

An Expectation for a Good Life of Women Characters in Chitra Banerjee's Short Stories 'The Bats' and 'Clothes'

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Abstract

This research paper will focus on a study of Women Protagonists and Characters and their expectations for a good life and the great miseries faced by women with special reference to Chitra Banerjee's short stories 'The Bats' and 'Clothes'. Feminism theory crossed a millennium academical-ly but practically it has a long way to go. This paper tries to prove that the above title is the feminine reality. The paper offers a detailed study of feminine expectations through Chitra Banerjee's short stories. 'The Bats' is a psychological story narrated by the protagonist who is a small child. 'Clothes' is the story of Sumitha, a young woman whose parents give more importance to marriage. Along with protagonists, other characters also serve as an example of the state of women in familial and social space. This paper also presents a study of feminine imagination through the works of Chitra Banerjee. Fiction is the product of reality. The two short stories chosen by the researcher confirm this reality.

Keywords: Chitra Banerjee's Short stories, 'The Bats', 'Clothes', Women Characters, psychological, suffering, escaping the reality, partiality.

Introduction

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, known also as Chitra Banerjee, is a popular Indian-American fiction writer and poet. She had lived in India until 1976, and then moved to the USA where she completed her higher education. Presently she is working as a professor of creative writing in the University of Houston. Meanwhile, she is a social activist well known throughout Asia as she has

rescued many South Asian women from domestic violence and abuse in America. She is also focused on educating Indian poor children. Chitra Banerjee stands apart from other Indian feminist writers in the way of exposing female sufferings in her fiction. She always uses liberal feminism rather than a radical way of opposing men. Her stories portray obstacles in women's' life as well as the realities of society. Her view of feminism is seen clearly mainly in An Award-winning short story collection book Arranged Marriage which is published in 1995. It received three prestigious awards, namely, 'The American Book Award', 'PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Literary Award' and 'Bay Area Book Review Award'. The two short stories 'The Bats' and 'Clothes', the main concern of this paper, belong to Arranged Marriage. Her works are translated into 29 languages.

Feminism

Feminism, which stands for equality in socio-economic and political aspects for both genders, is advocacy of women's liberation. The conception of feminism is first started in the west with suffrage movement to gain voting rights for women and later it expanded worldwide with different types of feminisms. In Indian Literature also feminism has been representing the importance of women's equal social status with men in Indian society. Indian feminism is somewhat different from feminist counterparts from the rest of the world. Indian women encounter a number of additional problems such as widow immolation, child marriage, improper treatment and unequal wages at working places and so on. These issues came to light more prominently during the independence struggle. Many modern Indian English writers incorporate these culture-specific problems effectively in their writings which make their imagination a unique one.

Objectives

The main consideration in this study is to explore expectations for a good life and struggles of women protagonists and characters in the 'The Bats' and 'Clothes'. In this article, the researcher tries to deduce the impact of patriarchy that hurts children and women both physically and psychologically. This research paper also pours light on skin-colour prejudice, women's issues as diaspora and cultural conflicts faced by them abroad.

Background

Chitra Banerjee's 'The Bats' and 'Clothes' are short stories which belong to her short stories collection Arranged Marriage (1995). The major themes in Arranged Marriage are Maternity, repressed sexuality, women's migration issues, culture conflicts and physical and psychological violence towards women and children. These two short stories express the negative side of Indian culture while discussing marital relationships in the diasporic aspects.

Chitra Banerjee depicts her stories from the points of view of women because feminine narration will be apt for feminine imagination. Feminist writing requires a woman writer to write

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honestly and realistically about female suffering, and also a woman narrator would suit well to fit with the context.

‘The Bats’ illustrates the drastic elements and changes of the life, threats faced by women and children in a male-dominated society, expectation towards good life and hope but finally a sudden change draws their lives into great endless misery.

In ‘The Bats’, the major characters are an unnamed child of undisclosed sex, a mother, a father of that child and her/his grandpa/uncle. Actually, this story starts with the unnamed narrator, who realised that her/his father abuses her/his mother, that mother always tries to sleep before the father arrives. She keeps on trying to distract her husband from their child to escape the attention from the sadistic father who is working as a foreman in Rashbihari printing press, Calcutta.

According to the narrator, she/he is hearing the continuous sobs of her/his mother all night. Here the writer exposes the negative faction of arranged marriage system. He beats her for unknown reasons, maybe he is showing the frustration at work ruthlessly on them which is reflected in the face of the mother as wounds and black marks under her eyes.

After these incidents one midnight her/his mother stealthily moved to Gopalpur where her uncle lived. The child in this story tells us he is a custodian to the orchards of a zamindar. The child and mother used to stay in his house. The child liked him immensely; the child enjoyed the company of uncle and they both cleared the dead bats from the mango groves. One day the child and the uncle found one ring in a fish while they were fishing. Later the uncle tells him that the ring belongs to a wizard, it has the power to fulfil every wish of its owner. When suddenly the mother informs them of the father's apology and his request to them to come back, the child shows the anger to the mother, but at last, they leave. On the train platform, the grandpa uncle gave that ring to the child. When the train was moving out of the station the child tries to see her/his grandpa uncle, because the child doesn't want to miss him.

When they returned home, his/her father started again to abuse them, but this time he has started to torture them both. Every time they faced violence from the father, the child, in fear, used to hold the ring until it became warm and make wish to that magic ring to bring back her/him to the past where she/he lived happily. The child hates her/his father and wants to live with his/her grandpa uncle.

The author created a façade here how the children are affected psychologically due to domestic violence. The children want to escape from the harsh reality. Even during these quarrels, she/he tried to protect the ring, later also mother and child tried to flee many times but without

other options, they stayed back. One day the child left the ring behind as they left in a hurry. When the narrator gets back to look for it, he/she couldn't find it.

In this story, Chitra Banerjee projects the domestic violence and male dominance in the family and harsh treatment given to children which damage them physically and mentally. At a certain point the mother and the child decided to escape from the cruel reality, they successfully did it and sheltered in Gopalpur with their Uncle where the mother gets some peace, but it only lasts for a while.

They expected a good life with the support of his/her grandpa uncle. The narrator thought that their stay at her/his uncle's home may be permanent but suddenly the mother decided to go back to their home. Because she cannot decide anything further against her husband. Our society binds women as dependent on men in their family. She cannot do otherwise but return to her husband. She informed that her husband apologised and promised not to abuse her again. At that moment, the mother character may have expected a good life, but her hope failed. They caught in a trap again and the antagonist, a sadist person, beat them without reasons. Their lives again move them into misery.

'Clothes' is the story of Sumitha, a young woman whose parents give more importance to marriage, but she has much affection with her family. It is reflected in the conversation between Sumitha. Her father is very affectionate. Sumitha knew that they (family) have great expectations about her marriage. This story starts in a lake where the protagonist and her friends were taking bath while discussing about grooms and bride selecting process. Later scene is shifted to groom selection for Sumitha in her home. The groom's parents came and judged Sumitha as a suitable bride for their son. Sumitha's friends have been rejected for various reasons. Especially it is very hard in the matter of her friend Radha. Because of her dark-coloured skin she is rejected by grooms for marriage. The author points out the colour partiality and bride selection system in India. The groom's name is Su-mesh who is living in California with his family working in a store in California. Sumitha also gets excited about new heavily embellished and expensive saris in her bridal trousseau. Slowly Sumitha gets to know that her husband Sumesh is a patient and loving person. Sumitha and Sumesh start to save for apartments. Sumesh also gives Sumitha the freedom to pursue a teaching course, but she would like to work as a shopkeeper, which she can't do because such position may become disrespectful to her In-laws.

Although Sumitha hesitates to wear American clothes in front of her in-laws, which signifies that either in India or America still women need to obey their in-laws. Everything is going good as per the protagonist's expectations towards a colourful life. But suddenly one tornado like incident takes place which takes her life into a colourless future. One day, When Sumesh was

working, he was shot by a thief and he died. Sumitha wears colourless dresses signifying colourless life because of the sudden tragic incident. Later an opportunity comes in her life to go back to India as a dutiful daughter-in-law, but this time she decides to stay in America and starts to work as a shop-keeper as per her dream. The major concern of the protagonist is to lead a happy and peaceful life and to satisfy her family and in-laws. But unfortunately, she loses her husband and remains as a young widow. In such a sorrowful situation, she has decided to work as a shop worker. This is a step ahead in her life.

Conclusion

The short stories, 'The Bats' and 'Clothes' project the actual status of women and suppression of children. In 'Clothes', the author boldly expressed the negative shades of Indian marital system, most importantly its colour partiality. Woman is highlighted as a protective mother to her child in 'The Bats', and in 'Clothes' woman protagonist is a loyal daughter to her parents, responsible wife to her husband and a dutiful daughter-in-law to her In-Laws. Sumitha's effort to be an independent woman should be appreciated. But in both stories, women protagonists have a strong aspiration and expectations for a good life, but unfortunately, the mother and child characters in 'The Bats' and Sumitha character face endless sufferings and solitude. In these two stories, Chitra Banerjee the feminine reality of Indian women.

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