



Bhattacharya's 'Goddess Named Gold' –A Plea for Woman's Empowerment

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Abstract: Bhattacharya shows in his works how the women in India are trapped more and more in the web of myth and lose their sense of self and will and how they are praised as goddesses and are robbed of their glory even though they are still seated on a high pedestal. He satirizes man's obsession which is to pull them down to earth by having the women sing their praises and do their will only when the women please them and satisfy their ego- needs, they call them the goddesses of household, Griha Lakshmi, the moment when women defy male idiosyncrasies, they are called devils.

Key words: goddesses, Ramayana, supremacy

Narration

In the Mahabharata, Draupadi is described as the common property of the five brothers. She was put at stake in a gambling bout. Sita, the ideal woman character of Ramayana, was put to fire ordeal to prove her chastity. She was denounced by Lord Rama to prove himself as an ideal king. Draupadi did accept her subordinate position and fought in an open assembly when Duryodhana the winner of the bout, sought to disrobe her. Sita, on other hand, took her humiliations with fortitude and good will toward her husband. However, by this time the right of the husband over his wife or a man over a woman has generally accepted by the society irrespective of whether women acknowledge it willingly or not.

This willing acceptance, even today, is considered as the ideal of womanhood. Sita is worshipped in most of devout homes for her absolute obedience to her husband everywhere in India; her example is exalted to be followed by all women. Sita had great

strength of character and virtue. She pursued what she considered to be right. Her love for the husband was limitless. Her character was of utmost purity and chastity. If we for the sake of argument forget for the time being the divinity of Rama and Sita then arises a doubt in our minds that such a character might have been drawn to satisfy the male ego by the male poets. It might be possible that Sita's character was enfolded in the myth of male supremacy and female subordination so that woman's sole aspiration in life became the loyalty and the service to her husband who was put at the level of God to her. This emphasis on chastity and service to the husband may lead to the conclusion that the women of this period were put on pedestal as goddesses only if they lived the ideal and virtuous life according to the most rigid standards set by a male dominated society.

The model women were exposed to re-model. Women were exposed to such literature, which highlighted dependence and punishment for breaking the norms of conduct imposed



on them by different priests. A blind faith developed among the women through a process of awe and forced reverence. The epic literature cites examples where the husband was carried on his wife's shoulders to the house of a prostitute. The wife's willingness to put her husband's needs above her proved that she was sati. The literature which seems to have been developed by male Hindu priests completely subjugated the will of women. It emphasized husband worship along with the notion that a woman's salvation was possible only by doing that which her husband desired.

An abundance of stories about pativrata Nari or the husband worshipping woman influenced women to perform every kind of unnatural act for the sake of their husbands. Women started taking pleasure in their morbid existence. Eventually they became even greater fanatics than men in opposing their freedom. Perhaps they were so removed from the idea of an independent existence that even the thought of such responsibility frightened them. It may be said that it is human nature that one wants to stay with the familiar even if it is destructive because the unknown is scary.

Bhattacharya shows in his works how the women in India are trapped more and more in the web of myth and lose their sense of self and will and how they are praised as goddesses and are robbed of their glory even though they are still seated on a high pedestal. He satirizes man's obsession which is to pull them down to earth by having the women sing their praises and do their will only when the women please them and satisfy their ego- needs, they call them the goddesses of household, Griha

Lakshmi, the moment when women defy male idiosyncrasies, they are called devils. It is seen in the novels of Bhattacharya how men take upon themselves the responsibilities of protecting and feeding the women who are consequently destitute and completely dependent. The women are shown how they are not allowed to move outside the household without male company since it is taken for granted that they are incapable of defending themselves. Bhattacharya reveals how women become frail and weak creatures that if any man other than their husbands touch them or cast a lustful glance towards them, they are defiled and dishonored. Hence, their only path to an honourable existence is to give the men unflinching loyalty, submit to their care and deny their own self and will.

In his "*Goddess named Gold*", Seth stands for male ego and his wife Lakshmi stands for innocence. The Seth is a greedy, selfish and opportunistic cloth seller. He controls the cloth business at Sonamitti and its surrounding villages. Making use of the countrywide sari shortage, he has cornered the supply and pushed up prices. He has brought up in advance the full output of the village weavers. The Seth makes cash the weaknesses of the others. The Seth is not only a cloth merchant, but also a money lender. The village is neck deep in debt to him and tether to his stiff rate of interest.

The women of Sonamitti wear saris patched over and over, jackets cut from cast off gunny sack – that is why the price of old bags is going up. At night to save their saris further wear, some of the women sleep almost naked. It is all due to the Seth. So he is scolded



by every woman in the village. His wife Lakshmi is entirely opposite to the character of the Seth and she is generous and helpful towards the other women in the village, but she is unable to do anything against her husband's will. She expresses her inability before her friends who ask her help and support to bend her husband.

"What can a woman do?

What strength has she against her house-hold king?

Tell me dear sisters." ¹

Her friends stress again and again about her opinion of joining with them. Bhattacharya explains her feelings as follows:

"Lakshmi felt wretched.

Under her husband's implacable will she was a lump of clay.

The habit of submission was her ages – old inheritance.

A woman had to obey her husband and household king.

Yet the obligation to one's friends – how let them down?" ²

However Lakshmi joins with her friends to revolt against her greedy husband. The women of Cow House Five and Lakshmi march in a procession by shouting "We demand cloth to wear, cloth" to the cloth shop of the Seth. The Seth wondered after seeing his wife in the procession which against him. First he asks his wife to come out from the

band. But she stands with her head erect and refuses to listen to him. Then the Seth bids his wife as:

"Go back, wife.

How could you leave Nago (her son) alone at home?

Have you no sense, no feeling?"³

But Lakshmi gathers for the perilous plunge, she gazes straight in to his eyes and says as:

"Mark my words. Unless you sell the cloth fairly, a hundred saris, I will take off what I wear.

I will, on behalf of all, throw my clothes on your heap of hoarded shame" ⁴

Bhattacharya points out the dual culture in the country where women have been mythically placed upon a high pinnacle while at the same time pulled down to dust in reality. It cannot be found nowhere in the world where she may be labeled either saint or sinner. He wishes to show her as self respected and self conscious and she can fight for her rights and she also knows how to protect herself. The Seth orders Lakshmi to go away from the protest, and tries another time to convey her as:

"go back, wife. How could you leave Nago alone at home?

Have you no sense, no feeling?..

What! You, Lakshmi, my lawful spouse?

I, Your lawful spouse.



You, the proud mother of that pig, my son and heir! ⁵

But Lakshmi has not been convinced by the juggler words of her husband and she starts to do what she has warned him. She sweeps her upper part of her sari aside and she starts to disclose her jacket, she warns him as:

“Naked I will leave this room. Naked I will walk on main road.

All Sonamitti will see a woman, a mother, put to disgrace”. ⁶

The jacket flies open across the bosom. She has never stood naked before her husband even in the darkness of night. The Seth gapes at his half-naked wife as she starts to untie her sari’s waist knot. He sees into her eyes in a pleading way, in a sharper tone,

“You bread-giver will gasp in poverty, remember that.

The child of your womb will turn one day into a Whining beggar boy.”⁷

He watches her for a minute, hoping to see repentant tears, but her eyes give him a bright, happy glance. Finally the Seth has no chance except to come down to agree to the proposal of the women of the village to sell saris at normal rates. The Seth stands a symbol for opportunism, hypocrisy and a typical

Reference:

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