراں تے چھوہریں داسکول بنواؤے۔ (7)

“In this way, Lajpal became the focus of the British. The Deputy Commissioner would often come with the commissioner and the Superintendent of Police, and in this way, people from the Ghotian, Jhoke, Jat, and Sharif communities had already secured small jobs. All of this was done by the grace of God and through Lajpal's efforts, as many people were able to get jobs and make a living. Seeing this situation, the zamindars were trying to push Lajpal down. The reason behind this was that the salaries of the workers had been doubled who were otherwise starving. They had to labour the entire year for a few handfuls of grain. They are establishing schools for the boys and girls there which the landlord saw as another mischief of Lajpal.” (7)

In the novel, the exploitative rulers, zamindars, chieftains, and the exploited class of people are all highlighted. Lajpal, even though he was deeply affected by the plight of the *Pakhīwās*, still had a feudal mentality and class consciousness that prevented him from seeing Basanti as anything other than that. He did not consider her a part of his own community. He could not break through the class divide and instead had Basanti presented as the daughter of a high-ranking British officer, as per the proposal from *Juli*. Lajpal realized that he could not introduce Basanti to the zamindars as a *Pakhīwās* girl. If he did this, it would diminish his own stature. Despite all his struggles and interactions with the lower class, his views on the upper classes remained unchanged.

"بابا بسنتی کوں تم اپنی بیٹی بنا کر یہاں سے رخصت کرو۔ لچپال برأت ادھر کو ٹھہی پر لائے۔ ہم بیٹی والے بنتے ہیں اور لچپال برأت ادھر لائے..." (8)

"Father, send Basanti away from here as your daughter. Lajpal has brought the proposal here. We are here to accept her as our daughter, and Lajpal has brought the proposal here..." (8)

Basanti is the story of a true lover. However, within the class divide, this lover is also affected by this separation, and despite having his bride, he does not return home. In fact, to maintain his dignity within this divide, he presents her as the daughter of his ruler when he sends her away. The novel portrays its characters within the framework of the class divide. Here, it also highlights the historical narratives within this framework. The character of Laju serves as a connection to history, being aware of the narratives associated with the land and its people. Through this character, the novelist reveals the hidden layers of history. He feels that they are the heirs of this land, the rulers. When the *Dharal* comes, they are also affected



by it; otherwise, they would have been eliminated. Just as they had to perform tricks with the monkeys. Lalu's tribe used to engage in activities involving *Sagiyan* and puppetry. They also had to ride horses and perform tricks. This work was traditionally done by the chieftains and zamindars. As a result, these people have now associated their livelihood with bears and monkeys. In all these actions, the *Pakhīwās* are highlighted. A significant injustice towards this *Pakhīwās* class has been that they are repeatedly labeled as foolish, mad, and devoid of intelligence, instilling the belief that they indeed deserve contempt.

This is a psychological war that the lower class fought to stabilize its social status, and they have been somewhat successful in it. This feeling of class divide is not only deeply felt within the lower class but is also more intensely felt among the marginalized class. The *Pukhtun*, who belong to the lower class, warn Lajpal about the *Pakhīwās*, bringing to his attention that Lajpal's connection lies with the lower class. This is a declaration of victory for the lower class in this psychological war. The novel transitions through the colonial era, where the British appear as a ruling class or elite. The British also enslaved the zamindar and landlord class. The zamindars are the right hand of this elite. They engage in sycophancy towards these colonial powers to enhance their status and power. These zamindars have also become a powerful ruling class over the lower class.

In this colonial era, a significant change marked the beginning of the capitalist system. With the establishment of factories, a major transformation occurred with an increase in labor wages. This increase affected the zamindars. The large zamindars are unhappy with the lower classes receiving this livelihood. This was against their interests. The marriage of Lajpal and Basanti is also affected by class division. The expression of class division in the novel is quite intense. This class divide has made the lives of people more difficult. This division in living conditions affects everyone. Every individual from each class is caught up in the struggle of this division. Despite their efforts, no one can escape this struggle. They wish to break free from this circle but find it impossible.

### **Conclusion:**

The narrative woven throughout the text highlights the profound impact of class divisions and social stratification on individual lives, particularly within the context of colonialism and the capitalist system. The story of Basanti and Lajpal serves as a poignant illustration of how love and personal aspirations are intricately entangled with the societal structures that define and often constrain them. The characters navigate a world marked by deep-rooted injustices, where their identities and relationships are shaped by the socio-economic landscape. At the heart of this narrative lies the depiction of the *Pakhīwās* class, symbolizing the marginalized and oppressed groups that struggle against the prevailing power dynamics. Through characters like Lalu, the text reveals the historical consciousness that informs the identity of these groups. Lalu's awareness of his people's historical plight and their connection to the land underscores the importance of heritage and belonging in their fight for dignity. This recognition of their rightful place in society highlights the psychological and emotional toll that systemic oppression takes on individuals and communities.

The colonial backdrop further complicates these dynamics, as the British rulers impose their authority and exacerbate existing inequalities. The zamindars, initially seen as local power brokers, become complicit in this colonial system, sacrificing the welfare of the lower classes for their own gain. The novel illustrates how the advent of capitalism transforms labor dynamics, leading to increased wages that disrupt the established social order. This shift creates tension among the zamindars, who view the economic advancement of the lower classes as a direct threat to their power and privilege. The theme of class struggle permeates the narrative, emphasizing that each character, regardless of their social standing,

is caught in a relentless cycle of conflict. The text powerfully conveys the sense of entrapment experienced by individuals striving for a better life yet finding themselves bound by the very systems that dictate their existence. This struggle is not merely economic; it is deeply psychological, as characters grapple with their identities and aspirations in a world that systematically devalues them. Moreover, the relationship between Lajpal and Basanti exemplifies the complexities of love within a fractured society. Their union, while a personal victory, is also a reflection of the societal barriers that persist. Lajpal's internal conflict regarding his status and his connection to the *Pakhīwās* illustrates the difficulties of transcending class boundaries, even when one desires to do so. The narrative suggests that true liberation from these constraints requires not only personal will but also a collective awakening to the injustices that perpetuate inequality.

In conclusion, the text serves as a powerful commentary on the intersections of love, identity, and class struggle within a colonial framework. It emphasizes the need for awareness and resistance against oppressive structures while highlighting the resilience of those who dare to challenge their circumstances. Through its richly developed characters and their struggles, the narrative invites readers to reflect on the ongoing relevance of these themes in contemporary society, where class divides and social injustices continue to shape human experiences.

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5. Ibid., p. 42.
6. Ibid., p. 57.
7. Ibid., p. 90.
8. Ibid., p. 90.