

JOURNEY OF WOMENHOOD – A CRITICAL STUDY IN THE NOVELS OF CHITRA

BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

Ms. Shringarika Shanker
Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English
Netaji Subhas University

Prof. Dr. Shakibur Rahman Khan
Department of English, Netaji Subhas University

ABSTRACT

Arrange Marriage is a novel of short stories related to womanhood. The center theme of the stories is marriage. The stories not just revolve around the issues before marriage and after marriage but it's the book of women lives. The stories are set both in India and USA. Showing cultural and traditional difference between the place, generations, and the effect of migration. The stories reveal the women situations and their concern about self-respect, independence, family expectation, identity, personal freedom, immigration, loneliness. The racism problem between American and Indians. Patriarchal social structure where male dominance is given more weightage but now it was a change where women questioned everything. The portrayal of women and the transition of evolving nature is shown in all the stories. Normally the women are expected to be obedient daughters, great wife, a dutiful daughter in law and sacrificing mother. Author raises a major problem of inequality between women and men. Women are supposed to be sacrificing in nature and take this unequal structure as their fate as patriarchy is seen since years and years. Feminism is the strongest theme of this collection of stories as the author has given the voice to her female protagonist. They were unheard till but with the ongoing stories they have raised their voice, their feelings, and their emotions. The social disparities are still there of dependence and equal respect but the author has given new wings to the voice of women.

INTRODUCTION

It was Written in the year 1995 it is a collection of eleven short stories. The Author also won the American Book Award for this book. The stories in novels denote the situation of Indian women. Migration to America was very common so the stories showcase India as well as USA. Showing migration shows new opportunities. But all opportunities come with many consequences. The new western world's culture and the Indian tradition differ a lot. Author show the changes of feeling of all the characters. Some women are victims of domestic violence, some are emotionally drained, and some are just a rope of tug of war between traditional mindset and their independence. Some get betrayed in their own stories; some boldly take their life decision and chose themselves to move on. These are different colours of womanhood the author has showcased in the book. It also deals with the social stigma of racism where the difference is shown clearly of Americans and Indians. Some relationships of live-in relations were

living together without marriage was ok in America but was a taboo in India. These are all the issues seen in the stories. There by all the stories are unwind in the journey of womanhood.

JOURNEY OF WOMANHOOD – ARRANGE MARRIAGE

The Author begins with the story 'BATS' of the emotion that keep coming back again and again. The narrator is a seven year old young little girl, who is the sole witness of marital abuse. When she was young, she often used to listen her father misbehave her mother. Basically her father was abusive man and beat her mother once he comes back from work. Initially when she heard her mother cry in alone she used to come and hug her. The little one used to comfort her mother. With repeated torture her mother decided to flee with her without father's knowledge. Her mother goes to Gopalpur to her uncle. The young one became very familiar to her maternal grandparents. She used to go everywhere with him. She goes to the orchid farms with her grandfather, where he was the care taker. The child wondered why despite the threat of poison the bats used to come to the farm. To which he replied that the bats cannot realize that they can go elsewhere safe but their hidden pull make them come to the same place to harm them. Once they went to a river to catch fish, surprisingly they found a ring inside a fish which her grandfather gave her. Later she got to know that her mother had planned to go back to her husband which made the little girl very frustrated. Then the girl got used to the same trait. Each time his father abused her mother; her mother ran away with her and later came back. But in this the ring was her only hope to secure her fairytale childhood. Once in a hurry she could not take the ring and when she came back she saw that her ring got misplaced that was the metaphor to the end of her fairytale childhood to harsh reality.

Next is the story of Sumita and Somesh 'CLOTHES'. Somesh used to live in California and with partnership his friend started a utility store in America. He got married to Sumita aka Mita. Sumita was an Indian girl. The story revolves around how fond of clothes Sumita is. When he went to see her before marriage she wore a beautiful costly Red saree but she wanted to wear her blue saree. She liked colorful clothes. Somesh also introduced her to jeans, T-shirt; he gave her a sunrise orange top. Cream colour blouse top and brown skirt, a black lace nighty. Somesh was forward man. He wanted her to go finish her further studies in college. But in the current scenario she is forcefully asked to wear a white saree at a very young age as Somesh is no more. He was gun shot at his store. There is a drastic change that Somesh took all the colours from Sumita's life leaving her colorless. But she decided to stay there as the condition of widows in India was pathetic. She continued to stay with Somesh's memories by wearing almond colour top and skirt denying to make her life colourless.

'SILVER PAVEMENTS GOLDEN ROOF' is the story of Jayanti. She was highly ambitious girl who always wanted to go to America for her further studies and marry a rich man there. She made to Chicago for further studies and would stay at aunt Pratima and uncle Bikram's home. She had a perception that her uncle is very rich as he had an Automobile business but her thoughts changed as she reached there. The reality was her uncle who was a victim of racism there. The Americans hated black men there. The American had destroyed his shop with fire and now he had to work at a garage. She was unaware of this incident until she became the victim herself. In a rainy evening she forced her aunt to come along the

street for an evening walk. Initially her aunt was hesitant but then she agreed for a short walk requesting her not to tell uncle that they left the house without his permission. They got so deeply into their village memories conversation that they forgot the way back home. In search of the right street they came across some American boys who abused them by throwing water on their sarees. Both of them got panicked, somehow returned home where uncle was waiting. As aunt came home, saw her husband, she fainted. Then uncle comforted her. With incident Jayanti understood two things that uncle was never controlling, he was only being protective seeing traumas in past and the other thing was the vision of America she had until now is all wrong. Then she remembered her home in Calcutta.

‘THE WORD LOVE’ is a story of a Brahmin girl from Calcutta, who went to USA for the PhD studies. Her dad was no more and her mother was conservative in her thoughts. Knowing about her mother will never accept her thoughts still she went into live-in relationship with Rex a foreigner boy. The mother only used call on Saturday morning. Which made things very easy but one Tuesday her mother called and her boyfriend received the call. It was unexpected situation for both mother and daughter. She tried to convince her mother and make her see the other side, but the mother was very angry with this act of her daughter. The mother changed all her contact numbers and also did not receive her registered letters too. The protagonist was very devastated, now she was unable to work on her relationship with Rex. Though Rex was very supportive but she was not ready to manage the stress of parting with her mother for which she was blaming her relationship. Later in the story Rex part ways with her and her mother also never contacted her. The mother even changed the will and removed her name from that. The protagonist decided to give herself a second chance and free up from all the guilt.

‘A PERFECT LIFE’ is the story of Meera and Richard where she was happy having a perfect life which she was leading. Little did she knew that one fine day when they were on their morning walk she found a 7 year American boy, who took all her attention. She instantly fell in motherly instinct with that boy. She took him home and wanted to keep his name Krishna because it symbolized ‘the demon destroying god who was raised by a foster mother’. She wanted to proceed for adoption. Richard did not want to go for adoption still she did not listen. The California Adoption Law was strict; she had to take session to adopt a child. As per Mayhew (the foster home office) instruction she had to send Krishna to a foster home until her sessions are over. Anelia Ortiz became the foster parent and she arranged the whole house for the boy. Krishna was very sad he did not want to leave Meera and both cried a lot but she promised that she will take him back to, his home. But fate had different plans, after four days Meera got a call that he ran away from the foster home. Meera was devastated. Her perfect life was now transformed.

‘THE MAID SERVANT’S STORY’ is set in India where Manisha wants to marry Bijoy whom she met in America. She insisted to wear a saffron sari for her wedding with which her Deepa mashi mentioned that saffron is the colour of sorrow and tells her a story of the maid Sarla. Sarla was from a poor family. There were two women in the story, the young wife (Sarla’s employer) and Sarla. The young wife was pregnant so Sarla became the helper. The young wife gave a saffron saree to Sarla. When she wore that saree it became a true confusion who is the wife and who is the maid to the husband. He became very disrespectful to Sarla. He even sexually abused her. Sarla could not take this and ran away from the house without telling the young wife. Many years later the young wife saw Sarla, but Sarla pretended not to

know her, just because Sarla was poor so she was ill-treated. Later on in the story it is revealed that it is the story of Manisha's mother, the young wife.

'THE DISAPPEARANCE' story starts with the missing wife. The husband and the child were in pain. Everyone thought that she might be abducted or kidnaped. Police investigated but due to lack of evidence and lead, the case got closed. Leaving the family devastated making everyone think that she is no more and will never come back. Mother in law came to help with the child and she started to discard the women's photos and her clothes to help the family to move on. Everyone was moving forward in life until the husband realized his wife was not kidnaped or dead but she deliberately ran away. Her jewelry was missing and then in this process he rethinks how he behaved with his wife. He was a very controlling husband; he only wanted his wife to be obedient. He took all decision and did not take her advice. He ignored her ambition and thought her silence as agreement. He then realized he never understood the feelings so she took a drastic move of escaping, leaving everything behind even her little son. This thought still haunts him and he never got a conclusion.

The story 'DOORS' shows the story of Preeti who was an Indian immigrant, with American values like privacy and healthy boundaries. Deepak her husband who owns Indian traditional values. Both were happy in marriage until Raj, Deepak's cousin came to America for studies and started living with them. Deepak was very happy seeing him. He grew up with the upbringing to cater all the guests. To always help the family members at all times, and overdoing for hospitality. However Raj's interference in the house made Preeti very uncomfortable, she was very particular about her privacy, independence and personal space. Raj did not knock the door before entering; he was always interfering between Preeti and Deepak's private time. The common area of the house was always captured by Raj. Preeti started being disturbed. Both of them started to question their decision of choosing each other as life partner. Later in the story both realized and respected each other's feelings.

The story 'AFFAIR' is the story of Abha and Ashok. Where Abha was jealous of her friend Meena and thought that her husband Ashok is having an affair with her. Meena was a confident woman and was very attractive. Her husband changing behaviour was the main culprit, he always admired Meena of being very attractive. Abha's suspicion intensified so much that she was unable to cope up with anything else. In the other part of story Meena told Ashok about her affair with her office colleague because Shrikant her husband, both had contrasting personalities. Abha was devastated that Meena being her friend did not tell her about the affair and told Ashok, who made her think differently for her husband. Meena did not want to disclose Abha as she was very judgmental. Abha's jealousy and insecurities made her own marriage a miserable one.

The story 'MEETING MRINAL' is Asha's story. For years she was a devoted wife and a great mother. She did all for her family but Mahesh her husband cheated her. He left Asha and son Dinesh for a young American girl. Asha was unable to bear the pain Mahesh gave. Her relations with her son also started to ruin. She was trying to move on by studying library science and becoming financially independent. One day she got a call from her childhood friend Mrinal. Asha always envied her as she was self-made business women, financially independent. Mrinal chose career and independence over marriage and kids. Asha did not tell about her broken marriage as she was still not over that. But something strange

happened Mrinal envied Asha's life of having a family. Mrinal got everything in her life still she craved for a family someone who she can call hers. This made Asha realize that grass is always greener on the other side. She started being better to herself and made efforts to fix everything with her son.

The story 'ULTRASOUND' is centered on the traditional Indian belief of having boy child is auspicious to family. Story begins with Anju and Runu cousins who are expecting babies. Anju resides in USA and Runu in India. In ultrasound tests Anju got to know that she is carrying a baby boy whereas Runu carrying a baby girl. Runu's in-laws wanting Runu to terminate the baby as it's a girl. Anju was very angry after knowing this that Runu's husband also did not supported her as Runu wanted to keep her child. Runu was determined to help herself and move out for the sake of her unborn girl. So Anju suggested her to go to her mother's house and be over there. Runu finally took major life saving step for her unborn girl.

CONCLUSION

These stories show the true mirror of the society and their behaviour against women. The transition from tradition and culture to self-observation is drastic. In every story there is its special conclusion. In *Bats* the author tells about domestic violence and how the lady comes back each time his husband apologizes. In *Clothes*, how the destiny of the new bride is decided because her husband is no more. In *Silver Pavements Golden Roof*, the story is all about racism which the protagonist couldn't even think of. She always thought that developed places give larger opportunities. In *The Word Love*, the protagonist goes through so much making her mother and boyfriend understand her situation but left with only guilt. She then makes a greater move of prioritizing herself. In *A Perfect Life*, motherly feeling make the whole story, making it a strong but unfulfilled emotion. In *The Maid Servant's Story*, story of breaking material norms. Not all women get respect and can speak up for themselves. In *The Disappearance*, makes it easy to understand that if the husband makes himself the authority then he will never understand the feeling of his wife. And the wife will never regard him. In *Doors*, two different culture and two different ideologies. One is totally into family obligations and other wants healthy boundaries to prioritize personal space. In *Affair*, it is the misunderstanding and the jealousy which gave fire to sour feeling between husband and wife. *Meeting Mrinal* gives the moral that grass is always greener on the other side as both the friends envy each other's life. *Ultrasound* is the story of female foeticide. Where the in-laws want to kill the unborn female child in quest of male child. These stories are the mirror of society how women are treated. Also the emotions and feeling they go through. The author has taken a stand for women to show to the world.

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