



EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN AS AN IMMIGRANT AND EXPATRIATE IN SELECT SOUTH ASIAN NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Women have been marginalized for ages under various aspects this includes race, class, and psychology, physical and economical strands. These discriminations do not confine to any particular race, period or geographical locations but are challenges encounter by woman throughout the ages and are universal issues. In this paper woman exploitation has been explored limiting the issues with that of the experience of the immigrants and expatriates in a random comparison of the works of South Asian female writers Bharati Mukherjee's Wife, Taslima Nasrin's French Lover and Chandani Lokuge's Turtle Nest.

KEYWORDS: expatriate, exploitation, exploration, feminism, identity and immigrants.

INTRODUCTION

The Evolution of Civilization at Various Parts of the World Initiates the History of Women. This history pertaining to the conditions and treatments of female is divided into three major parts i.e., the ancient, the medieval and the modern periods. It is insisted that the first evaluated homosapien was a woman. She was a Hermaphrodite who gave birth to another female. It was after many centuries man came into evolution. In the beginning female were hunters and food gatherers. Male took care of home. In course of time, inductions of pregnancy and related responsibilities forced women to stay back at home. This paved way for men to turn into hunters. This tenuous job of pregnancy, delivery and breast-feeding challenged women power.

The challenges of man in the course of hunting and food gathering elevated his power and made him turn strong physically. Gradually man became the source of power and started to frame rules according to his favour. The frame of religion further degraded the position of women. Any religion showcased women as a second source that is inferior to her man. During the Vedic period, women were not allowed to perform any rituals. Even Christianity, Taoism, Buddhism and Islam consider woman as a subordinate to man.

The condition of woman was pitiable except throughout the world yet these were some exceptions.

In India when the women of the Vedic period were considered secondary to men it is to be noted that the participation of female poets and the Sangam Literature establishes the firmness and dignity of women holding upper hands then and now.

However, considering the position of women worldwide is still miserable. Even literature witnesses' male writers being prioritized than the female writers' inspite of producing quality works. The female characters by the male writers were design to be illiterates and idiots with little knowledge and were comic figures. The examination of portrayal of women in literature down the ages throws light on female characterization by men. The Victorian literature evoked debates on the role of female. The famous writers of the age portrayed women feeble figures that are nothing but eligible commodities of the households.

It was in the Edwardian era literatures spoke about women right, feminism and portray women as equal to men especially during the world wars. Anyhow the themes were limited physical abuse, social standard, denied of education, helplessness and committing of suicides. Gradually many female writers were celebrated and their works were acknowledged in drawing attention of the issues faced by women in their day-to-day life. The female novelists of the 20th century and the contemporary

women writers throughout the world portray the vigorous sign on woman expressing their mental dilemmas. The female characters of these writers are degree holders come out of home, place themselves in a dignified position in the society, travel abroad and face the challenges courageously. Anita Nair says that,

Literature has always been ambivalent in its representation of women. Good women as in ones who accepted societal norms were rewarded with happily ever after. Even feisty heroines eventually go onto find content and life's purpose in a good man's arms, be it Elizabeth Bennett (*Pride and Prejudice*) or Jane Eyre (*Jane Eyre*). Alternatively they are left to rue their lot with a contrived courage as with Scarlett O'Hara (*Gone with the Wind*) or have to take their lives like Anna Karenina or Karuthamma (*Chemmeen*) or Emma Bovary (*Madame Bovary*).

This paper analyses the strength of protagonist and their resistance to exploitation and discrimination in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*, Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover* and Chandani Lokuge's *Turtle Nest*.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*, the second novel published in 1975 is a story of an Indian girl, Dimple Dasgupta. She belongs to a middle class Bengali family who moves to New York from Calcutta with her husband. The novel examines the problem of the protagonist and also the mental psychological damage through her experience. The novel illustrates the life of Dimple in India and US. Dimple is a young girl of 17 who remains in her world of fantasy. Dimple exists completely recognizable from other ordinary girls. She lives as an idealist lost in her own formation of imagination.

The novel targets on the experience of Dimple who is enslaved to face the concept of her native land and culture. It also portrays the inner mind of the young girl who has unfolded her life to womanhood from her childhood. Dimple's life changes to distinctive land of New York. From her childhood days Dimple has accustomed patriarchal code. She likes to lead the life of an ideal Bengali wife. She dreams about her marriage eagerly from the perspective of her male-centered family.

Dimple's family live in a very small house even though they belong to a wealthy upper class conventional Indian family. As a girl of twenty, Dimple is fascinated by marriage not only by the term but by the events itself. As it is echoed; "Marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising, and dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love." (W 3) Dimple cannot think aside of the marriage as she thinks about the positive turn of events. For her marriage brings liberty, happiness and wealth in life.

Dimple chooses a neurosurgeon to marry which will allow her to become rich life.

On the contrary Dimple's father Mr. Das Gupta, an employee of Calcutta Electric Supply Company looks for an engineer as a bridegroom. Dimple is always carried away by the dreams of her marriage and future partner. She believes that marriage would accomplish all her expectation in her life. On speaking of Dimple's inclination to fantasy Jasbir Jain observes "it is difficult to treat the novel as a study of cultural shock for even while in Calcutta, Dimple is an escapist and lost in her private world's fantasy?" (15)

Dimple assumes the pre-marriage arrangement and preparation as a rehearsal of her marriage life. She prepares for the marriage enthusiastically and spends days with eagerness and zeal. She puts plan for the felicitous moment when her father searches for the 'best man' she worries about her impaired structure and look which she makes emotional to define her prospect life and fate. She enquires each and every possible way to improve herself through chicken soup, excursive, homeopathic pills and back rubs. She finds out the tips about beauty through magazines and also even purchases skin whitening cream.

She also thinks that education is also an important aspect for successful marriage. It is confessed by both Amit and Dimple that marriage is the essence of life. She gets bothered while her school examination gets postponed as it made her difficult to find a suitable husband without a degree. Though she tries to prepare for her University Exams, her mind unchangeably wavers towards her marriage. At last, her father weds her with Amit Kumar Basu, a normal middle-class family, dull engineer who is migrated to US. Dimple moves to Amit's house after her marriage based on the Indian tradition. At beginning Dimple does not feel comfortable in her in-law's house. She does not like their house because it does not look beautiful and spacious. She also finds difficult to cope up with Amit's mother and sister. Her mother-in-law hates her name 'Dimple' and wishes to call her as 'Nandini'.

Dimple always dwells in an imaginary world but the real future of life slashes her wings out of imagination. She feels painful when all her dreams are being destroyed. Dimple slowly realizes that her marriage has stolen all her dream. She speaks with Amit as often as possible of their unfamiliar journey of life. One night Amit brings her to Kowloon and requests stew chicken, pan fried rice and chicken spring rolls. She does not feel comfortable to deal with the chicken pieces. Dimple examines that Amit could never become as a husband of her imagination. As the day passes, happiness of their marriage gets

declines. Dimple feels curious emotion while she comes to know about her pregnancy. As she remains a peculiar girl, she feels disgust of sickness throughout the day.

Even pregnancy which is symbol of completing of womanhood seems to be a curse for Dimple. She feels pregnancy to be a burden and hindrance to travel abroad. Without second thought she aborts her baby even without the knowledge of her husband. Though Amit is upset because of the abortion she could easily convince her husband. Dimple's crucial act of self-abortion indicates her peculiarity free from all the limitations of womanhood. She does not accept a child in her womb without her knowledge. She never gives reconsideration about the end of her pregnancy. On discussing about the uncertainty and exemption of Dimple, Knika Agarwall in her article "The Dynamics of Psyche in Bharati Mukherjee's Wife" states the reason for her abortion as,

Dimple is an extremely immature girl who constantly dreams of marriage as she hopes that it would bring her free demand love. At the same time she is not clear about these concepts. This ambiguity underlying her mental make-up defines the incompleteness of her very being. After an exuviating painful waiting which makes her desperate and suicidal, she is finally married to Amit Kumar Basu, an average middle-class, unimaginative, young engineer who dreams of making a fortune in America and retiring to live a comfortable rich life in Calcutta. But soon after her marriage, she feels cheated as her romantic, adolescent mind cannot grasp the reality that freedom has certain limitation. She begins to resent her new home, her in-laws and even her husband who doesn't seem to be capable of helping her to achieve her fantasy-life. At this stage, when she begins to reconstruct her ideal man from faces from magazines, and is unable to identify herself with anyone in the family, the prospect of becoming a mother enrages her. She treats it as an outrage on her body and induces an abortion, disposing of that "tyrannical and vile" thing deposited in her body. (n-page)

Once landed in US the controversy between Amit and Dimple is exposed. When Dimple is fascinated by the beauty of the land Amit shows no attention towards the beauty of the enormous city rather, he is very particular in seeking a job. Amit activities reflect the proverb 'men must usefully engage.' Being jobless for a long time advocates more potency in Amit which results in spending very few times with Dimple. But for Dimple it seems to be as he is ignored. She spends time with Meena Sen the whole day doing households and watching TV. He observes the activities of Meena Sen and tries to learn

the lifestyle of America. In a party she comes across Ina Mullik whom she envies in the beginning but influences her badly. Ina introduces her to Milt Glesser, an American with whom Dimple develops a relationship with.

Once landed in America Dimple is confined with fear deep in her mind. She comes across rape, murder and smuggling very often. The American TV channels and newspapers are filled with this news. Even in parties and social gatherings the matters of rape and murder become the top of the day. Even the American movies thematize sex and violence. Dimple feels desolated and cut off when Ina and Milt Glesser have limited their visit. Even her performance of seeking a job is denied by Amit putting forth some genuine reasons. At Mukherjee's apartment in Manhattan Dimple has to live a burdened life watching TV throughout the day. The violence that the television enforces on her forces her to insomnia. This in turn makes her kill her husband and without guilt justify it as an effort of watching television. She stabs him seven times on his chest symbolizes the seven steps taken but the couple in the event of binding them the most predominant ritual of the Hindu marriage.

Taslima Nasrin in her *French Lover* as created a character, Nilanjana Mandal parallel to that of Dimple. Nila is also a middle-class Bengali woman with the degree possessing a fairy tale vision of marriage. They wait for a princess who could sweep off their feet. Both travel abroad in a hope that they can lead a happy life without any commitments and responsibilities. She is married to Punjabi Kishanlal who runs a restaurant in Paris. Similar to that of Dimple and Amit, Nila and Kishan have a controversial approach towards life when Kishan is a very practical man limited towards his duty with devotion. Nila loves to engage her intelligence with arts especially towards literature and music. Her sentiment and emotion yearns such that of walking alongside the river, shopping, reading books and listening to the Hindustani music are being denied by her husband.

She feels the emptiness of life and home even when Kishan is with her. Even though she tries to convince herself assuring Kishan as the only the best and intimate companion, she is haunted with the dominance of loneliness. Even this sexual relationship does not bring any intimacy between them and she feels it as an act of mechanism. On the other hand, Kishan wants Nila to be a typical Indian housewife who takes care of household works with the routine job of cooking food, washing clothes, cleaning home, arranging utensils, serving food, waiting for his return are above all entertaining him on bed.

Kishan once take her out for a dinner on the way back home she finds people roaming out on the street even late at night. She surprised with the lifestyle of Paris and questions Kishan about that Kishan's reply shocks her.

If on a Friday night, girls of this age sit at home, if they don't have a boyfriend or sleep with a boy, it's then that parents would be worried. They'd wonder if something was wrong with her, physically or mentally. If the girl goes out, the parents sleep in peace and if she stays at home, they'd have a sleepless night. Besides, most of them leave home at this age. They stay alone or with a boyfriend. (FL 47)

On being bored at home she finds a packing job which is opposed by Kishan. Later she finds that Kishan has an affair with another woman and so leaves his home to live with Danielle. She is first surprised to know that Danielle is a homosexual yet she convinces when she comes to know about hideous reality of Danielle being raped by her own father at the age of six. She once again has to go back to India to nurse her sicken mother. There she finds that even her brother and father do not show any sentiments towards her dying mother.

Nila barred their way and said, 'How can you all bitterly leave for the day, when Ma is so ill?'

'But we have work to do.'

'Work? You'll work all your life and get far salaries for it. Take a day off.'

'What's the poem? Will Ma become all right.'

'No, but at least be at her side; she can look at you.'

'She, and look at me.' She's sleeping all the time.'

Anirban rushed Nikhil, 'Don't waste your time, you are getting late. Don't pay any heed to this impractical girl. (FL 141)

On her back to Paris, she meets Benoit, a tall Frenchman who impresses her at very first sight. She is very much fascinated towards him and develops a relationship with him. Later she realizes that Benoit is married and is father of a child too. She is forced into depression when she realizes that Benoit also has used her as an object of his physical desire.

The next novel *Turtle Nest* by Chandani Lokuge is entirely different from that of the previous two novels discussed. When Dimple and Nila are married woman struggling to create an identity as wife, Aruni the protagonist of *Turtle Nest* is a young spinster trying to find her biological identity. When Dimple and Nila encounter hurdles in creating an identity as an immigrant in her alien land Aruni comes back to Sri Lanka from Australia to find her biological roots.

Aruni has been living Australia with her adopted parents Neela and Mohan. When she comes to know that Mohan is a biological father and Neela

is Mohan's wife and not her biological mother an urge arises in her to relocate her maternal biological root. Aruni comes to know about her maternal mother. Nirmala through her father Mohan. Mala was a maid at Mohan's house when they resided in Sri Lanka Mohan was fascinated by Mala's beauty and developed illegal relationship with her. Mala and Neela were pregnant at same time. But Neela loses her baby Kumari at a very short and span of a month after delivery. As a maid Mala witnesses Mala's sorrow at the loss of the child. So, Mala after delivery places her new born baby at door steps of Mohan and ascends. This is the short history Aruni comes to know about Mala through Mohan.

Aruni Ratnayake who comes to Sri Lanka from Australia in search of her mother and motherline stay in a hotel 'Ceyshores'. Her predicament is narrated thus: "Young girl with suffering face ... Desolate and confused, the eyes of the broken-winged bird that Priya held in his palm" (3). She becomes friend with Paul, a man of forty-five, who is also from Australia on holidays writing a series on tourism recording his experiences in South Sri Lanka.

Through Simon, Aruni comes to learn about Mala's past life and childhood experience. Aruni also explains her story to Simon and also defines the reason of how she develops interest in knowing about her mother as she says "when I heard the song, I know I had to come here and find out more about her." (TN 25-26) Mala and her brother Priya are fond of turtles those come to their home during the rainy season. Simon was in love with Mala but even in the age of 12, Mala was sexually abused by a boy Rathu. Though this is a common scene in Sri Lankan beach Simon warns Aruni to "be a bit careful on this beach, missy" (TN 25). Aruni feels herself as a hybrid product as she says "Neela is a Buddhist. My father is a Catholic. My real mother, Mala was also a Catholic. I have no idea what I am. Everyone's a bit of everything when they're Sri Lankan." (TN 36)

Aruni even learns that even a life of Priya, a maternal uncle becomes victim to poverty on his selling of Ganja in spite of his earning from mending nets and mechanically inspecting the boats. It also states the pitiable condition of young boys who persuades the travelers for money by showcasing them the turtles on the beach and corals and the bottom of the sea through the character Premasiri. "The boys speak in English now. 'We can show you turtles, black and white and brown turtles, turtles laying eggs, and beautiful corals at the bottom of the sea. We take missy and sir in glass-bottom boat'". (TN 12)

When this be the condition of the boys the condition of young girls is more sympathetic that

there is no surprise of Mala selling herself for money to the foreigners. This being the state of the mother, the daughter too becomes a victim of the social Sri Lankan life. In the end Aruni too is gang raped and she had to accept it as a culture of her motherland.

Thus, all the three female writers display the shock of dual exploitation of the characters. Dimple,

Nila and Aruni travel to a new place in search of their identity and freedom. But these become a challenging task in a new land. In spite of leading a happy life exuberantly they had to create a new identity and in process they become victim to the culture of the new land.

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