CHAPTER IV

DIFFERENTIAL - IMAGE

(The image of woman in the novels of men writers).

"We, men are knights whose quest is that freedom to which our ideals call us. She, who makes for us the banner under which we fare forth is the true woman for us. We must tear away the disguise of her and know her for what she is".

‘Nikhil’ in Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘The Home and the World’ MADRAS - 1976 pp-143-144

Tagore’s belief is that man, unlike woman, is a seeker after the infinite and that woman’s love is only an aid in his search for freedom. Man’s calling is thus different from that of woman.

History is a record of the experience of man, written by man according to man’s point of view. Hence, ‘war and politics’ are seen as more significant in the history of mankind, than child bearing and child rearing. This partiality for man’s activities recorded in history, does much harm to the woman’s point of view. When man gets social recognition to his ambitious exploits, it becomes the glorious part of our national history. His wars, conquests, destructions, raising barricades and drowning kingdoms all are viewed with awe and reverence, but nurturing of a culture and caring for the humanity by woman does not find place in history. The slighting references to woman and her achievements in history, myth and epics puts her in a disadvantageous position vis-à-vis man. This trend continues in literature also.

One cannot correctly comprehend the process of gradual development of woman without taking into account this background in the works of men writers. History of literature gives us a subdued image of woman which is the image of a weakling and a parasite, dwarf and hunchback. It creates a profound psychosis which can permanently jaundice man’s vision. The Indian women, according to R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Manohar Mulgaonkar, are more relevant interpretation of ‘the Indian psyche’. These writers have created some strong female characters in their novels. They are beyond such petty biases about the opposite sex. As
true artists they wanted to live through their characters. That is why their women characters are nearer to life.

There is a need for a shift in the perception to see how the women have fared at the hands of men writers. It is worth noting that much of the Indian English literature written by men, rejects the notion that woman has much power, but they acknowledge the fact that woman wields vast influence on man and society. This influence of woman is always 'unobtrusive', 'secret', 'unobserved', and like an 'under current' below the surface.


In the minds of men, women are associated with feelings, sentiments and emotion. They are seen as liking to talk about such abstractions as passion and love, sympathy and affection and so on. Women can argue about despair and loneliness, misery and happiness, sentiments and delicateness. Men cannot have this tendency because they have been discouraged from the beginning to discuss such matters or to display outwardly signs of such feelings.

Men writers use words to express emotion in such a different sense than what the women writers do, that the contrasts are vividly noticeable. So, in many respects, no matter which strata of society they come from, men writers see things in the same way, but from a different standpoint than women do. Men have rather a strong complacency towards the world of women. They consider that "women are there for men and not for themselves" 1.

Although many men writers are interested in the expression coded as feminine, but they are not interested in a particular woman and her plight or even the general plight of women. For them an issue, an event, a happening is more important than the woman involved in such issues and events. A male writer may simply need feministic way to express himself more fully because there he experiences the particular construction of his masculinity. He wrestles with patriarchal language or totally side steps the issue of gender equality.

Generally men writers have not fully justified their women characters. They impose
stereotypes on their women, except Bhabani Bhattacharya, Mulk Raj Anand, by monitoring their looks, their behaviour, their choice of work and even their involvement in conversation. The men writers do so in order to try and impose on women the delicacy they themselves are not permitted. But we are not supposed to enter into the politics of guilt. Our main consideration is why men writers have created particular kind of women characters, and why they are ashamed to be seen as gentle and caring for women. If it is argued that men writers are also genuinely gentle and compassionately caring for women but they refrain themselves from exhibiting it because of masculine arrogance, then it amounts to hypocrisy. But some men writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya, R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand can form friendship with women, despite the patriarchal supremacy their class boasts. They all have "the power to warm us towards their female characters in our hearts". These are the men writers who value the positive and distinct qualities in women and are not threatened by them.

Most of the men writers have handed down to us a stereotype of mother, caring, warm and tender and father, aggressive, competitive and seeking achievement outside the home. Most of the men writers demonstrate a high degree of egocentricity that is bound up with what they thought to be a man. Male selfishness is also often confused to be a masculine privilege. They seemed uneasy about the gentle aspects of their lives which they found hard to put into words. It was in the area of relationship with others, particularly with women, that they were confused about their role as a man.

Though the writers appear to be in a position of power and control and have got everything organized to suit them, that is not so. They sometimes have an uneasy feeling whether they are going in the right direction, why their writings are full of too many regrets, regrets about not being able to understand the nature of human relationship, regrets at suppressing, instead of developing the human qualities of tenderness, gentleness and sympathy because their masculine world does not reward such attempts. Some men writers have allowed some of their deepest "feelings to fossilize", because to exhibit them through the women characters can be unmanly. They also do not practice the art of love making in novels because at best it makes them feel too vulnerable and at their worst. The world of feelings and emotions which is considered to be the
forte of women writers are difficult for men writers to handle.

Although some writers have shown intense love and concern while writing about their heroines, it is not immediately clear whether this is the tip of an emotional ice berg or all that they have to show. It seems that they are not comfortable at talking about their hidden feelings which are stifled or camouflaged.

The emotional world of woman is difficult for a man to penetrate and understand. The toughened and hardened exterior as well as interior of man, while passing through all the seasons of life, must have made man insensitive to the delicate feelings and sentiments of woman. This must be one of the reasons for causing rupture between man’s and woman’s feelings. Very few men understand women’s point of view.

Women have a wider repertoire of feelings. Generally men are incapable of talking about some of the things women want to talk about. Men are bad at talking about other people’s feelings. They generally avoid or rather leave untouched the emotional confrontation or personal relations. They are handicapped at working out their most significant feelings. Men dig around themselves inside and think for a while whether they have anything to say. Some men need more time for this exercise.

Men believe in bottling up their emotions unaware of their reason for doing so or unaware of the effect it will have on them. But Indian English men writers, to some extent, leapt at opportunity to discuss what they felt through some of their female creations. It was, as though, they have at last decided to explore a taboo. Their analysis is surprising. They sulked openly about the release of aggression of courage and self-control but were not nervous about expressing tenderness or gentleness, qualities of compassion and sympathy.

Some drastic changes that have transformed the lives and horizons of million of women over the last two or three decades, find true reflection in the novels of men writers, though it has also opened up deep crevices for men, leaving them often shaken and confused. The old stereotype image of female is gradually changing because many men are striving at bridging the gap between these two extremities - man and woman.

Some men writers are begining to voice their rejection of male stereotype for they are
outgrowing the uncomfortable straight jacket of traditional masculinity, the masculine preference for logical thought rather than feeling and the constant need to prove themselves, to do rather than to be. There are men writers who are obliged to change their outlooks towards women and that could bring about a revolution in women's lives. Some revolutionary ideas of men about women, might be the right mean to project 'true to life' and sincere image of women before the world. For a woman to come out of the patriarchal mess, she has to have the full support of patriarchy itself. Man, who is a prime mover behind her, should be sympathetic towards woman. Then only something worth while could be achieved towards women's emancipation.

To underscore the fact that there are vibrant analogical possibilities in the female and male novelistic perceptions of woman, even if the culture is male oriented, representative texts of Indian English men writers are taken to perceive the 'relationship' or 'differentia' in the image projection of Indian women. The two views are not in opposition but in correlation.

Analyzing the image of women in the works of Indian English men writers is like viewing the other side of the coin. The writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and others depict almost the same face or similar face of woman in their novels. The differences in style, technique and approach are understandable between a man novelist and a woman novelist.

Allowance has also been made for factors like variations in personal temperaments, family upbringing, regional associations and the like. More important than these are the social attitudes they have developed, through years, which may or may not strictly amount to a philosophy of life. These attitudes could be gleamed through their predictions and prejudices, favorite hobbies and pet aversions.
REFERENCES

1. Laura Claridge, Elizabeth Langland - ‘Out of bounds - Male writers and Gender’ (Ed.) - Criticism.


3. Laura Claridge, Elizabeth Langland - ‘Out of bounds - Male writers and Gender’ (Ed.) - Criticism.
Robert Pyne comments in the 'Saturday Review' that Bhabani Bhattacharya writes in a language which is not English, yet all the words are English. It is a language of the heart, projecting to the readers the pain and anguish of the poor, during certain man made and natural calamities in the country. This novel describes a major historical crisis and transmutes it into vivid, throbbing fictional patterns. Bhattacharya holds that literature must say something from the society's point of view. "Art is not necessarily for Art's sake". As he mainly derives inspiration from the contemporary events, his novels are a sort of running commentary on the social and political conditions of our country.

It is Bhattacharya's interest in the contemporary history which initially inspired him to write 'So many Hungers'. He comments - "when I was a student in London in the thirties, I started writing a novel. Half way through, I thought it was no good and I was not destined to become a creative writer. I tore up the manuscript......... Back in India I found other pre-occupations. Early in the forties I tried to do a novel again. When half written, it found its way into a heap of unwanted papers. Then the great famine swept down upon Bengal. The emotional stirrings I felt......... were a sheer compulsion to creativity. The result was the novel "So many Hungers". A 'sufficient emotional response' to famine as suggested by Iqubal Bakhtiar.

Committed writer as he was, Bhattacharya wrote on the emotionally touchy themes like the terrific Bengal famine. Thereafter writing novels with a social purpose, became his main


preoccupation. We see particularly in this novel, that he has emphasised the dehumanizing consequences of the terrible famine along the length and breadth of the country. He gives us quite a few stark images of the people who are the victims of poverty and hunger. He wields a curious power, a power generated from the vortex of the abyssmal calamity that befell Bengal. As Marlene Fischer says "In 'So many Hungers', the Bengal famine is more than just a background, it is the very heart of the book".

During the famine a few black marketeers started hoarding rice and as a result hunger multiplied many folds. This is the main theme of the novel. The story revolves around a strange assortment of people whom "fate prompted to try out, evolve and assiduously practice for some time a daring social experiment".

The famine was so terrible and harrowing that 'human endurance ebbed. Hungry children cried themselves to death streams of desperate men turned out of their ancestral homes in search of food. Corpses lay by the road, huddling together, picked to the bones, only the hair uneaten, the baby's hair, men's hair, the waist long hair of woman' *(p. -242)

Kajoli, a poor peasant girl of Barauni village, illustrates the sufferings of the rural population, during the time of famine. The novel focuses on how the members of her family are reduced to destitute because of the man-made famine. How Kajoli fights the adverse situations, maintains her dignity and how much she is influenced by the Gandhian ideas, are the major issues discussed in the novel. As Chandrashekhar states "The sad fate of Kajoli is a pathetic record of what happened to more than two million men and women who became victims of a famine, which was not an act of God, but which was brought about by the rapacity and selfishness


All further page references shall be from this edition.
Kajoli lived with her mother, father, an elder brother Kanu and a younger brother Onu, in Barauni village. They lived a life of utter poverty and extreme despair. Barauni was a village haunted by the ghost of famine. Scarcity of food, particularly of rice, makes the people to leave the village and go elsewhere in search of food. Kajoli understands that the villagers are being exploited by hoarders like Samarendu Basu and it is the Gandhian prototype Devesh Babu, who tries to save the villagers from exploitation. Kajoli slowly comes under the influence of the Gandhian ideas, which impress her most. At a time when the physical chastity and moral virtues are at stake, Kajoli needs a crutch, not only to support herself, but her family also from total disintegration.

Bhattacharya believes that Gandhian ideals instill the required courage, moral strength and will in the people to survive at the time of utter crisis. Kajoli understands that 'those who do not resort to some principles or ideals to discipline their minds in the times of crisis, particularly crisis of food, there is no hope for such people'. (p.-26)

There is hunger everywhere, doing its devil dance. Bhattacharya himself explains that in this novel he has spoken of "all the intensified hungers of the historic years, 1942-43, not of food alone, the money hunger, the sex hunger, the hunger to achieve India's political freedom". 'So Many Hungers' are surrounding the poor destitute of Barauni and Bengal. Kajoli and her likes are 'hungry' of food, Rahoul, the astro physician in the university of Calcutta is 'hungry' for political freedom, Girish, the grocer turned money lender in Baruni, represents another from of hunger, 'hunger' for money. Compelled and intimidated by all these exploiters, the villagers, one by one, sell their crops. The meagre land holdings are also taken away for some measurers of rice. Totally oppressed, the villagers have neither will nor strength to fight back. To a hungry man even if God wishes to visit, he must visit him in the form of bread.

Hunger is his biggest religion and he wants his hunger to be satisfied first. In addition to exploitation there are man made barriers of caste and class to add to their woes. Bhattacharya expresses his intense disgust towards cruelty and hypocrisy in Indian social life at its lowest ebb. Probably the writer is trying to suggest that, hunger breeds all sorts of corruption and exploitations. A hungry man is ready to commit any sin. The second fact which the writer highlights with equal competence is the human nature which tends to fish in troubled waters. Let people suffer, but their aims must be fulfilled, be it political, economic or any other.

As this juncture there is a shift in the story. When the situation goes out of control, when humanity is abused for a measure of rice and when moral virtues are at stake, Bhattacharya brings before us a woman "An ideal Indian woman heralded by Gandhian thoughts"7, Kajoli, to set an example of courage and conviction. She becomes a mascot to the villagers. Man cannot breakdown so easily in crisis when there is some hope for him. The only condition is that there shall be some proper person to lead him. He has to get up and face all his oppressors. Bhattachrya believes in human dignity and his beliefs are mirrored in Kajoli, when he says 'you are not supposed to cry, we are fighters all' (p. -71)

As the famine continues, there is no rice in the house and Kajoli's family, like other families in the village, lives on roots and dry stale fruits. They sell almost every thing in the house including cow bells. The family's suffering due to scarcity of food, makes Kajoli's mother feel worse. She feels that she is unable to fulfill her prime duty as a mother, nourisher and sustainer. She is no more the 'Annapoorna' of the house. She ends her life, so that there will be one less mouth to be fed in the family. The supreme sacrifice that Kajoli's mother makes for her children makes her the paragon of feminine virtues. As she prepares to say good bye to her family, she pleads with God to hold her guilty of the past sins of her children. This nameless mother of Kajoli symbolises the motherhood itself, to show what a mother can do for her children. 'In silence she blessed her son and daughter, committing them to the care of all gods. Let bright

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After the death of her mother Kajoli the eldest daughter in the family, naturally takes the position of a 'nurturer'. She is looked upon as mother now. She does a lot of manual work in the field and the words of Devesh Babu act as a balm to her sore mind. He infuses in her love for country, compassion towards her fellow beings and passion for the country's independence. Kajoli is alone in her heroic fight. She has a brief spell of joy when she gets married to Kishore another 'hungry' freedom fighter. But he too becomes a victim of policeman's bullets when he goes to Calcutta to earn his livelihood. Pregnant and helpless, Kajoli along with her younger brother Onu, leaves for the city in search of a new beginning.

Bhattacharya brings out here the ultimate exploitation of woman by man. He forces her into flesh trading which is another horrid 'hunger'. Tragedy seems to be Kajoli's lot. After days of starvation, she asks a soldier for bread and he rapes her. It is said that man's cruelty towards man is exceeded only by man's cruelty towards woman. The most harrowing episode in the novel is when bleeding Kajoli is attacked by a 'hungry' jackal. 'A piercing shriek, a deep heavy groan from her awakens him to his senses and he finds that she is bleeding and unconscious'.

A passerby admits her to the hospital where she miscarriages.

Kajoli is not vanquished. She takes this tragedy in her stride. She is neither vindictive nor bitter. She leaves the hospital, more determined than ever, to fight against her fate and better her lot. At this point, she sees her brother Onu eating from the garbage pit. Onu's pathetic expression when he says - 'those garbage cans....... they are our food banks. We pick out of them before the city's scavengers come with their vans, some times we pick at nights.... competition. I saw two women fighting like animals over a dust bin.... it happened yesterday'.

In her village Kajoli had spurned the agent who had come to entice hungry girls into prostitution, but now when she sees her brother eating from the garbage pit, she decides to take the extreme step of going to a brothel. As Kajoli and the betel woman approach the brothel
house, a newspaper boy is heard shouting 'paper, Hindusthan, Dehra Dun prisoners start hunger strike' (p.-194). At once Kajoli stops 'a bell of memory somewhere in her rang suddenly' (p.-194). She asks the betel woman the name of the patriot and she tells 'man with a Godly beard. I saw a picture of him. Devesh babu, that's the name'. (p -795).

Kajoli felt ashamed of herself, of her trivial mind, of accepting defeat, of losing her moral strength when faced with misfortune. She encourages herself, she inspires herself 'Be strong, Be true, Be deathless'. She repeats it like a mantra which rings in to her ears and which goes on increasing in its intensity as she withdraws her steps away from the brothel. She decides to earn her livelihood by selling newspapers.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's female characters take on life squarely. Kajoli for instance, passes through all sorts of troubles under the sun, hunger, death of her husband, migration to the city and tumbling on the threshold of a brothel. Out of this turmoil a new Kajoli emerges, this time more determined to live at all cost.

The characterization of Kajoli is a vindication of modern Gandhian ideals. Bhattacharya repeatedly focuses on Kajoli, who being a victim of circumstances, emerges a complex symbol of the mother land.

It is a deeply moving and impressive narrative of the woes and untold miseries of the famine-struck people. Therefore it has to be taken as a "worthy illustration of how contemporary history can be transformed by socially conscious artist, into fiction of permanent relevance to mankind"8.

MOHINI - 'MUSIC FOR MOHINI' - (1952).

From a major natural calamity, affecting the very texture of the society in Bengal, engulfing men, women, and children, leaving an indelible mark on the psyche of an average Indian, Bhattacharya now raises some fundamental questions regarding woman being considered only a 'vehicle' for producing children. Is woman not capable of anything more than that? Does her identity begin and end with only being a mother?

Mohini, as the name implies, is a vivacious, charming, funloving girl born and bred in a large town. In keeping with her upbringing, her ideas too are broad and progressive. The novelist writes about her - 'She needs life, feelings. She was not curious about East-West cultural patterns' (p.-105) Mohini lives life with full zest. She smiles, muses, sings with gay abandon in her melodious voice and lives in a dream world of romance. She is Bhattacharya's epitome of love, life and pleasure and everything that is beautiful on this earth. Such a beautiful creature cannot survive in any form of bondage. She needed space to grow.

Mohini gets married to Jayadeva, 'a silent solitary man with heavy lidded dreamy eyes in a young tranquil face'. He looked like a scholar, like a man about to 'reorientate the values of Hindu life'. He is a bookish man in search of knowledge through books. He expects his wife to be the right complement to him, by being very intelligent who can share his views on the philosophies of life. He also wishes that his wife should be like Gargi and Maitreyi, the great female scholars during the Vedanta period. If wishes were horses, beggars would ride. A chasm, between expectancy and reality, is created and once again the human drama takes an interesting turn.

Jayadeva wants Mohini to reach a level of ultimate knowledge of the soul, the highest power granted to mankind to be able to detach oneself from this materialistic world. Jayadeva called Mohini Maitreyi, who lived three thousand years ago. He wanted Mohini to be his

* Bhabani Bhattacharya - 'Music for Mohini'. New - Delhi. Orient Publication - 1952. All further page references shall be from this edition.
Maitreyi the wife and inspiration of seer Yajnyavalkya, the greatest thinker of his age who had strived for immortality'. (p. 104) But Mohini was an ordinary fun loving girl who had no intention nor ambition to be Maitreyi - 'She would rather live the common place things of life, like other girls. She was not made to be an idealist'. (p. 129) She is a life loving, lively woman who very much needed the presence of her husband by her side. She cannot fulfill the high expectation of Jayadeva. Jayadeva, on the contrary, wants to communicate with his wife on an intellectual plane, not giving any importance to the physical aspect of their relationship. Bhabani Bhattacharya compares and contrasts beautifully the characters of Jayadeva and Mohini, in an attempt to bring out the quest for knowledge and desire for beauty. Jayadeva is optimistic in aspiring for this unique union - a majestic synthesis of body and brain.

Initially Mohini does not like the serious aspects of her husband's character. She desires that he should love her, appreciate her beauty and praise her melodious voice. Jayadeva fails to understand her physical need, to be loved and appreciated. Mohini, on the other hand, does not understand her husband's quest for knowledge and his intellectual demands from her. So, Mohini feels lost and lonely. Both cannot come up to the expectations of each other.

The other members of the 'Big house' is her traditional mother-in-law, blinded by her out-dated and superstitious beliefs. The clash is inevitable as Mohini becomes the standard bearer of modernity and her mother-in-law, the opposite of it. The preservation of their old house and the perpetuation of its tradition is the greatest aim of Jayadeva's mother, who had dedicated her right hand to Shiva to ensure the safety of the family heir. The marriage mantra chants 'O Indra, king of all the Gods, let this lady be the mother of heroic sons' (p.no 74) and the only blessing Mohini's mother-in-law invokes from Lord Shiva is that Mohini should have male off spring. Mohini feels that her mother-in-law unnecessarily propitiates Gods because bearing children is completely a biological phenomenon and the Gods have no hand in it. The novelist does not want to discard the traditional superstitious beliefs of the mother-in-law as well as the logical explanation of Mohini. He brings about a reconciliation between the two extreme out looks, through another woman Rooplata, Mohini's sister-in-law who is living in...
the same house. She listens to the points of both the women, one modern, influenced by the western education and culture and the other traditional, moulded by centuries of customs and beliefs. She wants to bring about a fusion of the best in both the outlooks.

Rooplata infuses Mohini with courage and enthusiasm to cope with the difficult situation at home and cites some problems in her own marriage as an example. Rooplata knows that, to live in harmony, there is a need for synthesizing the opposites -‘we connect culture with culture, Mohini our old Eastern views of life with the new semi-Western outlook. This is more urgent today than even before. Our new India must rest on this foundation’. (p.-81)

Rooplata is a fine combination of the old and new and a writer like Bhabani Bhattacharya cannot be more prophetic than this. It is to the credit of the novelist that he has understood the right ‘music’ which could be produced by mixing the notes of opposite nature. Bhabani Bhattacharya always make a woman to voice the main theme of his novel, for he knows that a female voice is heard better than the male voice. It has more force, more effect. Rooplata, a connecting link between Mohini and her mother-in-law forms the third angle of the triangle. Unlike other love triangles this is the love and hate triangle formed by three women only. Mohini’s inability to communicate with her mother-in-law is compounded when the former is accused of bareness. Mohini becomes guilt ridden as ‘she wouldn’t bear the strain’ (p. -129). For the Indian woman, “fertility is the path to power. She must procreate to establish an identity and status”. For Jayadeva, she is not like Gargi or Maitreyi and for the mother-in-law she does not give a grand-son. Both the demands seemed to Mohini unreasonable and illogical. She never claimed herself to be anything more than a ‘normal human being’. She is not at fault for not bearing a son. Mohini is threatened by the possibility of her husband taking a second wife (Katyani ?) to get a male issue in the family.

Mohini comprehends Rooplata’s wisdom in dealing with such a personal crisis and resolves

to bring happiness to the 'Big house'. She may not be a Gargi or Maitreyi but she knows how to fight for her rights in the family, without disturbing its peace and tranquility. Bhabani Bhattacharya’s women do not accept defeat easily. They know how to make the best use of the worst situation they are in. Mohini takes up the work of educating the illiterate village women and now she has the sense of achievement and contentment. Bhattacharya says ‘life once so empty, was now full’. Mohini understands that there is a special kind of satisfaction and a deep sense of achievement in imparting knowledge to others. Enlightening others about their ignorance and making them more aware about the things around them, gives one a sense of spiritual accomplishment. She slowly understands Jayadeva’s insistence on making her listen to all the Puranas and Vachanas. Was it not with the intention of making Mohini more knowledgeable about life, as she was trying to do with others? She comes to comprehend her husband’s attitude towards her.

Rooplata suggests to Mohini to go to her city - home for a month to rest her troubled mind, but Mohini rejects. She had already made up her mind to stay at the 'Big house' and try to understand her mother-in-law and her husband in order to solve all her problems one by one. There is no use of running from the crisis. One has to face life squarely.

Mohini wants to mould herself according to the expectations of her husband ‘for his sake she would absorb new ways of thought and habit, cultivate new interests. She set her mouth, life was serious business and she was no doll in silk and satin. She was the mistress of the Big house, a position higher than any other women’s in Behule village. She had duties to discharge, responsibilities to fulfil. How could she let herself be defeated by discomfort and dislocation’ (p.-106)

The crisis in the novel reaches its climax when Mohini is almost forced to offer her blood in a cup for the Devi, an ancestral Goddess of the family. She is rescued in the nick of time by her husband who explains to his mother the futility of such superstitions. He tells further that propitiating the Goddess shall in no way make Mohini a mother. Motherhood is not a religious
construct but it is a biological phenomenon.

Jayadeva is a truly educated man. In due course of time he had also changed his mother’s outlook. The result is that Mohini and her mother-in-law understand each other perfectly. They respect the views of each other and thereby emerges a sweet harmonious 'Music'.

After sometime, Mohini finds that she is pregnant and her position in the 'Big house' gains importance, as she is to become a mother. Her mother-in-law understands the reality in the light of reason. Bhabani Bhattacharya presents the view through his female protagonist that a joyful and happy life is possible only with the fusion of the conflicting values.

Through Mohini's joy and fulfilment the novelist sees that the family is orchestrated with fine 'Music' which pervades the atmosphere. It is to assert that a happy contented woman is a source of ultimate happiness in the family. She spreads fragrance everywhere. Music is being played all through the 'Big-House'. There is joy everywhere, which is the most important need of mankind. Charles Poore concluded an article on this novel in the New York Times as "We will all be Lucky if we meet a more appealing Heroine this year". He was moved by Mohini’s capacity for change, forecasting music in her life out of the many discordant notes.


The marxist and artist in Bhabani Bhattacharya tends to make him draw a sentimentalized picture of famine, poverty and the vulnerability of women. The concept of innocent victimisation of a woman is again the theme of this novel.

Kalo is an ordinary village blacksmith who stoically accepts his state of poverty and deprivation without any whimper. He considers it his 'Karma' to be in this inevitable position. He loses his wife in childbirth and literally lives for his daughter, Chandralekha, 'the moon tinted

2. As quoted by Bhabani Bhattacharya - 'Woman in my stories' - *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*. 

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girl'. She is not only beautiful but also intelligent. It is rare to find such a combination of beauty and brain in Kalo’s class of people. He considers his daughter to be a gift of God to a poor, impoverished and destitute like him. Kalo lives perennially in the past haunted by the memory of his dead wife and is brought back to the present, when he sees his beautiful daughter Chandralekha. She brings sunshine and hope into his dark, dull life.

The Bengal famine, once again forms the backdrop against which the story of Kalo and Chandralekha unfolds. A terrible famine ravaged the length and breadth of Bengal, particularly Calcutta, where Kalo had gone in search of employment. A massive migration takes place from the famine struck rural areas to the city, in the hope of survival. Kalo leaves behind Chandralekha with her grand mother in the village and comes to Calcutta. In the city he becomes a victim of the crooked capitalistic society. He is convicted for the crime of stealing a banana to satisfy his hunger.

Some of the incidents of 1943 Bengal famine, described in the novel, are so deeply moving as if the writer has witnessed them personally. Bhattacharya "simultaneously had to be objective to make an emotional impact on the reader, and to present his own picture"¹. Heart rending scenes of starvation and death are presented in a graphic manner, which has made Bhabani Bhattacharya to give "a lacerating account of the naked horror of it all"².

Kalo is released from the prison. Happy to be free at last, but finds the situations in Calcutta worse. The famine had taken its toll and wherever he looks, he sees a sea of suffering humanity. Many, like him, had become the unfortunate victims of the man made calamities and the capitalist trap in Bengal. Kalo finds no work, no food and he walks the streets of Calcutta along with the teeming millions, in search of job. Hunger over powers his little left morality and he starts serving at a brothel.

The brothel was a refuge for the young 'hungry' girls, who are brought from the rural areas, lured by the agents, for a fistfull of rice. Kalo is shocked to find his own daughter Chandralekha in the same brothel. He is furious at the conditions which made him a scavenger and a pimp and protests at his fate, that dragged his 'Celestial Chandralekha' to the brothel. His important anger was aimed at nobody in particular.

Kalo is a possessed man now. The simple village blacksmith realises that he and his likes will always be victimised. They are all on the rough side of life. No amount of protest will change this rotten system. He comes under the influence of Biten, once a fellow prisoner, and together they determine to bit back at the establishment. He sets out to strike at the elitist society. According to Kalo, the elite are the people, who form a vicious circle of exploitation and corruption in the society.

Chandralekha, along with her father, decides to face the society squarely, lending courage and support to each other. Together they find their courage doubled and determination strengthened to avenge the rich. Bhabani Bhattacharya suggests that unity, among any class of people, reduces their exploitation. Kalo and Chandralekha also act accordingly. They decide to 'Ride the Tiger' and twist its tail. Chandralekha is the author's most desired representation of womanhood, which can spite when spurned. The writer has shown, time and again, that it is the spirit of womanhood which can set things right and bring some sort of order in this chaotic world.

Chandralekha is a symbol of moral goodness and purity. She infuses confidence in her father and gets him ready to fight the battle. She proves that she too can stand shoulder to shoulder with man and fight for her rights. It is not only Kalo who rides the Tiger, but Chandralekha too. She redefines the aims and objects of her life. She realises that she has to be a fighter to live in this heartless society and it is the only way for a virtuous life. This world is only for the survival of the fittest. Fitness is measured not only in terms of physical strength, but in terms of a will to survive, to stand up with dignity and face life squarely. This is Bhabani Bhattacharya's philosophy of life expressed in all his novels.
Chandralekha who is lured by the agent to go to a brothel, decides to pay back in the same coin by exploiting man in the name of religion, a vulnerable point in a man's life.

Kalo and Chandralekha are donned in saffron robes and they make the elite of Calcutta to touch their feet. At the time of crisis, personal or social, man needs some crutches to lean upon and religion is the best crutch according to the novelist. Kalo understands this weakness of man and he exploits it. His action seems a proletarian attempt to fight the capitalist system by striking at one of its most vulnerable spots. Kalo is transformed gradually by putting the sacred thread across his chest, to become a brahmin. He not only adopts the Brahamanic posture but also the ways of behaviour. But a fear lurks somewhere in his mind that their secret should not be out. Kalo's dilemma was, whether to destroy the edifice that he has so painstakingly constructed or to continue to 'Ride the Tiger', whatever be the consequence. Finally Kalo decides to dismount the Tiger, when he sees that his daughter Chandralekha has become a sacrificial pawn in his diabolical ritual of revenge.

The novelist implies that if one sets a trap for others finally he himself gets caught in it. Victimising others amounts to victimisation of self. Chandralekha is forced to act the role of the mother of seven fold bliss, the 'Goddess' who represents the vital force of the cosmos. She is interpreted as expressing ideas of "power, autonomy and privacy". The author endeavours primarily to convey through his female protagonist, not so much the idea of physical motherhood, but a world view in which the creative power of femininity is central. Chandralekha is also used as a symbol of mother goddess to suggest the modern iconography of India as 'Mother Goddess riding a Tiger', 'Bharat Mata' and the use of the goddess for the end goal of Nationalism. These two images are the potential sources of empowerment. Chandralekha represents the female principle of creativity. She is the representation of a benevolent 'Shakti', the actualiser of Kalo's power, the weapon with which he strikes at the society.

The hollowness of such deification is strongly attacked by Bhabani Bhattacharya. He

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writes 'Out of a simple hearted teenage girl who made no claim to holiness, a girl like ten million others in Bengal, they created a lie as big as the lie inside the temple. They created the "mother of seven fold bliss". (p. - 228)

Kalo's and Chandralekha's are all self made images which may come crashing to the ground when exposed. Then they may question themselves which is the 'essence' and which 'derived'. Chandralekha is caught in the vortex of this duality and sometimes she rebels against such false sanctity 'but in her deification, more than her feelings, were involved. There was no escape from the simple hearted men and women who had come to pray to her with full hearts and bright faith. She was a tool in other hands. The fake but compulsive hands of the mother of seven fold bliss. She had destroyed the mother'. (p. - 274) She did not want to live a life of lie any more. She did not want to mourn her own death. When Chandralekha feels that the situation is closing around her, very heroically she dismounts the 'Tiger'. She neither gives in nor does she contemplate suicide. She rejects Motichand and walks away along with her father to search new meanings in life.


All further page references shall be from this edition.
MULK RAJ ANAND


This is the only novel where Mulk Raj Anand has a woman as its chief protagonist. He shows an excellent understanding about, and deep concern for, the victimisation of woman in her household as well as in the society. She is shown wriggling under this dual victimisation.

Behind the 'Passive' exterior of woman, there lies growing anger over her wasted energies. Women of rare pluck have dared, time and again, to give vent to their anger and anguish. Gouri in 'The Old Woman and the Cow' is such a character. Gouri took the courage to break the shackles of oppressive domestic life and get out of the prison like atmosphere, to breathe in the "refreshing world of modernity". Gouri's entire struggle is like one long journey towards self-realisation, where she emerges triumphant in the end. She is the symbol of "modern mother India", says H.C. Harrex.

It is rarely seen in Indian English fiction, that a wife walks out of her husband's house to find out an independent existence and to be the sole parent to her child. This goes against the womanhood in general and the Indian motherhood in particular, because in India there is not only emotional but spiritual bond between mother and child. But Anand, way back in 1960, tries to explore through Gouri, the possibility of a woman bringing up a child all alone, without bothering about social criticism. Even today single parenthood is still looked at with 'squint askance'. Anand seems to validate the belief that such decision empowers women like Gouri to act independently with regards to their children.

The novel opens with Gouri's marriage. The wedding descriptions are as elaborate as an

Indian wedding itself, full of hassles and harassments faced by the bride's party. Even the possibility of an eleventh hour cancellation of marriage could not be ruled out. Anand beautifully etches the pains and pangs of a bride's father in an Indian marriage. The obstacles at the time of wedding overshadow the doubt whether Gouri may live happily after marriage.

Dualism is the main bane to upset relations in Indian life. On the one hand we respect woman as 'mother' and on the other, we don't hesitate to 'kick' her if she is a wife. Anand aptly projects Panchi's mind on his way to marry Gouri. 'The prospects of the prize of a girl, a girl whom he could fold in his arms at night and kick during the day, who would adorn his house and help him with the work on the land' * (p. -5). The double standards the married men bear towards their wives, are made clear by the author through Panchi. The shameless self confession of Panchi is not typical of Mulk Raj Anand's heroes alone. This dualism is our cultural heritage because in one breath we deify woman and in the next we condemn her also.

Anand rejects the age old belief that woman is scared of man. She is weak and docile so man is the master. This equation of one-up manship is entrenched in the Indian psyche. Anand decides otherwise. He considers Gouri to be the 'Modern day Sita'. Instead of submitting to the whims and fancies of her husband, she is going to question him at every step and demand answer for his odd behavior. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly writes "the time honored womanly virtues of patience and submission", 3 is not going to fetch Gouri any status in the family.

It is hardly possible to suspect another without having in ones self, the seeds of baseness the other is accused of. Panchi himself having an incestuous relation with his own aunt Kesaro, doubts the fidelity of his wife Gouri. By nature a suspicious creature Panchi blames Gouri for all the misfortunes and miseries in his life. He goes to the extent of blaming Gouri for drought in his village, Piplan. Gouri feels it is unjust to hold her responsible for a natural calamity. She can


only 'feel' but cannot 'voice' her grievances. If she does so, her husband knows how to chastise her. Panchi is modelled after a typical egoistic husband, who believes, in his ignorance, that he reserves the right to punish his wife when she goes wrong. Physical force is the only weapon, man can use against woman to keep her is perpetual terror and submissiveness.

There is no emotional bond between Panchi and Gouri, neither there exists faith between them. Panchi has reduced his wife Gouri to such a state that she must offer her body to him without grumbling, in return he woes her with Hamam soap and stolen mangoes.

Gouri is caught between the devil and dark sea, Panchi and his aunt Kesaro. This woman enacts the role of a traditional mother-in-law, who is well versed in all the manifestations of cruelty towards Gouri and never misses an opportunity to find fault with her. Gouri slowly realises that some vital forces are being killed inside her.

Kesaro's relations with her husband Moola Ram are not smooth. Therefore all her anger and venom against her husband, Kesaro lets loose on Gouri. Moreover Kesaro finds Gouri a competitor for Panchi's attention. Such a relationship is beyond comprehension of a simple soul like Gouri. She tries her best to get Panchi out of this unholy alliance, but she fails in her efforts. Life goes on for Gouri, as she continues to wriggle in pain.

Gouri's misfortune is compounded when her husband doubts not only her fidelity but also the prospective father of the child to be born. Panchi's anger also mounts as he has to feed another mouth. Anand realistically works out the mental torture of Gouri because Panchi denies the fatherhood of the child. He refuses to provide shelter to her, as he thinks her to be infidel and tells his wife to go to her mother. Gouri is betrayed by her own mother Laxmi, who sells her to a rich banker Jai Ram Das. With the money she reclaims her mortgaged house and her cow. Laxmi belongs to a mountain tribe where there is no qualms for selling girls.

Laxmi does not conform to the stereotype of all sacrificing mother. Anand wants to 'reverse the well known myth to propagate a new ideal of womenhood'. But such image can only be an exception not an approved opinion of the writer. Laxmi views Gouri as a burden.
daughter once married severs all connection with her maternal home. Woman like Gouri, can neither claim her husband's home as her own nor have any right over her father's house. She is on a 'no man's land'. Let down by her husband and betrayed by her mother, Gouri faces animosity from two corners, one from the opposite sex and the other from her own.

Gouri is in a precarious condition as the crisis goes on mounting in her life. But she gains strength of character from her moral uprightness. She has to resist another temptation in the form of Batra's amorous advances. Crisis always have a singular advantage that they force us to think and as Thomas Paine puts it "Crisis is the time that try men's souls". Gouri undergoes several trials and tribulations to maintain her virtue. Her employment in Col. Mahindra's hospital widens her perception and strengthens her will to gain economic independence. Her stay at the hospital does wonders to her self esteem. Her primary functions at the hospital remain the same as in Panchi's house, scrubbing and cleaning. But the dignity attached to the work in the hospital is much more than pandering to the ego of her husband. Of the many hard lessons that Gouri learns, the hardest and the most painful is, that it is not safe to rely on anyone in important matters. One must journey through life alone and to rely exclusively on others is to invite frustration. Gouri realises this truth a bit later. Gouri is Anand's woman of moderation and wisdom.

Slowly Anand transforms Gouri into a wise woman. This transformation would not have been effective if Gouri was 'weak and supine'. "The impact of modernity ... would have been lost upon a weak and supine nature". Gouri returns to Panchi and he is bewildered by the change in her. But before returning, she is armed with the weapon of economic independence. 'No longer was she .... the shy gentle cow, that she had been. She seemed alert and dignified, her movements full of strength' (p. -271.) Now Panchi thought twice before raising his hand to

beat her. The boldness and the strength of character emitting from her stopped Panchi. Gouri very well understood that one can never achieve anything lasting by being submissive and irresolute. She sees no road too long for her to advance and she prepared herself for the remaining arduous journey. She sets the measure of her freedom by her own convictions. Her convictions are not inflexible which will again make her the victim of circumstances.

Gouri's every effort is aimed at strengthening her conviction to be her own independent self, so that the events of tomorrow will bring happiness and not misery. She keeps herself prepared to leave the house, never to come back, if Panchi dares throw her out. She has a much better chance now to discover those alternatives which will lead eventually to her emancipation.

She takes up the responsibility of educating the illiterate villagers about health, sanitation and hygiene. She shares her new found knowledge and awareness with others.

This is Gouri's greatness that she tries to help all those unfortunate women like herself, who are the victims of superstitions and ill treatment from their husbands. She is not teaching them to revolt, but to be aware of themselves as human beings. They should know who they are, what they want so that they should not be taken for granted. Gouri takes care not only of her 'self' but also of her 'social self'.

Panchi, the suspicious husband, is again provoked by men regarding the fidelity of his wife and he questions the legitimacy of the child. Gouri cannot swallow this insult easily this time. She has already learnt from her previous experience not to submit weekly to Panchi's abuses and allegations. It dawns on her that there are two ways of escaping from the suffering and humiliation. The first by rising above the causes of conflict, the other by sinking below them. Gouri gathers her strength, makes up her mind and announces her decision to leave the house and go back to work in Col. Mahindra's hospital. A meal earned with her hard work is better any day than two square meals a day at her husband's house. "Economic self sufficiency would concretize her claims for Independence". 6

to get stagnated. She wants to hit back at her husband and those rotten male companions of her husband. The transformation in Gouri has been told thus.

'Her face shone, from the pressure of her stricken heart, transfigured from the gentle cow's acquiescent visage of the time when she had arrived in Panchi's house, to that of a woman, with a will of her own'. (p. 272).

Gouri represents 'motherhood' in its truest sense. Her motherhood takes a universal form. A symbol of pity and kindness, when she also decides to spend her time in nursing and looking after the ailing people in the hospital. There is a culmination of a woman, a mother and Florance Nightingale in the character of Gouri. Anand's Gouri is an active person opposing her humiliation. Unlike other women, who have to limit their protests within the framework of society. Gouri sheds "her narrow domestic coils and emerges with fresh lease of life". Gouri's greatness lies not in never falling, but in rising every time she falls. Her real glory springs from the silent conquest of her fear. Without that she is nothing, but a slave again.

Commenting on the novel in his interview with Marlene Fisher, Anand justifies the "slow and sure change" in Gouri's personality. "Sudden revolt would not be possible in Indian life. I didn't want to show anything alien to her consciousness. But the growth of conscience in Gouri from innocence to experience is a very important purpose of that novel".  

Gouri rejects her husband's home and is prepared to bring up the child herself. Anand enunciates a new myth in the society. She escapes from the patriarchal house-hold, strengthened by her imminent motherhood. Anand prove a point that a woman is a mother first then a wife, and 'motherhood' need not be enclosed and defined within the parameter of a home. It can find sustainance outside too. Gouri boldly walks away with the hope that 'her child would not be a coward that Panchi was or as weak as he had been'. (p-284)
Anand makes another significant assertion that economic independence would mitigate sufferings of woman to a considerable extent. This is a new face of the Indian womanhood which the readers of Anand would like to look at. Through Gouri, Anand is confronting the entire feminine breed and suggesting them a whole new world of possibilities.
It is obvious that 'the Hindu psyche' is not a biological, genetic and ethnic endowment. What is typically Hindu is a set of Hindu cultural norms, mores, and patterns of social operation. So strong are the mythical and traditional images embedded in the psyche of Indian woman and in the cultural fabric of Indian society that she feels overwhelmed by them. The confined, claustrophobic, domestic life of Indian woman is presented in Narayan's 'The Dark Room' (1938). The 'room' reflects the patriarchal power structure, controlling woman's activities. The novel is an early treatment in Indian English fiction of female subversion. As R.K. Narayan himself has suggested that the genesis of his novel lay in his sympathetic response to the women's movement in the West as typified by Ibsen's Nora Helmer. In his own words "I was some how obsessed with a philosophy of Woman as opposed to Man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament of the Women's Liberation movement. Man assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning that she herself began to lose all notion of her independence, individuality, stature and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances. My novel dealt with this philosophy in the background".

Savithri, a traditional wife and mother of three children in an orthodox Brahmin family, is happy in marriage though "the euphoria of marriage is at times marred by, her self examination


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of her wife and mother's roles." However she does not allow her inner urge to be exhibited and does not violate the family's code of conduct. She is totally dependent on her husband Ramani, a man with an inflated ego, affluent, holding a good job and is an authoritative male head of the family. He believes 'woman's primary duty and also a divine privilege was being a wife and a mother' *(p. - 92).

Savithri appears to be a woman without any will or mind of her own, passive and subservient. For fifteen long years she was an obedient wife to Ramani, always conforming to his ideas, opinions and tasks. He has always treated her as a pet and as his personal property. Savitri also has accepted this position. For her there was no other meaning of existence than being subservient to her husband. Like Nora, Savithri has all these years, been a 'doll' and living in a 'doll's house'. It is the religious ideology which pushes woman into domesticity and confines her to housekeeping and child rearing, leading to subordination by domestication.

Savithri does not have the decision making power in the family. When she does intervene, she is reminded of her powerlessness. '...... mind your business, do you hear... go and do your work in the kitchen, but leave the training of a grown up boy to me. It is none of a woman's business' (p -1). She faces crisis in her life even after fifteen years of her marriage. Her husband Ramani philanders by having a secret alliance with Shanta Bai who is sexually attractive. Savithri feels not only humiliated and hurt but also her 'womanhood' abused, her very existence nullified. She expects the same chastity and loyalty from Ramani as was expected of her. She decides to rebel and walk out of her house but Narayan's Savithri is a simpleton and does not know of her destination.

Before taking the final plunge, Savithri requests her husband to see reason and to save the family from disintegration. She cries, cajoles and claims that her husband belonged to her


totally and the house was hers completely. But the only space offered to her for retreat is the 'Dark room', without light or air. Her withdrawal into the dark room indicates her growing claustrophobia in the traditional wife/mother roles which had earlier sustained her identity. This withdrawal to a dark recess of the house indicates the only form of passive resistance which a woman could offer against the patriarchal control and which is more or less, a sort of self inflicted torture. According to S.C. Harex - “the 'Dark room' symbolises the emotional emptiness and domestic claustrophobia which can result from a circumscribed marital orthodoxy.”¹ Savithri raves and rants and sheds tears but her husband remains unaffected. Seeing Savithri sulking, her elderly neighbour Janamma tells her, 'I have never opposed my husband or argued with him at any time in my life. I might have occasionally suggested an alternative but nothing more. What he does is right. It is a wife's duty to feel so' (p. 42).

Men like Ramani believe in separate codes for man and woman, wife and mistress. It is ironical that he runs after Shanta Bai while glorifying the traditional Indian womanhood. He advises his wife 'Indian woman should be blind in their primary duties of being wives and mothers' (p. 92). He remembered all the heroines of the epics whose one dominant quality was a blind stubborn following to their husbands, 'like the shadow following the substance' (p.p. 92-93). This double standard is a part of the game of the patriarchal lifestyle. The woman like Savithri, who does not know how to manipulate, suffers in life. She feels 'betrayed' as Ramani is insensitive to her feelings and to his own transgression and behaves as if nothing outrageous has happened.

Savithri realises that she has absolutely no importance in the family. Her presence was taken for granted by her husband. It dawns on her '.... I don't possess anything in the world, what possession can a woman call her own, except, her body? Everything else that she has is her father's, her husband's or her son's'. (p.117)

Savithri has no self identity. She is somebody's daughter, somebody's wife and somebody's

mother. She is a jelly of a being. As she decides to leave the claustrophobic atmosphere of the four walls of her house, her helplessness hits her. She feels that the mother inside her is tugging at her heart and she sobs. ‘What will the children do without me?’ Ramani has his answer ready - 'They will get on splendidly without you, don't you worry. No one is indespensable in this world' (p.-75). Ramani claims that the children are his and this shatters the myth of motherhood as even her 'motherhood' is questioned. Savithri realises that she does not even have any right over her own offspring. She says ...... 'Yes you are right. They are yours, absolutely. Your paid the midwife and the nurse. You pay for the clothes and teachers. You are right. Didn't I say that a woman owns nothing'. (p.-118). Although Savithri is the mother of three children, she can exercise no right over them. She is an Indian mother who can give birth but cannot give her child a social identity. “She is the ‘soil’ into which the man ‘sows’ his seeds and therefore can claim the child as his” . Savithri is horrified to know that neither she is needed by Ramani as his wife nor by her children as their mother. Then why this futile existence? She takes courage to leave them all and see if she could find any other meaning of her ‘self’ than as a “mother” or a ‘wife’. She questions herself amazed at her own strength. 'Am I the same old Savithri, or I am someone else?' (p.-77). It is her frustration, her helplessness in not being able to control her husband and being wronged without any fault of her own. She realises that she was not meant to be a possession of her husband. There has always been a mutinous instinct in her, which had so far been kept in check by her sense of conventional propriety. The social decorum, according to which she had always behaved, now seems to her to be an unfair imposition upon a woman.

She got tired and tried to drown herself in the Sarayu river but is saved. Then she seeks a job in a temple and the priest gives her the task of sweeping the temple courtyard for a measure of rice and a pinch of salt. For few days it looks like a new beginning for her, living the life of an ascetic, away from the bondage of family and the world. But Savithri’s mind is not yet ready for such total alienation. She is still bounded by ‘Moha’ or ‘desire’ to lead a family life. This again leads to dissatisfaction. The joy of deliverance cannot last long, as Savithri has only moved

from the 'darkness of the house' to the 'darkness of the temple'. Narayan's Savithri implies that woman need the protection of four walls however claustrophobic they may be. If at all they want to create an individual identity, it has to be within the boundary of a house. It is the 'sanctum - sanctorum'.

Savithri imagines the hungry faces of her children with uncombed hair. Tears well up in her eyes and her temporary revolt crumbles as she decides to return home. 'A nostalgia for children, home and accustomed comforts seized her....... her soul racked with fears'. (P. -195)

Savithri loves her husband and children more than she loves her 'self', hence she fails in her attempts at autonomy and returns to the familiar roles of mother/wife beyond which she can create no other identity. She is back to the point from where she had set out in quest for autonomy. Williams, H.M. states that Savithri is "not selfish enough to abandon her family, therefore it is her glory".

Savithri is full of conflicting responses and at the end of the novel she admits defeat. 'what desperate creatures of God are we that we can't exist without a support. I am like a bamboo pole, which cannot stand without a wall to support it..... this is defeat. I accept it I am no good for the fight. I am a bamboo pole' (p. p -123-24).

In order to justify her final decision of coming back to the family, Savithri glorifies the concept of motherhood which extols the ideology of self abnegation and selfless love. She convinces herself that motherhood is her prime role and so she returns to the humdrum of daily life.

Savithri's revolt and quick retreat are alternate facts of the Indian woman's predicament in a society, where orthodox traditions still have considerable influence on woman. Savithri symbolises the average Indian woman, who as Krishnaswamy says is "pushed from one set of non-choice to another in a relentless vicious circle".

While recapitulating her fifteen years of married life Savithri ruminates that it could have been better if 'she had asserted herself a little more at the beginning of her married life. (p.-80)

This awareness is sufficient to begin with. Women like Savithri are happy and contended within the steel framework of their domestic life, encompassing the roles of a mother and a wife, what they demand is little more respect and an acknowledgement of their positive presence and importance in the family. Narayan represents that Indian woman, who though conventional, can revolt against male oppression, living within the enclosed domestic circle.


'Bharati' is another image of woman who has an innate capacity for wiseness, strength, patience which are the attributes of a morally superior woman. Bharati also becomes the symbol of political conscience of the new nation-in-the making. She is neither meek nor submissive, but an epitome of all those qualities which are found in the urban middle class woman. She is one of those women, who, having come under the influence of Gandhi and the precepts of non-violence is a true image of what a modern Indian woman should be.

The story is very simple. It begins in the period shortly before India gained her independence. Narayan depicts here the influence of a woman not only on the persons close to her, but also on the immediate surrounding. Bharati, as the name implies infuses courage, strength and the will to succeed in all, who comes in contact with her. She is an endless source of inspiration to others. Depicting the freedom movement of India, Narayan believes that only by the involvement of the devoted woman like Bharati the freedom struggle would become effective.

Under her benign influence, Sriram 'a granvys boy', her fiance, changes from a callous youth to a devotee of the Mahatma, capable ultimately to exhibit such characters as sacrifice, altruism and charity. Correspondingly Narayan adorns Bharati with qualities like belief in non-violence, personal integrity, social consciousness and responsibility, love and compassion for
the downtrodden and uplifting the status of women. Bharati's immediate concerns, were very similar to those voiced by the women's liberation activists all over the world. She was a sort of trendsetter to the new generation of women. Women like Bharati propagate equality of sex and dignity of women in male dominant society.

Narayan highlights Bharati's attributes to such an extent that Sriram pales in comparison- 'He was frightened of her. She seemed too magnificent to be his wife' *(p. -167)* After Savithri Bharati is projected as an ideal Indian woman, who, given the right opportunity and a conducive atmosphere can make the male pale beside her. Bharati is a product of the period of the struggle for Independence, who has a patriotic fire burning in her, which submerges all things around.

Bharati comes under the influence of Gandhi, so we could say, a woman Gandhi would be proud of, Bharati 'daughter of India' - A symbol for all things good, moralistic, strong, India stands for. The patriotic fervour what we find in her in the beginning is sustained till the end. She rarely wavers from her path of virtue and duty, even though she falls in love with Sriram.

With the advent of Gandhiji on the horizon of the national movement a change in the perception of woman was heralded. Bharati demanded more humane treatment to women. Through her characterisation Narayan conveys the message that women are not the objects of reform and humanitarianism but self conscious arbiters of their own destiny. Bharati is not dependent on anyone for her sustenance. She in turn can prove to be the source of life for many. She can shoulder the responsibility of the millions of poor in the country. In a way 'Bharati' as the word itself might suggest, symbolically stands for the feminine grace and moral uprightness of Indian woman.

Bharati becomes an ardent follower of the Mahatma as she came from a family of freedom fighters. She did not have the middle class mediocre mentality. She has growth and in the process of growing and ripening, she sheds all that is negative in her nature. At the end, she

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appears like an active Gandhian who recently graduated from the ashram of the Mahatma.

Bharati is Narayan's woman exemplifying "the women's changing position in the post Independent India without transforming that relation to the outer world of production and the inner world of family".\(^1\) Bharati is one among many who entered the national arena to participate in the national movement. They appeared as homogenous category not to be differentiated in terms of class, caste, religion or region. Through her Narayan defines the concepts of femininity and womanhood which acts as perspective frames of reference in his construction of women characters. There is a certain compulsion in Bharati to succeed. She is very much aware that to lead a meaningful life, one has to strike "a balance between the private individuality and public responsibility".\(^2\) By sheer dint of grit and determination, Bharati rises from obscurity to recognition.

She not only tries to better herself by imbibing the beliefs of the Mahatma but also tries to influence Sriram, raising him from an ordinary, immature, slow witted, callous, selfish man to a better human being. She teaches him to 'Spin, inspire him to be self sufficient'. (p. - 65) She wants him as her co-worker in spinning and fighting for the cause of the nation. An invitation to mutually help each other at 'home' and 'outside'.

Narayan's introduction of the spinning wheel as an important part of Bharati's activities becomes a Gandhian instrument and symbol for the "woman-in-the-home to participate in political life from within the home.".\(^3\) Sriram becomes aware that he is a non-entity without the presence of Bharati by his side. He insists - 'I feel happy when you are with me and miserable when you are away' (p.-154) Sriram is diametrically opposite to insensitive Ramani and the stone hearted

Marco. Here is a male who could really feel.

R.K. Narayan reverses the situation here by making a man dependent on a woman emotionally where as till now it was the other way round. Bharati moulded herself on Gandhi’s reconstruction of a new image of a woman “adorn both her sex and nation. She is no longer weak, and at the mercy of men. She is Sabala”⁴. R.K.Narayan creates a new woman, a woman who could have strength, courage, patience and a capacity for suffering and thus become a symbol of non-violence and peace. Women like Bharati do not need any feminist movement nor any feminine literature to hoist her up and demand a place in society. One who has a tremendous moral force proves that she is not a 'Abala' but a 'Sabala'. L. Marr comments "the heroine in 'Waiting for the Mahatma' is represented as being the superior in spiritual character and in ability. Is this is a sign of times?"⁵.


Rosie represents the conflict of tradition and modernity experienced by many women in the modern society. She belongs to a traditional Devadasi family and tries to rise above the associated stigma by virtue of her education. She gets married to Marco, an archeologist, who had everything a girl could dream of, 'He had a big house, a motor car. He was a man of high social standard'. (p.no-85). The desire to improve oneself is a very strong characteristic in an educated person, which sets him or her apart from the rest. Rosie hopes for a respectable family

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All further page references shall be from this edition.

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life, which she had never experienced in her childhood. She decides even to sacrifice her love for
dancing, if her husband so desires, in lieu of smooth domestic life.

Initially the marriage looks to be satisfactory to both of them. Rosie gets a stable family
life, a position in the society as Marco’s wife and Marco gets a beautiful, non-interfering wife.
To an onlooker the marriage of Rosie and Marco appears to be a matter of convinience but in
reality it is flawed by incompatability. Though "both are artists in their own sphere, due to lack
of understanding the catastrophe takes place".

By nature artists are sensitive high strung people, always expecting emotional support
and appreciation from others. But Marco considers Rosie’s talent in dance as something that he
should be ashamed of. So he calls it ‘Street acrobatics’. He undermines the artistic talent of
Rosie. Generally one good artist appreciates another artist, but here we see Marco so self
centered and so absorbed in himself that he has neither the time nor inclination to accomodate
other artist’s views. An artist, who cannot accomodate or respect another artist’s point of view,
loses vision of greater things and in turn stifles his own art.

We find duality in Marco’s behaviour because he is a lover of the beautiful sculptured
images of dancers on the walls of the caves, but he attaches no importance to his wife’s talent as
a dancer. Marco seems to prefer the stone dancers to a ‘living exponent of the art’. He is a man
who finds beauty in inanimate objects, where as his beautiful wife does not give him any pleasure.
He finds nothing to appreciate in her, neither her looks, nor her talent.

Rosie tries to be an ideal wife to Marco, but he simply does not acknowledge her existence.
His sole intension in getting married to Rosie was to have a caretaker of his palatial house at
Madras and also a person who could ‘pack and unpack’ his suitcases, while he keeps on travelling
to unearth one precious cave after another. The euphoria of Marco, when he sees a sculptured
dancing figure in the cave, changes into a cold response in the presence of his wife. But Rosie
though disheartened, does not fail in her duties towards him. She meekly surrenders to his


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moods and tempers. "Rosie is a typical Indian woman and heroine."²

She tries to please Marco as it is her 'Dharma' as an ideal Indian wife. His indifference towards her is because of her 'Karma'. The theory of 'Karma' is a recurring theme in the novels of Narayan. It is a Hindu concept, which finds its ground in traditional upbringing, where the past actions of man are stressed upon. It is a belief that the thoughts and deeds of one earthly life have "fruition in a subsequent birth of a man."³

The characters in the novels of Narayan find this 'Karma theory' as a convenient outlet to get rid of their guilty conscience or the inability to face a critical situation. So this theory has become a square peg in a round hole in a man's life. It is like a peg in the wall, where one would like to hang anything. Rosie attributes the present incompatibility in her life to her 'karma' and lets the things drift. She stoically accepts her fate even to the extent of preferring 'any kind of mother-in-law, if it had meant one real live husband' (p.-85). Rosie takes her loveless life in her stride and she gradually becomes a ware of her husband's self centered attitude and his insensitivity to her individual needs and aspirations. At this point, Raju enters her life.

Raju is a semi-literate young man, who earns his living by working as a Guide for the tourists coming to see Manori - a historical place. But he is not at all serious about his vocation and is non-committal in life. Rosie visits this historical place alongwith her husband Marco, who had some important excavation and research to do. Raju is fascinated by this 'elegant creature' (p.-47), when he sees Rosie.

Left together for most of the time, Rosie and Raju feel attracted towards each other. Raju is warned about this growing fascination for a married woman, by his widowed mother and his friend Gafur. But he is on to a new vocation of accompanying Rosie when her husband Marco is busy with his excavations. Raju lends his support to Rosie, who in her unguarded

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moments narrates her tale of unhappy conjugal life. Raju decides to play the role of a comforter to assuage her hurt feelings.

Raju who is always ready to play roles, now becomes Rosie's 'Guide' and utilises this opportunity to encourage her passion for dancing. He praises her art and becomes her mentor to provide inspiration. Raju has no knowledge of the historical importance of Manori, but just being a glib talker and having facility with words, he had become a very popular guide of the area. Similarly, he has no knowledge of art but just by the gift of the gab he poses to Rosie to be a lover of dance.

Rosie feels drawn towards Raju, not because of any physical or sexual want, but because of her 'psychological need', to be appreciated and praised. Every human being needs to be told that he is loved and appreciated. Raju satisfies this need in Rosie, who has, till now, been completely neglected by Marco. Raju not only encourages her to dance but also compliments her on her beauty. Rosie, in need of love, devotion and attention, finds in Raju all those qualities which she expected from her husband.

Raju becomes sure that he has been an emotional crutch to Rosie. He tries to exploit others sentiments and see to what extent he can tempt her. He starts believing that she would not exist without him. Raju ruminates 'I found out the clue to her affection and utilised it to the utmost. Her art and her husband could not find a place in her thoughts at the same time, one drove the other out'(p.-122).

Rosie realised that she was not meant only to be a prized possession of her husband, she also needed to belong to some one and grow. She discovered that she was a human being in her own right and not just an item of property belonging to her husband. There is an instinct in her to rebel which has so far been kept in abeyance by her sense of conventional propriety. The social decorum, the traditional upbringing, according to which she had always behaved, now seemed to strangle her hunger for furthering the art of dancing. She had the options of either to care for the social decorum and remain at home or boldly pursue her art. In this endeavour she is encouraged by Raju, who fans her ambition to be a renowned dancer. Rosie's newly awakened
sense of self identity overcomes her previous conventional notions of wife's duties in life. She realises that she has a duty towards her 'self' also. She decides to leave her husband and make Raju her mentor and 'Guide'.

By the dint of sheer competence and dedication Rosie alias Nalini becomes a household name for dancing. Raju takes pride in moulding Rosie into Nalini and considers her as his creation. A sense of possessiveness overtakes him and he considers Rosie as his personal property. Rosie moves from the clutches of one master Marco to the clutches of another master Raju. Her new found freedom takes Rosie from one height of artistic achievement to another, bringing in its wake name, fame and money.

Somewhere in the dark recess of her mind lurks a feeling of guilt that she had deviated from the path of virtue. So Rosie does not allow proximity to Raju under the pretext that she was tired after strenuous dance performances.

Soon she abandons Raju who tries to exploit her by squandering her fortune in gambling and drinking. He also tries to dominate her as his personal property. Raju cannot imagine that the subdued dancer, whom he thinks he has moulded, becomes so bold to ask what is happening to her money. Rosie feels cheated twice in her life, once by her husband and second time by her lover. Raju over commits her dance performances to the extent that she becomes exhausted completely. It is also her fatigue of mind and soul that makes her more frustrated. She says 'I visualised it as something different. But cannot stop now, like a bull yoked to an oil crusher. I have to go round and round, keep dancing without a beginning or an end' (p.-202). She protests at reducing her to 'a caged parrot' or 'a performing monkey' (p.no-143).

After the bout of rebelliousness was over Rosie wants to go back to her husband and start her life anew. She longs for a peaceful domestic life, never mind if it is with the unfeeling Marco. Now she realises that a loveless life with Marco is better than guilt ridden moments with Raju. Even when she is away from Marco, we find Rosie immersed in his thoughts day and night. She celebrates the publication of her husband's book and collects cuttings of all the pictures and critical opinions about the book. She treasures them to the chagrin of Raju. Raju
cannot understand why Rosie should be happy and proud in the success of her husband, who tried to make her life miserable. It is Raju who made her Nalini, the famous dancer, not her husband. It is Raju who provided the outlet for her artistic urge, not her husband. This is beyond Raju's understanding. He confesses 'I couldn't understand her. I had an appalling thought that for months and months I had eaten, slept and lived with her without in the least understanding her mind' (p. 144).

Lack of mutual trust and over identification with the managerial role makes Raju to forge Rosie's signature to meet his extravagant spending in gambling and drinking. This eventually destroys everything between them. "Raju is a failure in the role of Nalini's manager". Rosie, remorseful and repentent, decides to go back to her husband as her quest for independence has shown her the ugly side of life. She finds no meaning in the pursuit of her art at the cost of her morality and domesticity. Her position and relationship with Raju does not have the sanction of the society. Her refrain 'After all Marco is my husband' (p. 201) even after years of separation, and her comment 'it is better to end one's life on his doorstep' (p. no 202) reveal her mental agony and the centuries old belief and psyche of Indian woman.

Rosie approaches her husband with guilt written large on her face but he rejects her outrightly saying - 'You are here because I am not a ruffian. But you are not my wife. You are a woman who will go to bed with anyone that flatters your antics. That's all.' (p. 152)

Marco is not in a mood of reconciliation. He refuses to accept her and throws her out of the house. Rosie had committed a sin by deserting her husband for the sake of art for which she has to be punished. This is her 'Karma'. She does not even find fault with Marco or get angry or feel hurt by his harsh sentence.

She consoles herself by saying 'After all he is my husband. Any other husband would have throttled me then and there' (p. 201).

Narayan suggests that between the demands of art and scholarly reflexes and leading of a monotonous, humdrum existence, a woman has to choose. She cannot dream of enjoying both the options. This is another image of woman in the Indian English fiction written by men.
For our study we have selected men novelists R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Mulk Raj Anand and we have studied select women characters of these writers. One thing is common amongst these three men writers, their heroines are not only tradition bound but also tradition loving.

R.K. Narayan depicts women of middle class society, who believe in traditional morality. Narayan chooses “modest heroes and heroines belonging to the middle class who psychologically are more active, in whom consciousness is more vivid and harrowing” 1. His heroines undertake a circular journey. They start with the traditional Mother/wife role, get bored with the humdrum of life, rebel with an urge to search for their identity but are disillusioned with the outside world. They are aware their fight is futile and everything happens according to their ‘Karma’. R.K.Narayan is a firm believer in the institution of marriage and any liberty taken with this institution deserves punishment. He also considers woman as the repository of all that is morally and spiritually good. Bharati is an example.

Bhabani Bhattacharya also believes in the moral uprightness of woman, but his women characters, by and large, are more dynamic. He endows his heroines with endurance and courage. They never break down in the face of adversity.

‘Food’ and ‘Motherhood’ are the recurring themes in Bhattacharya’s novels. In ‘So many Hungers’ the significance of food is well borne out. It is also suggested that absence of food breeds moral, material and even spiritual corruption.

His mother and mother-in-law are sometimes very cruel. The mother in ‘He who Rides Tiger’, pushes her daughter into prostitution and Mohini’s mother-in-law believes that without male child, there is no ‘Moksha’ or salvation. Hence there should be second marriage for her son besides Mohini.

Bhabani Bhattacharya’s women characters are bold, optimistic and have capacity to bear any calamity. They never beat their fore head and cry in the name of ‘Karma’. They herald or at least try to do so, a new social structure. The woman like Mohini revolts against superstitions. Some times they are not convincing like Kajoli’s decision to live on newspaper selling and Lekha

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walking out, but where? His women throb with life.

It is true that Mulk Raj Anand presents fewer women. Yet there is no dearth of a variety of women characters. In his novel we come across quite a few traditional, devoted wives like Gouri, Parbati, Laxmi and the like. They follow their husbands faithfully, but Anand does not make fetish of this devotion. He does not idealise women.

Though woman is suppressed in India, Anand is aware of her dormant capacities. While stressing the need for emancipating women, he also suggests that women themselves should break the ties that bind them to the hearth and come out boldly. His women characters include the familiar type of doting mothers, loving sisters, devoted wives, nagging shrews, alluring courtesans and so on. It is interesting to see that, some times, these characters are pushed back as secondary characters and the non-conformist women are fully realised in the novel. So there doesn't seem to be a studied strategy of Anand in creating women characters.

Widowhood has been described by Anand with great care and accuracy. The widow like Maya, Janaki are found blaming their 'Karma' for their suffering. These women occupy a subordinate position.

Gouri in 'The Woman and the Cow' is Anand's real heroic character. There is a bit of Nora in Gouri but her returning home, makes her a mediocre. Anand's women characters show variety and have range, but none of them is a trend setter for the future generation.

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