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Women in Indian Tradition

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Woman is honoured as goddess among the Hindus in India. She is also respected and worshipped as *Shakti* (goddess of power) and *Laxmi* (goddess of wealth). She is considered an idol of love and sacrifice. But she is also exploited in the name of *tyagmurti* (idol of sacrifice). She takes care of her home as *Annapurna* (Cooking and providing food to full satisfaction). But many times she has to live a life of a captive in the four walls of her home. She has to suppress her aspirations and desires in the name of *maryada* or traditions.

Human life has changed from time to time. With the scientific developments and spread of education many things are changed. Even the old traditions and beliefs have to face many alterations. The life style has many incredible modifications. Even as this process of change is continuous, some of the age-old traditions and conventions continue to have intense impact on the mindset of people.

Patriarchy is still a tradition in rural India. There is an equal contribution of men and women in society. Both are inevitable wheels to run the chariot of life. But man has not yet completely freed himself from some age-old concepts of superiority. Man takes a woman as a useful addition to his life, an object of enjoyment and a possession – *upabhoga*. He has all freedom in life. He decides everything about social, economic, and other aspects of life. Simone de Beauvoir's well-known statement in *The Second Sex* (1997), “one is not born a woman, one becomes one” has a special relevance to India where conventions, religious and social taboos dictate and inhibit woman's individuality. Meena Shiwadkar in *The Image of Indian Woman in the Indo-Anglian Novel* (1979) writes:

The behavioural patterns for the Indian women are predetermined by the family and caste into which one is born and values and traditions of a culture that upholds archetypical images of women. Ancient Indian literature and mythology have internalized the concept of the sacrificing mother and the devoted, enduring wife through the 'image of Sati, Savitri and Shakuntala.

Beauvoir exhorts women to achieve autonomy, to discover and nurture their authentic self through lived experience for self realization. This argument may apply in case of Kadambari, the protagonist in the novel *Kadambarini Maa*, as she negotiates many opposed discourses and moves forward in a quest to know who and what she is.

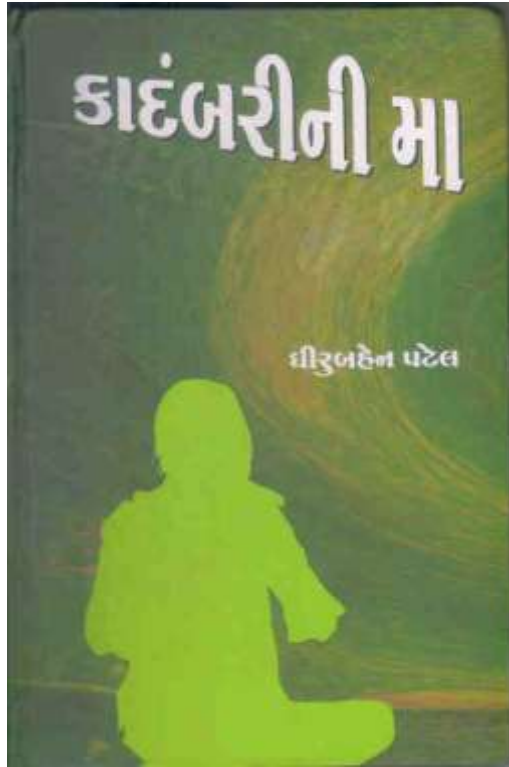
***Kadambari Maa* – A Unique Gujarati Novel**

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Kadambarini Maa, published in 1988, is a unique novel in Gujarati by Dhiruben Patel. It presents the story of a woman who fights for dignity and who struggles against all odds to retain her self-esteem.

Kadambarini Maa is one of the most popular novels in Gujarati literature. The novel deals with social perspectives. It is a fine example of the exposition of a woman who achieves independent status after a severe conflict in married life. She is Kadambari, the central character of the novel. Her mother-in-law Vijaya plays a very important role in it. We learn regarding the social customs through Aruna, the heroine Kadambari's mother.

The Name *Kadambari*

The name *Kadambari* has several meanings: it may refer to Goddess Saraswati, Goddess Parvati and also a cute female cuckoo. It is derived possibly from the name of a tree, Kadamba, known to be the *stala vriksha* or chosen temple tree associated with selected Siva temples in Tamilnadu, but all the meanings seem to carry with them a sense of delicacy, beauty and all the features ancient Sanskrit and Tamil grammars ascribe to women. In some modern Indian languages such as Kannada and Marathi, the term *kadambari* is used to refer to the genre of romantic fiction. There is a medieval Sanskrit text *The Kadambari of Bana*. This prose work is perhaps the first ever written novel in human civilization. So, in more than one sense, the name of our protagonist in this novel, Kadambari, is chosen deliberately by the novelist, to remind us about the Kadambari of classic Sanskrit fiction.

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The Protagonist Kadambari

Kadambari is a typical timid Indian wife, feeling safe among a lot of tyrannies of a drunkard husband. She has been married into a rich household. Kadambari has been brought up by Aruna in such a way that her self consciousness, self respect and healthy relation have been blunted.

Kadambari's husband is extremely rich but her life is not happy. Dhiruben writes:

Parantu Kadambarinun ghar kai ghar nahotun. Var- e var pan nahoto. E hato keval ek kruar malik. Je manma moj aave tyare ghadibhar gel karto, pampalto, bolavato ane bheju chaske ke tarat marto, janvarthiye haddhoot karto, mari nakhvani dhamkio aapto. (KM 25)

(But Kadambri's house was not a real house and even the husband was not a husband in the real sense of the term. He was a cruel master. Sometimes, if in proper mood, he loved, soothed, chatted and, if he has lost his temper, he beat and treated her worse than an animal and even threatened to murder her.) (Translation by the researcher.)

This was the condition of Kadambari. Kadambari is very unhappy but she remains silent as she has been taught so by her mother. When she is unable to bear the cruel behaviour and tyranny of her husband she runs away to her mother, Aruna.

The Flip-flop between the Traditional Roles of Mother and Mother-in-law

But Aruna believes that her daughter is very happy because of ample money and ornaments. According to her, Kadambari's husband is a perfect one. Her mother Aruna advises Kadambari to bear all the cruelties of her husband in the name of *sanskaras* (traditional practices). Therefore she sends her back to her father-in-law's house. As Aruna sees only the material wealth of Anil, she can not realize the pathetic condition of Kadambari. She advises her daughter to connive at:

Ane e hammersha evu j shikhavati ke 'e to hoy ! chalya kare! Aankh ada kan karvana!

Ane Kadambari evu samji bethi hati ke aankh ada kan karva e j strina jivanni saphaltano payo chhe. (KM 31)

(And she always taught her that 'it's a common phenomenon! Connive at such things.

And Kadambari also believed that this is the key to be successful for a woman)

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At last, Vijaya, Kadambari's mother-in-law, decides to do justice to her innocent daughter-in-law, an unusual turn in the story. Of course, this is not easy. Her husband is crippled, her son Anil is out of control, her relatives are indifferent and Kadambari is soft and simple. Moreover Anil threatens her of dire consequences now and then. Still Vijaya does not give up. She teaches very important lessons to Kadambari, i.e. spirit of abandon and self respect. She says:

Khulasa na karish, kadamb! Marathi nahi sahevay. Tare koine kasho khulaso nathi karvano. Jivvanu chhe, khumarithi jivvanu chhe. Anil kahe em nahi, Arunabahen kahe em nahi- tari jate, tane potane game tem jivvanu chhe.... (KM 100)

(‘Do not explain anything Kadamb. I can’t tolerate. You don’t have to give any explanation to anybody. You have to live, live with self-respect. Don’t obey to Anil or Arunaben. You are to live as per your choice.)

Thus, Vijaya proves herself to be the first unique mother-in-law in Gujarati novel. But Kadambari lacks determination. Vijaya gives her courage and explains the importance of having a right goal in life:

Aa duniya ghani moti chhe....Ghana badha manaso chhe. Ema ghanu badhu thay chhe. Navun navun, vichitra, chmatkarik, aahladak! E haji tare jovanu chhe, janvanun che. Janmayano aanand manvano chhe, jivyano utsav ujavvanochhe. (KM 101)

(This world is very big. There are many people. A plenty of things happen there. It is strange, miraculous, and magnificent. You have yet to see and know that world. You have to enjoy life. You have to rejoice your birth.)

The reputation of a mother-in-law in Indian society has been bad for centuries. She is looked upon as a cruel ‘animal’. Folklore presents many stories about the behavior and conduct of mothers-in-law. Even a sister-in-law is considered to be dangerous. This social belief has been exposed in many literary works in Gujarati literature. In this novel Aruna, the mother of Kadambari also criticizes Vijaya, the mother-in-law of Kadambari. She tells Kadambari that her mother-in-law is very cunning. Of course, this is far from truth. On the contrary Vijaya, the mother-in-law, helps Kadambari to be free from the evil condition she is in. Aruna represents the old beliefs of the society. She advises Kadambari to be calm, dumb and obedient to elders and to her husband. Owing to such beliefs she is unsympathetic to Kadambari, though she knows Kadambari is not happy. Of course, the novelist tries to break these social beliefs.

Kadambari's Character

Kadambari's character is a complex character full of contradictory factors. Dhiruben makes a satire:

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Ene navai lagti hati ke Kadambari patino aavo vyavahar sha mate sahan kari le chhe? Sha mate kadi kasho pratikar nathi karti? Salamadini shodh ane samruddhino lobh shun strine aatli badhi pamar banavi de chhe? (KM 18)

(She was surprised to observe that why Kadambari tolerates such a cruel behaviour of her husband. Why does she not protest? Is it the sense of safekeeping and greediness for affluence that make the woman so timorous?)

Aruna's Character

Aruna on the other side is a different kind of character. She is mother of five children. Three daughters have been married off. Kadambari is the last one for whom she has found out the boy from a very rich family. Aruna is greedy. She gives more importance to money. She ignores the unhappy life of her daughter. Still we find the change in her attitude at the end of the novel.

Aruna thinks that she has found out a rich husband for her daughter. But in reality, Kadambari is not happy with him. He is a drunkard and lacks good virtues. Kadambari is just a sex-satisfying toy for him. Her pathetic condition is described as under:

Anil sathe parnine te jane potano ek manav tarikeno darajjo khoi bethi hati. Matra ek sadhan bani gai hati. Anilna manma vare vare uthta krodhna, ghrunana ane kamnana jabardasta tofanona pragtyanu. (KM 62)

(After her marriage with Anil she had lost her status as a human being. She had just become the means...the means satisfying the anger, hatred and lust of Anil.)

Aruna is a typical woman giving more importance to money ignoring human values. She marries off her daughter Kadambari to Anil only because he has ample money, ornaments and a car. When Kadambari complains about the vices of her husband, Aruna advises her to overlook them. "Anil is a wealthy man and some vices are but natural for him"-this type of advice is given to Kadambari by Aruna. Aruna is never worried about the sufferings of her daughter. She is so foolish that she cannot know the wicked schemes of her son-in-law Anil. Not only that but she has sympathy for him and supports him. When Vijaya tries to help Kadambari Aruna doubts her sincerity.

Positive Mother-in-law

The novel mainly focuses on the married life of Anil and Kadambari. In between, the novelist has touched the married life of Vijaya and Girdharilal. Girdharilal is bed-ridden due to paralysis. Vijaya gives up the luxury of their big mansion 'Ratanmenor,' and lives with her husband in a single room. She constantly serves her husband and takes care of him. In such a testing period, she

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is loyal to her husband. Her love and sympathy for him knows no bounds. She boldly faces the circumstances.

Though she lives in her room, she is not unaware of the ‘happenings of ‘*Ratanmenor*’. In the beginning, she just witnesses the tyranny, injustice and exploitation done to Kadambari by Anil. When the plight of Kadambari reaches the climax, Kadambari goes to her parent’s house. Vijaya likes this gesture of Kadambari and she advises Aruna not to send her back to her own house. Vijaya wants to teach lessons to Anil. But Aruna doubts Vijaya.

Vijaya’s character is very appealing, she represents a strong woman. Her life is full of struggles but she does not give in. When Kadambari is unable to tolerate the cruelty of her husband and runs away to her parents’ house, Vijaya takes her side and guides her properly to become an independent lady. In this way Vijaya proves to be a very bold character of this novel. Of course Panna’s role appeals to the reader. The character of Panna is minor. Yet she represents a self-esteemed lady. Though she is happy with her husband in Australia, she leaves him when he is interested in other woman. She is the reflection of her mother Vijaya. She becomes angry with Kadambari for her fearful nature:

aamey jivati rahiney shun karvani chhun?’
Pannane khoob gusso avyo. Potana deshni lakho-karodo strio
jevunj aa bhabhi bolti hati. (KM 144)
(What is use of my life?
Panna got angry. Her sister-in-law was speaking in the same way
as the other lacks of women of her country.)

She saves Kadambari’s life when she tries to commit suicide. Through the character of Vijaya, the author gives an optimistic message that life is a wonderful thing, we must live it in full:

Aa duniya ghani moti chhe.... Ghana badha manaso chhe. Ema
ghanu badhu thay chhe. Navun navun, vichitra, chmatkarik,
aahladak! E haji tare jovanu chhe, janvanun che. Janmayano
aanand manvano chhe, jivyano utsav ujavvanochhe. (KM 100)
(This world is very big. There are many people. A plenty of things
happen there. It is strange, miraculous, and magnificent. You have
yet to see and know that world. You have to enjoy life. You have
to rejoice your birth.)

Kadambari’s Husband Anil

In normal circumstances he hates and detests her. Kadambari suffers the ill-treatment of her husband as she is timid and immature due to her mother’s improper upbringing. Therefore she bears the insults and injustices done to her by Anil, when she sees the bundles of currency notes or she is in an air-conditioned car of Anil. Ultimately Kadambari tries to commit suicide but she is saved by the

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attempts of Vijaya and Panna. At last, she gains her self-confidence. She becomes a changed lady, a new lady having freedom and her own individuality.

Anil symbolizes all the vices of a wealthy man's uncontrolled son. Anil is intelligent but he prostitutes his talent. He marries Kadambari but he is not a loyal husband. He is very cruel to her. He also cheats his parents. He can't manage the property and business he has inherited. Hence he becomes as good as bankrupt. He therefore tries to entrap Kalindi, a rich lady Shakuntala's daughter, by marrying her. Kadambari's sorrows and sufferings know no bounds because of such a bad husband:

.. Nahi ba.. – Anil kahe emaj karya karvanun. Annane ej game chhe.’
‘Ane Kadambarine?’
‘Kone- mane?’
‘han.’
‘Mare shun gamva na gamvanun? Mare to aa loko jivade em jivvanun. Mar kahe to mari javanun, bijo rasto j kya chhe mari pase?’ (KM 98)
(No...mother -I have to obey Anil completely. Anna also likes it.’
‘And what about you ?’
‘Who? - me?’
‘yes.’
‘I am not supposed to have likes or dislikes. I have to live my life as per their wishes. I have to die if they so desire. I do not have any alternative.)

Change in the Life Posturing of Kadambari

There is a sea-change in the life of Kadambari. We find the rays of self – faith in her. Now she is timid no more. She gains confidence. Now she becomes independent in the real sense of the term. She gains self pride. Vijaya takes the place of her real mother. Her rebirth is due to Vijaya. In the end Kadambari is awakened and she is determined to live her own life. She becomes a new woman. Kadambari says:

..... Aa maro nirnay chhe. Havethi hun ahin j rahevani chhun.
Mari rite rahevani chhun’.
‘Maa pase nathi rahevun?’
‘Maa pase j rahevu chhe, Anna! Aa mari maa pase! Kahi Kadambari Vijya pase jai ubhi, ane boli, ‘Rat-dahado fafdatman mare have nathi jivavu. Oshiyali thaine nathi rahevun. Mare jovu chhe-shodhavu chhe-‘
‘shun?’
‘ke bhagvane mane sha mate janma aapyo chhe?’ Kadambarina chahera par ek smit pragatyun.’ (KM 155)

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(This is my decision. Now I will live here. I will live in my own way.

Don't you want to live with mother?

I will live with mother, Anna, but with this mother, so saying, she went to Vijaya and said, 'I don't want to live in a panic for twenty four hours. I don't want to be dependent, I want to find-

'What?'

.-'that.... why God has given me birth'

A bright smile shone on the face of Kadambari.)

A Well-structured Plot

Dhiruben Patel is an excellent novelist. She has a knack of creating interesting characters. In this novel, Aruna, Vijaya, Kadambari and Panna are the very interesting female characters.

Dhiruben shows the conflict of a woman and how she passes successfully through all the buffets of life. The novel has a nice and well structured plot. Thus, the novelist raises questions against the age-old pathetic condition of women and male dominance in Indian families. The creation of the character of Vijaya, the mother-in-law of Kadambari, is extra ordinary. She behaves as the real mother and well-wisher of Kadambari.

Kadambarini Maa is a novel narrating an artistic exertion of the establishment of a female personality. This is the story of a helpless lady turning into a lady of independent nature supported by another lady. But ultimately Vijaya, her mother-in-law, comes to her rescue and Kadambari gains her freedom.

Kadambarini Maa is a story of a new birth of a woman. There is no force of revolt but a woman firmly and mutely opposes another suppressing woman. Kadambari's real mother is Aruna who has given her birth but her true mother is her mother-in-law, Vijaya who inspires the spirit of self respect in Kadambari. Aruna, her mother is a typical timid woman. She finds happiness in money and jewels. Anyhow she wants to send back Kadambari to her husband's home. But it is Vijaya who desperately struggles and even takes a great risk to make her daughter-in-law happy in the real sense of the term. She tells to Kadambari:

Kadamb! Ane have ek vat yad rakhje- ghar chhodi daine nahin, gharma rahinej aapne aapni rite jivvanu chhe. Aapne potane mate jivvanun chhe. (KM 102)

(Kadamb! Now remember one thing- We do not have to leave this house. We have to live in this house and that too in our own way.

We have to live for ourselves.)

Thus Dhiruben is nowhere presenting the pathetic condition of a woman in the male dominated family of Anil in any extreme manner. Yet she revolts against such a society where an innocent bride like Kadambari has to suffer. Through the Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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character of Vijaya, Dhiruben has presented her message regarding women awareness and her philosophical vision. She considers self-respect as the only speculation. *Kadambarini Maa* deserves a creditable position in the history of Gujarati novel.

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