



MARGINALIZED INDIAN WOMEN IN *INNER COURTYARD*

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ABSTRACT:

Inner Courtyard is a large compilation of short stories which is basically based upon the female issues in particular subjugation under the patriarchal order. The stories are written by women about women hailing from all corners of India and Pakistan - Assam to Kerala and Pakistan to Bengal. With the title of the collection, it gives readers an apparent impression about women's freedom radius is only the inner courtyard of house. So is in the Vedas, the Gita and other Hindu religious scriptures, women are posed as the beings of house, crossing the threshold of house is rigorously outlawed. Equality between sexes is beyond imagination. Education remained a dream for the women and the conception of human beings as morally and intellectually capable of being educated and civilized is refused, and the conviction of the moral and intellectual advancement of humankind would result in greater happiness for everybody is deliberately sidetracked. This and many more lifeblood threads are far stretched and inconsiderate with regard to women and their rights. The book introduces with the first story highlighting this very theme.

The editor of the book Laxmi Holmstrom brings out a fabulous collection of short stories from very diverse walks of life dealing each of the stories with single theme of women being marginalized, harassed, humiliated – female discrimination. In this line, many stories are powerful on their own; most have some element that reflects on the position of the society. Male ascendancy is always at honour while female's is at stake. There is a vast disparity between an Indian woman and that of the developed nations across the world. The female honour and rights rest upon the basics of respective nations' culture, in this respect India as a nation of strong and prehistoric culture bound by the religious scriptures cited above abandon women lamenting every moment. Their identity is always subject to the male mercy than that of the natural human rights. They are left pondering over the negligible status in the Indian set up as in Revenge Herself; the Tatri; a Brahmin woman of lowest strata in Brahmin community in Kerala, mothers in Girls, Summer Vacation, My Beloved Charioteer and Her Mother or even Sakina of The Meeting. The First Party is also an analogous illustration which encounters the husband's vanity being modern and wise

person while his wife an odd one out in the party.

The first story *Revenge Herself* by Lalitambika Antarjanam in the collection is a powerful tale of a fallen Nambudiri woman of the 19th century. Her name itself has become a synonym for shameful among the patriarchal Nambudiri. According to the Tatri traditional, such woman's life is giving away herself to husband in everything without any self for herself. So does she, she marries a man whom she offers herself in order "to please him in his taste of sex with the same attention I have for his taste for food". But one point of time, he disregards her for other women and leaves her. Further he even brings a prostitute into the house and asks to become like her, "If you could be like her, I might like you better". This results in her rebellion to revenge against her husband. She leaves his house, sets out to become a whore, working hard to learn how to please a man and eventually becomes an admired courtesan and one day her husband visits her then she reveals herself as the same Tatri; his wife who he has expected to become like a whore. In this case who would Tatri have teamed up for executing her rebellion? Society has so trained its peers that it would be impossible for anyone to entertain even remotely the ideas that she puts into execution.

Summer Vacation by Kamala Das is a sweet childhood story narrated by Muthassi (grandmother) whom she visits alone. Her father drops her off at the station of Muthassi's place. *Vaidehi Akku* is a story of Akku; a husbandless daughter of the patriarchal family. She exposes herself wherever her beauty can be exhibited by wearing new saris and jewelry at weddings or whatever which seems like a social

objection in terms of the cultural and conservative norms.

The other major story of the book is *Girls* by Mrinal Pande it is about three sisters and their mother who is pregnant for the fourth time for a son. They go to her Nani's (maternal grandmother) for having the baby while their father stays back. At the outset itself, the mother refrains with, "I hope it is a boy this time. It will relieve me of the nuisance of going through another pregnancy". Even the Nani prays god for protecting her honour so that at the fourth time she would take a son back from her parents' home. Taking the thread of Nani, neighbour comments that the last time her skin had a pinkish tinge, now it is yellow; it is sure to be a son. Another feature of the story shares the issue with marginalization in the family, this relates to the masi of the sisters. She complains about her endurance in the house and put to work as a dog so is duly responded by all women. In continuance of the first issue of gender discrimination, the following statement carries serious social consideration when their father assures that there is a bright star in the sky and they work hard they can become anything they want to just as Dhruva star, the author in the girl's character asks, "But I can't become a boy, can I?" This marks grave place in girls'/women's hearts and pains for longer or perhaps lifelong. In case of the girl in the story, the girl rebels at the occasion of Ashtami (kanyakumari) puja calling the society if they do not love girls they should not pretend to worship them either. This story illustrates the scenario of a male dominating world and how female gender is subjugated. The opening introduces characters of the story. Despite the fact that how the story is set in a male dominating

there is very little to mention of the male gender. The first sentence is bold and exasperated, desensitized mother who thinks that girls have no visage and always looks forward to the boys.

Yellow Fish by Ambai - a simple two page story compares the torture a fish feeling on being tossed out of the sea to the anxiety of a woman's feelings. The story shares any Indian woman's feelings and her freedom of choice and life is at the patriarchal order.

The next finest story of the collection is Ismat Chughtai's Chauthi ka Jaura. The greatest mission of the Siddiqui in life is to provide a husband for the elder daughter Naseema who is not gifted in matters of health or features. She is frail and un-voluptuous and has a thin hair. When the daughter's cousin comes to stay with them for some time as part of his professional training, it proves to be a godsend to them. They begin plotting to arrange the cousin's interest in the elder daughter but instead, the younger and more daring daughter is sent as the messenger with the proposition. Due to this circumstantial misunderstanding, the cousin agrees to marry, but with the younger sister, without knowledge of the fact, the ladies of the house rejoice. The cousin can no longer control himself and grabs the younger girl. The elder daughter commits suicide at that. After some time, the ladies continue to stitch the Chautha ka Jaura while the younger daughter sits and looks at them without response and careless.

Another beautiful story is the First Party by Attia Hossain which depicts in marvelous manner the conventional or orthodox women being put to stake at the cost of sophistication and modern life traits. The woman in the story is just married and

taken to a modern party to be introduced wherein all sophisticated people gather and enjoy, drink, eat and dance with their or different partners. The woman is not used to it though she hails from an equally affluent family. She feels embarrassed among the people involved in partying. Being pressed by her husband and others, she refuses to involve but keep sitting aside with a glass in hand. At such demeanor, he feels being humiliated and dishonoured having such unrefined and orthodox wife as the partying people laugh at his wife. Should education, if imparted to women, not play major and vital contribution in women's life in totality as in the case of this woman of the First Party? Or who should be responsible for her being orthodox and traditional, respecting the culture which in many terms is treasured the patriarchal order or the women or even the culture itself?

The Meeting by Shama Fatehally also comes out with similar male mindset in the Indian social set up. The protagonist of the story; a Muslim unmarried girl is given a marriage proposal which incredibly unexpected for Sakina who is so fat like 'elephantine' and nothing in looks to mention. She is nostalgic by the thought of the proposal. She is apprehensive about the person to be 'a real man'. It gives way out to dreaming about the boy to be a handsome person like a dream hero etc. Her father criticises her for daydreaming. True to it, it proves to be a foil to her dream as her partner is not a boy but a middle aged man. Father forgets that a human being dreams and marriage of either female or male is dreamt about the partner. A general question can be posed to the society, should the women looking ugly or whatever not have right to dreaming like

the counterparts in boys and men who may be equally looking ugly or so. If men hold the right, women should also possess.

Shashi Deshpande's *My Beloved Charioteer* and Mahasweta Devi's *Dopdi* picturise the similar stories of women being victimised at every stage of life whether as a girl, married woman, mother or even old woman. Grandmother in the former story is a sheer victim of the patriarchal order even before her marriage till her husband's death. She feels envious at her daughter's happy married life and when her affliction for her dead husband for whom she gives up her own and her daughter's life. It is a shock to the readers. The latter story deals with the extreme brutality of human beings towards the woman. It relates to Mahabharata's Draupadi on how she was humiliated publicly which added to the pride of the then men folk. All this went for no fault of Draupadi. This cruelty ever since continues witnessing and spreading the message. *Dopdi* of this story is a tribal woman revolts against the society at large but beaten by the treachery of the militancy and raped inhumanly.

L. Vishwapriya's *the Library Girl* is an impressive story and only optimistic story of the book where woman is honoured and let free to read and roam around the town though a Muslim girl. But it does keep the thrust of dishonoring the girl as she comes of age. She is put into golden cage; a Persian robe (*burqa*). She thinks the robe adding beauty to her personality but hidden it in the guise of the robe. Her budding beauty is hidden from the malicious eyes about which she is unaware.

The book offers both detailed argumentation and passionate eloquence in opposition to the social inequalities commonly imposed upon women by a

patriarchal culture. Just as in revolutionary Lalitambika Antaranam defends the emancipation of women on utilitarian grounds. The legal subordination of one sex to another is immoral in itself and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a system of perfect equality, admitting no power and privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.

Women are brought up to act as if they were weak, emotional, docile - a traditional prejudice. If tried equality, the results can be seen benefitting to individual women. They would be free of the unhappiness of being told what to do by men. And there are benefits for society at large - doubling the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity. The ideas and potential of half the population would be liberated, producing a great effect on human development. These marginalised women have today set their feet on all fields and corners of life with regard to education and professional assignments. A long way witnesses many such destinations, if she is equal and free.

REFERENCE:

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