

Manifestation of Woman's Agony in the Stories of Chandraben Shrimali

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Abstract

Society is made up of certain rules and roles. In society woman have to perform certain roles. They are subjected to do what men feel. Woman has suffered a lot since ages. She is treated only as object. Man has given woman a better place only for their own benefit. Woman's identity always depends upon man's identity. If a woman is young girl her identity is dependent upon his father and if married upon her husband. Woman becomes burden if desired work is not fulfilled. She becomes burden if she fails to fulfill what has been intended from her. Her own husband and family look to kill or abandon her not only for her faults but also for her husband's faults. Woman's life becomes hell on earth because of her husband. The aim of present study is to describe woman's pain and agony revealed in Chandraben Shrimali's stories.

Introduction

Chandraben Shrimali is a prominent Gujarati poet and short story writer, who meticulously portrays woman's life and struggles in her writings. Her short story collections include: *Chanibor ane Biji Vartao*, *Chakuno Var*, *Valonu*, and *Chudlakaram*. She is more concerned with emotions and agony of woman than with actions. She gives a picture of man-woman relationship in accordance with modern day existing social situations. The representation of woman's emotions and pains seems of particular interest in her stories. She has illustrated and concentrated on male-dominated society and woman's predicament within that society. According to Chandraben Shrimali, with reference to these stories, in most of the marriages woman is seen-believed as a machine whose role is to produce children and look after her husband and family. In *How is Mother?* the husband planned to set his own wife on fire only because they are unable to produce a child. If the present wife dies he will get a chance to marry a 'new wife' for the same reason. In this story woman's agony is incomparable. In *Does the daughter-in-law have something?* Surbhi and her mother-in-law get irritated hearing people's taunts and satires. In the first story woman suffers and killed because she doesn't have child and in the later story the husband postpones the planning for personal gain. In both stories male domination is presented. In both the stories woman suffers only because of their husbands.

How is Mother?

In her story, *How is Mother?* Chandraben Shrimali has delineated the pains and predicament of a young girl who is married to a man who sees her only as a child bearing machine. The story is realistic and symbolic in its presentation. The author has symbolically presented all the characters. She has not given a name to any of the characters in order to reveal the typical village life where woman has to suffer. It seems that the author attempts to lay bare that the story of *How is Mother?* is very common in many of the villages. Woman gets respect only if she can give birth to a child. If unfortunately she fails in doing so, she becomes or is seen as sterile and infertile woman regardless of her husband's faults. In many of the families it becomes commonly believed and discussed. The author has presented how man-woman relationship becomes of no use if desired intentions are not fulfilled.

The story of *How is Mother?* revolves around a young woman who has married to a man who has been ambitiously and rigorously looking for children. Unfortunately they are unable to give birth to any child. The reason behind it is not expressed but it seems that her husband and her mother-in-law believed that it's only her fault they cannot have child. The story opens with people discussing about her burnt up body. When the story starts the incident has already happened. The narratives regarding her are discussed everywhere at marketplace, at meeting place of villagers, and at the cross roads; Some said, she had herself burnt up and died. Some said, going to save her, her mother-in-law had also been hurt by burning. Someone further said as she could not give birth to children, her quarrelsome and suspicious mother-in-law only had caused her to burn so that a 'new' wife can be brought after remarriage. (135)

Her full body got burnt in that incident except her eyesight. Some body parts of her mother-in-law also got burnt but she lost permanently her ability to see. Her full body is burnt up. She is not in a state to survive though on the deathbed in semi-unconscious state she inquires about her mother-in-law, "How is mother?" (135). She was looking to know about her only to know how she feels after burning. The relatives and friends standing outside the ward tried to console her that she should be worried about her, her mother-in-law will be recovered properly because she has not burnt much. In the ward of burnt up patience, her husband stands near her and apparently started pretending. After all he did that only to save himself from lengthy police inquiry. He was afraid of police and to avoid trouble of police he pretended. In fact his desires are to remarry as it is depicted in the story. She writes, "Actually, his desire was only to marry a 'new wife' for getting children. Now, because of fear from the police, he changed his mind. He stated pretending as if he was overtaken by a great misfortune" (135). He does not want to go in jail instead he is looking for safe and secure steps so that he can enjoy with 'new wife'. He does not repent for what happened with his wife. It happened in his absence but on his command it was planned and executed: "Otherwise, in order to burn his own wife he has made an arrangement of petrol for his mother" (136). He gives news that his mother will surely survive but "the illumination of her eyes has been snatched permanently" (136). Her eyes gradually started going off with a mysterious smile in her eyes. "Only she knew that when her mother-in-law had set her ablaze she also kept completely pressed her mother-in-law with her breast forcefully – with complete fierceness embracing with two hands" (136). The writer describes that only she knows about the incident that happened and with her death her mother-in-law knows it.

Does the daughter-in-law have something?

In her other story *Does the daughter-in-law have something?* Chandraben has demonstrated yearning and longings of a mother-in-law for the birth of a child. This theme is common in both her stories. But in this story the treatment is distinctly presented. In this story, the mother-in-law is waiting for child birth for more than five years. Though she has not lost hope, yet somewhere in her mind the concerns and worries are persisting. The story begins with the conversation between Lalitaben and Charuben who discuss about their respective daughters-in-law. Lalitaben has one grandson and her daughter-in-law has just aborted pregnancy after three months with her acknowledgement. Lalitaben enquires about Surbhi, "has your daughter-in-law got something? Your Kinnar has been married since five years! Give her medical treatment, consult and refer her to some good female doctor" (75). The words of Lalitaben made Charuben feel mental pain and discontent. She feels that Lalitaben's daughter-in-law aborted pregnancy and hers is not able to conceive any. In their conversation Lalitaben tries to tease Charuben that beauty is of no use if they can't conceive a single child. Her reply better shows her character. She also has desire to play with her children's children but somehow it's not happening. Surbhi runs a beauty parlor who given up studies after S.S.C. Charuben is worried

about her because not only Lalitaben but everyone keeps enquiring and similar question is asked. Charuben and her family are affected by social rigidity.

Why did Surbhi not bear a child? It was not only Lalitaben alone saying such. Other women residing in the neighborhood and serving with Surbhi in the school also, under one or the other pretext, kept asking Charuben, does the daughter-in-law have something? Has the daughter-in-law something or not? Why does the daughter-in-law have nothing? (76-77)

The story centers on this particular question of woman's fertility and her relationship with family. This enquiry always makes Charuben serious and displeased. Such talks affected Surbhi as well. She did not come out as usually she greet with her mother-in-law. In her way to school, Charuben meets a group of pilgrims going to Ambaji. She learns that they have undertaken the religious vow to get child, and they are going to complete that vow. The old woman said that; "This baby girl is the birth of Laxmi. She has fulfilled my hopes. I have completed 80 years. Even then I can walk and it is only because of such power and strength!" (79). Looking at that old lady Charuben takes a vow in her mind that she will go "as a pedestrian to have 'darshan' of Ambaji Maa" (79) if Surbhi gives birth to a child. She takes the religious way in order to console herself. She respects Surbhi not only as her daughter-in-law but she treats her as her own daughter and therefore she never asked her about child. She took that only to make her contented because everyone who meets her- friends, relatives, and neighbor constantly keep reminding this only thing which made her irritated and confused. She got tired hearing those taunts and satires and started over thinking that: "now what to do? What way should be made out? What should be told to poor Surbhi?" (80). She is bit hesitated in discussing this matter with Surbhi. She doesn't want hurt her sentiments and properly takes care to ensure that. She reminds the conversation between Surbhi and Kinnar which she unwittingly heard about four month ago,

Surbhi, you do not make haste in getting yourself consulted by a doctor. It is true that you want a child- you love children very much, but still we are young and we have to move here and there and right from now if a long line will start you will get bored and tired; with the birth of one or two children your figure will be disfigured. Within five years, you will get dilapidated. In taking care and looking after them you will forget me also. (81)

Relatives, neighbors and others who always enquired about her were unaware of this fact. The relationship between them is different. They lived in city and as per that their belief system is different. But Surbhi is disappointed at her husband's views. She told, "Even woman certainly has an ambition of bearing motherhood. I have also a yearning for becoming a mother" (81). She knows that because of her, mother-in-law has to listen 'unworthy utterances'. On Sunday morning she heard Surbhi's voice and wakes up. The story ends with a happy note that "the daughter-in-law has positively have something"⁸⁵. She is happy about her daughter-in-law and her son. The story illustrates the social rigidity where people give judgments about woman and her life. The author has thoughtfully presented this theme in this story. Until the birth of a child woman is not respected for being woman and human. In this story the treatment of theme is distinctly presented than *How is Mother?*

Conclusion

The treatment of the theme of woman predicament is distinctly presented in both the short stories. In her stories Chandraben Shrimali has portrayed different perspectives on motherhood and child birth. Whether the story is of *How is Mother?* or *Does the daughter-in-law have something?* ultimately woman is suffered and regarded as responsible for not fulfilling the desire. In both the short stories, *How is Mother?* and *Does the daughter-in-law have something?* the question of woman's fertility and motherhood is at the centre. The first is set in a village, which depicts the story of a

woman who fails to give birth to child and she is set on fire by her own husband in order to remarry and get child from 'new wife'. And the later also centers on the motherhood of a woman married for more than five years. Both stories present the pains and predicament of woman but the treatment of theme is entirely different in both stories.

Works Cited

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