

A Study on Gender Inequality in Ashapura Deri's Subarnalatha

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Abstract

Sociological criticism is criticism with an idea that art related with society are very important. It will deepen one's aesthetic sense to a work of art. Sociological criticism is of course the mirror of the society. It pictures the social environment, the race, the culture, tradition, the life style, religion, political status, their beliefs, position of women everything is discussed. This paper represents the general picture of Indian life and culture that prevailed in our Indian society. In the novel Subarnalatha the women's position in the society, in their families and among other relatives are focused. It expresses the modes of feeling that relate to one of the world's oldest, unbroken traditions. It also analyses about the women's place in society. Women are controlled and the sophisticated treatment of all the basic issues is seen and is discussed from within the four walls. So it is sure the ideas discussed here will be easily and surely reaches out to all women across the seven seas.

The freedom of country is decided with the freedom given to a woman by this patriarchal society. In the novel Subarnalatha, the main female character Subarna tries hard to survive in the midst of her husband, her brother-in-laws, mother-in-law, society and even with her son. Subarna strongly believes in her mind that education is very important for women. So she was very much focused in giving education to her daughter even though all other members in that family were against her opinion. Knowledge will give freedom to both men and women. Knowledge will enable liberation. Schooling had become a central symbol of independence. This freedom made Subarna to design for her own house. She designs a balcony so that she can be in touch with the outside world. And at last she succeeded in everything she desires. But it was too late for her to enjoy it. Thus this paper explores how a woman in a society overcomes the tangles which she faces from all four sides.

The novel Subarnalatha is basically a Bengal novel and tells about a Hindu middle class family. It tells the story of a woman and how she was affected by change. Subarnalatha is a symbol of the helpless cry of an imprisoned soul. It is believed that the freedom of a country depends on the freedom of women. The so-called mistress of the house has no power at all. She is probably known as an angel in the house but that angel is imprisoned within the four walls of her house without proper freedom or proper education. A woman's freedom is inextricably bound to education. Schooling of every individual is a symbol of independence. But in this patriarchal society men are not ready to enlarge

their sphere of knowledge. But awareness is necessary to take the first step to emancipation. Subarna's inner conviction seems very strange in the eyes of others in the family. When education is given to a woman the basic values will be changed and there will be a new identity for all.

Subarna loved reading books. There was someone in her husband's house who supplied books secretly. And that unknown person becomes an angel for her. But she knows well that if somebody from her family comes to know about it "they wouldn't hesitate to have her thrown out" (8). But at last one day they found out and mistook the person as her lover. One of the two persons is caught and is noticed as Dulo, Susheela's nephew. But their question is who the other person is. Even though Dulo is their relative they beat him like a hungry tiger on its prey. Muktokeshi's told her son, "if you are a man, my son, kick her to death" (67)

A country cannot regard itself as independent if a majority of the people especially, the women are not free. Liberation begins with education, with the ability to think freely. So Subarna is very particular in educating her daughter Satyavati. She always wished to have a touch with the outside world. So she desired for a house with terrace on the roof. So that she can have a close relation with the cosmic forces. She wished to stand under the sky and enjoy the beauty of nature, the stars, the sun, the moon etc. This of course is not the need of the household but it is the need of her inner self.

But her husband actively prevented her from enjoying all these sort of enjoyment. She was deprived of all her small pleasures of her life throughout. He brings her from Subala's village where she was enjoying herself to the extreme. She finds the people in that village are so simple and happy. They are trusting and helpful, liberal and imaginative. He stops the way to the terrace. He even gave a false promise of building a terrace for her. He hurts her telling that he doesn't want herself to expose herself posing to strange man from the balcony. "Nonsense. Besides, what do you want a veranda for? To stand there in the evening, displaying yourself?" (4). But a fourteen year old girl Subarna couldn't understand the hidden meaning in the word 'display'. What she wished to see is the world outside, the processions, weddings, festivals and even funerals. But he shouted and grabbed his wife by her hair.

"You're overstepping your mark, MejoBou, you really are. Don't you realize I can throw you out on the street this very minute?" (13). But when Subarna built her own house having balcony it was too late for her to enjoy it.

Subarna was married at the age of nine. Often she was hurt by her husband's family members and other relatives. Her heart felt as if it is going to burst. But this nine year little girl wiped away her tears and started a new life with colourful dreams and hopes. Five years she spent in that house without visiting her father's home. Her father came to see her a few times, she was not allowed to see him alone nor was she not allowed to take off her veil from her head. Feeling hurt the father stopped his visit to that house again. But during her delivery Muktokeshi insulted her very badly,

Why no one from your family came to take you away, I cannot imagine. I've never heard of any women having her first child away from her own people. I shouldn't have had to

do all this at all! Your mother might have left home, but your father could've taken you back, surely? After all, your brother has a wife, hasn't he, and then there's an aunt I believe (26)

Muktokeshi, her mother-in-law once goes to the extreme of separating Subarna from her husband. "Keep away from her husband. Don't let her sleep with him for a few days" (18). But Subarna was too kind-hearted that she gives all her jewels to her sister-in-law when the family members were suffering without enough money to send her off to be married to a rich family. "It was MejoBou, wasn't it? She must have offered to give Biraj some of her own jewellery. She may be a complete fool, but I must say she's most generous!"(31)

Subarna while giving birth to her first baby, she was very particular about the clothes which are to be used for the baby. Even in that great pain she talked loudly, "why have you brought those dirty, filthy rags and towels? God knows what germs they're filled with" (26). But her mother-in-law, Muktokeshi was taken aback as she felt Subarna has slapped in her face. "What did you say? You object to these old and torn towels do you? You're worried about germs, did you say? Well, what should I get for you then – silk sheets and satin covers? What do you think you are, a princess?" (26)

"After all this what do we get for our pains? A girl! It's just my luck! Get out of here, BoroBou, don't stand there like an idiot with the conch-shell. There's no need to blow it now". (29)

Ashapura Debi from her very childhood age has grown up in the house where the boy children and girl children are treated differently. When Subarna gave birth to a girl baby after a long pain nobody is there to welcome the child or to celebrate the arrival of the new member of the house. But Subarna now remembers the quoted words of her mother saying that "Don't neglect your child, Subarna – a girl or a boy, it makes no difference at all. Each is a gift of God" (29). Always Subarna stands on the side of her mother's view point. In this novel, the author also notices about the custom of marrying off young girls to older men.

Subarnalata like her mother Satyavati, is a thinking and a judging women. Both of them wish to change the society for the betterment of women in the society. They did not give up easily and challenges its injustices. Subarnalatha as a teenager, she wants a well-lit, open and airy room with a good view. Also she wished to have a healthy space for giving birth to her child. She refused to use dirty old rags and demands lengths of clean fresh cloth for the baby. All these innovations of Subarna made the other family members shocked. Nobody knows why Subarna is behaving like this what made her to go for a house with balcony, why did she go for books, why she is not satisfied at all.

Subarna's another inner desire is to travel. Rarely Subarna got chances to travel. But she was not allowed to open the windows in the trucks. She wished to visit many places."Puri, I am dying to see the sea. There's such a lot in my imagination, but it's not the same as seeing the real thing, is it? Ma will listen to you, I know. Just say that I'm quite mad and I really want to go, so why doesn't she take me with her? (40). But Prabodh gave a chance to fulfill this desire very late in her life by allowing her to join just

for a pilgrimage. But fate never allowed her to go for the pilgrimage as her husband was affected by cholera. “Was her going on a pilgrimage more important than her husband’s life?”(193)

Subarna was never allowed to go to her father’s home after her marriage. But one day when her father heard the sound of the carriage he was shocked to see his daughter getting down from it. Nobokumar should have overjoyed to see his daughter after a long time. Instead “he stared stupidly at her, trying desperately to find a reason for her arrival. Had something happened to her husband? No, there was enough jewellery on her person and sindoor in her hair to indicate all was well on that front. What then? (54)

Another incident which Subarna suffered is too cruel. Once she was invited by Shymasundari for a puja. Subarna went there with Haridasi, the servant and her three little children. On seeing the love of Shymasundari, Subarna stayed there for some time and when she came back nobody is there to open the door for her or to her three little children. Her husband Praboth was too hard-hearted that he never showed any mercy even towards his children. She with her three little kids slept outside the house till the dawn. Even in the next day nobody in the house showed any sympathy towards her. But she spoke “Who on earth asked you to bring me in? it wasn’t necessary to have me revived, was it? Were you afraid of the neighbours? God, was there anything left to be afraid of after last night?” (83)

Subarnalatha was always aware of herself, her self-identity. She painfully identifies that she lacks her self-identification. At last she wrote a book of her own, an autobiography. But she was worried about the printer because she doesn’t want anybody knows that she writes a book and publish it. In that book she reveals about herself, her identity, her wishes and her position both in the family and in the society, also she writes about her dreams and wishes. In her book she writes –“I am a housewife. My only name is Mejobou. I have a mind, a soul, but no one acknowledges my existence” (189). But her family members were stunned by her action. And at last she burned all her printed books.

But Subarna at last wishes to satisfy all her wishes through her daughter. She wishes to give her education, to get married late and to have careers. Also she wishes to see her daughter to stand under the sky too close with the cosmic forces. She also wants to stand on the balcony and see all the street views like the vendors, the processions, funerals, wedding functions, religious and political functions, the passer-by and all the outdoor life.

At last in her death bed, she wishes to have a bed on the southern balcony that she desired all through her life. But even in those last days of her life Praboth covers up the sides of the balcony with heavy curtains. He prevents her from getting fresh air also from the outside view. She feels vexed and turns her face towards the wall and waits for death.

It was too late even to wonder about it. As dawn broke in the sky, those sitting around Subarna saw her close her eyes, and even her shaky, delirious voice fell silent. The battle between life and death was finally over. Amidst piercing wails and loud sobs, someone rose quietly and drew the curtains back. The first rays of the sun fell on Subarna’s still

face, wiping out the pain and desolation of death. Her eyes closed in eternal sleep, Subarnalatha looked truly beautiful (204)

Thus the novel is a picture of a woman trying to know herself, the world around her and it is about a woman who wishes to communicate with the world on every level. The development of her 'self' is hindered at every point of her life. Till the last breath of her life she struggles with a rare courage which is within herself. But at the end she has to give up her fight and wait for eternal life.

Works cited

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