Concept of Fallenness and Patriarchy in Anuradha Sharma Pujari's Novel "Kanchan"

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Abstract

Patriarchy places women in a marginalised position. Women always bare same feeling and same status of their lives in patriarchal oppression and exploitation. Men often speak about virtues and vices of women and on the basis of that categorise them as chaste or unchaste. Women in patriarchal society should be pure to get societal honour. The society decides what a woman should do, how a woman should behave and these views are the cultural determinant of a society or a community. If a woman challenges these lessons of morality, she will get the identity of fallen woman in a patriarchal society. The novelist Sharma Pujari through the portrayal of Kanchan as a fallen woman does not want to condemn her fundamental disorder but attempts to expose the exploitation and oppression that exist in sexual practices and thereby wants to challenge it. A patriarchal society mirrors some cultural views and attitudes of sexuality. On the basis of these norms a woman is relegated to the rank of fallen woman. The man being the superior section of the society proves his male power in the emotional, physical and material sphere of a woman's life. This power of patriarchal authority determines the fallenness of a woman and thereby deprives her from availing the

pleasures and securities which are only permissible for a wife. The culturally constructed feminine myth looks at her as an exception. People's psyche is moulded by this cultural affinities constructed by patriarchal system. The novel *Kanchan* describes the discrimination on gender relation and sexual responses between two genders that exists in a patriarchy. Anuradha Sharma Pujari narrates the complexities in the life of the woman character who tries to come out of her destitute situation by using her body. Adopting a feminist perspective this research article attempts to discuss the construction of the idea "fallen women" by patriarchy and the experiences and struggles of the marginalised protagonist Kanchan in the novel *Kanchan*.

Keyword: Feminist, Patriarchy Oppression, Marginalise.

Introduction

Women in patriarchy play her assigned and predetermined role. Women are never granted equal power and position and in the mindset of men women are inferior and subordinate. In the society and family, decision makers are always men and they never bother about women's perspective, interest, likings and dislikings. Ignoring a woman's desires, dreams and expectations in a patriarchy, the men keeps themselves busy in debating on the virtues and vices of women. The rule makers of a society believe that a community or a society's honour depends on the purity of a woman. The restrictions and prohibitions are imposed on a woman in patriarchy to control her sexuality and that is the predetermined destiny of a woman.

Society determines a woman's feminine purity as the marker of her virtue. She should remain pure and faithful within the strict controlled spaces of virtuousness. If a woman deviates from the marital norms she becomes a fallen woman. Whatever her reasons for deviations, she will never get respect and favour in society. Nobody wants to understand the circumstances what has made her a fallen woman. A fallen woman is not always the creation

of a patriarchal system. Her independent decision to accept fallenness and challenge the society by deviating traditional beliefs may be the reason for acquiring this new identity. A fallen woman in the mindset of men is a character who has done wrong and goes against social norms. A very sensitive area in a person's life is sexual behaviour and if a woman departs from that normal sexual behaviour it will be considered deviation from approved social behaviour. Fallen women are categorised as prostitutes though all of them are not. But all prostitutes have been categorised as fallen women throughout history. The French feminist Simone de Beauvoir opines that "the female sex while preserves the safety and sanctity, the another part of them should be sacrificed. Prostitute faces the social hatred. The society punishes prostitutes without their fault. At the same time men unleash turpitude upon her and discard her after use" (Beauvoir, 569). Michel Foucault remarks that "men are generally granted a greater degree of liberty than women and they are allowed to be sexually frivolous. So, prostitutes should exist to satisfy the sexual needs of men" (Rabinow, 146).

In a patriarchal society the female roles and female sexuality is regulated by men and to achieve that control and domination the institution called marriage is used as an instrument by men. If a woman fails to manifest her chastity and purity in proper measure she might lose her own identity and will get a new identity of a "fallen woman". She becomes a fallen woman because of not obeying the rules of her family and deviating her obedience of silent submission to her husband.

Analysis

Kanchan is a novel by one of the very popular writer of modern Assamese literature, Anuradha Sharma Pujari. *Hridoy Ek Bigyapan* (1998) her first novel made a real work to the Assamese reader. She is the current editor of weekly newspaper 'Sadin'. Anuradha Sharma Pujari born and brought up in Jorhat. She does Masters from Dibrugarh University in Sociology. She completed course on journalism in 1993. Her second novel *Ejon Ishwaror*

Sandhanat published in 1998. She immediately became a respected and popular name in Assamese literature. Another few novels of Sharma Pujari are *Kanchan* (2001), *Sahebpurar Borosun* (2003), *Naharor Niribili Saa* (2005). Her many short story collections are *Boxontor Gaan* (1999), *Ejon Oxamajik Kabir Biography* (2001), *Autograph* (2004). *Kalikotar Sithi* (1999) and *Diary* (2000) are collection of autography stories. Her first novel *Hridoy Ek Bigyapan* has been translated to English as *Heart a Showbiz* by Dr. Abha Bhattacharya. Sharma Pujari has been awarded the best novelist by 'Axom Sahitya Sabha' in 2003 for her novel *Sahebpurar Boroxun*.

In the novel *Kanchan* Anuradha Sharma Pujari portrays the picture of despair and agony of a woman through the character of Kanchan, who under circumstances gets a new identity of "fallen woman". Kanchan is a poor helpless woman desperately seeking for sustenance. She had to overcome a series of events in her life and to get a job she had to please many persons with her youth and beauty. Kanchan started her work with revulsion but her voluntary involvement in the work gradually starts to give her a feeling of satisfaction. At the last part of the novel Sharma Pujari depicts the protagonist Kanchan's silent surrender in the hand of her boss Akashjyoti Phukan. After the death of her father, Kanchan had to face financial crisis what compelled her to decide her own destiny. A fallen woman or a prostitute faces that persistent truth. Kanchan is a miserable victim of circumstances and she had no control over that. So in the character of Kanchan we hear the echo of Beauvoir's statement that "a female sex while preserves the safety and sanctity, another part of her should be sacrificed. Prostitute faces the social hatred. The society punishes prostitutes without their fault. At the same time men unleash their turpitude upon her and discard her after use" (Beauvoir, 569).

In the novel *Kanchan*, Kanchan and her mother both are victims of patriarchal injustice. The rule makers of patriarchy take the chance to exploit Kanchan and her family

because of their poverty. Kanchan went to Guwahati with one of her neighbour Nani Nath in search of a job. Nani Nath is an employee in an office and he takes Kanchan to meet the head of the office 'Borsahab' for a job. Kanchan has to sacrifice her virginity first in the hand of Nani and second in the hand of 'Borsahab' to get a post of peon in his office. She fails to find out any other way to give financial support to her mother and her younger brother Thaneswar. The life experiences of Kanchan teach her many lessons. To support her family she used her body and her beauty which was the only leverage for survival. But the life of the fallen woman Kanchan ends with her mental break down after her eventual rape in a party arranged by Engineer Akashjyoti Phukan, who left her after satisfying his male lust.

Kanchan describes unhesitatingly her past sexual encounters with many persons to Akashjyoti Phukan who pretends to be her lover and gives false promises of marrying her. Kanchan without any hesitation tells Phukan how her poverty compels her to sleep with someone to secure a job. Her unforgettable past is responsible for her new identity as a 'fallen woman'. She is insulted by the society and even by her colleagues. But nobody wants to understand the circumstances what have made her fallen woman. To speak about the situation of women, Beauvoir in her book *Second Sex* opines that "women's situation is not a result of her character. Rather her character is a result of the situation" (Beauvoir, 570). This is apparent in the character of Kanchan who was a victim of male exploitation.

After meeting Akashjyoti Phukan, Kanchan gradually starts to change her lifestyle and starts to plan her life with him. But misfortune never leaves her. The situation and circumstances compel her to show infantile behaviour. She loses her mind and becomes bedridden as a result of an unexpected situation of sexual torture. During her days with Akashjyoti Phukan some difficulties arise in his office. Some officers of an inquiry commission visit Akashjyoti's office for an inquiry. Akashjyoti requests Kanchan to attend these officers at a party. After the party at night she has been gangraped and Akashjyoti

leaves her alone and escapes from the situation. Kanchan is deeply shocked by this situation and starts to show infantile behaviour like an innocent child, who does not have the experience of exploitation, deprivation and artificiality of an adult person. This situation brings a drastic change into her life and gives a new shape to her character.

The novelist Sharma Pujari emphasises on Kanchan's struggle for survival in a patriarchal society. Kanchan's honest confession about her relationships with men threatens the definition of womanhood. In the life of Kanchan Badar, the peon of her office and her own mother are the well wishers. Other employees in her office pass many bad comments on her for her physical relationship with many persons. Slowly a relationship between Kanchan and her boss Akashjyoti Phukan develops. Kanchan considers herself unworthy of marriage and love because of her past sexual misconduct which was a mode of survival for Kanchan. Akashjyoti Phukan is portrayed as a self centred person who pretends to be a romantic lover but his main intention is to collect a theme for his next novel. Being a novelist Phukan takes the unforgettable past life of Kanchan as the theme for his novel. Thus, Kanchan's struggles for survival becomes a subject for Akashjyoti's novel.

By referring to the existence of prostitutes Michel Foucault remarks that "men are generally granted a greater degree of liberty than women and they are allowed to be sexually frivolous. So, prostitutions should exist to satisfy the sexual needs of men" (Rabinow, 146).

In the novel *Kanchan*, Kanchan's deprivation from sexual autonomy, her victimisation by men's exploitation and her pathetic condition can be explained by Michel Foucault's view that "men are generally granted a greater degree of liberty than women" (Rabinow, 146). Kanchan wants to uncover unequal social and sexual roles that exist in the society. She does it by violating social norms and uses her body to resist patriarchal oppression. Kanchan by using her body for survival defies social norms but her resistance neither change her social status nor can provide sexual autonomy to women. Kanchan in the

novel is deprived of a respectable existence and her destiny is on the hand of men. Throughout her life this society compels her to be a bed partner to the old Borsahab, the office head, the peon Nani Nath, to the betrayer Akashjyoti Phukan and to the members of enquiry commissions. As a result of this exploitation Kanchan gets the identity of a “fallen woman”. Society never blames men’s moral degradation, but makes moral lessons for women. The situations and surroundings conspires Kanchan’s choice of her destiny. So, in Kanchan’s unbearable situation of sexual torture we hear the echo of Michel Foucault’s view that “prostitute should exist to satisfy the sexual needs of man” (Rabinow, 146). Kanchan never regrets over her decision to use her body for survival. She openly blames the men who remain pure after creating sexual relation with her. Thus gender discrimination and patriarchal control over women is seen throughout the novel. In one of the speech Kanchan states:

“If the men who came to me at night like a thief can still retain their position as a good husband, responsible father, why cannot I have the same respect? If the society does not allow me to have that power I will forcefully take it. I know the gossips about me in the office. They too want to sleep with me. Some of my colleagues have already given me such indications. I know everybody’s nature. I am not a petty whore. I believe that I am not whore at all. If I am a whore so are the men who came to me secretly at night.” (Sharma Pujari, 52)

In the novel *Kanchan* the patriarchal society puts Kanchan through different forms of subjugation and compels her to satisfy all the needs of men. When her boss Akashjyoti Phukan faces departmental complexities she provides him mental support and surrenders her body to him to give him sexual pleasure. Moreover, Kanchan attends the officers of the enquiry commission to help her boss Akashjyoti to overcome the complexities. The patriarchal authorities are responsible for making the fallen woman or prostitutes who becomes an object of sexual exploitation. Being the rule maker of patriarchy Akashjyoti

Phukan exploited Kanchan and used her for his pleasure. It is found in the novel that he becomes interested in Kanchan for a photograph which had witnessed a helpless moment of her young age. The image of Kanchan's bare legs in the photograph has great impact on him. But Kanchan discloses the truth to Akashjyoti that the photograph had been taken when Kanchan was sleeping with a senior officer to make her post permanent. So, the photograph indicates helpless situation of Kanchan. Again, it shows that female sexuality is under male control and domination. There are some categories to create a division in patriarchal societies in availing the pleasures and securities of life. Wife, non wife, good girls and bad girls are the constructed categories divided by a great partition in the patriarchy. In patriarchy sex is united with men's bodies and personalities.

The men in patriarchy acquire the right to control women emotionally, physically and materially. On the other hand women even do not get freedom in the sphere of work, love, sexuality or violence. The patriarchal authorities who are associated with a woman's fall may be a husband, a father, a son or a brother. The family in a patriarchal society is a unit that gets power to provide goodness of a wife and thereby she possesses social honour. Patriarchal society considers the sexuality of wife a property which owned by her husband only. Unlike a wife, a fallen woman sells her sexuality to satisfy male lust. So, both ways either through marriage or through prostitution women's body is used by men to get sexual satisfaction. Women obey silently the domination of patriarchy. So, "marriage is" in the words of Simon de Beauvoir, "the destiny society offers to women where though necessary to each other, they never exist in a state of reciprocity. Marriage keeps a woman in a restricted space and there her ethics are made "impure" by the individualised desires" (Beauvoir, 445 – 446). In the character of Basanti Saikia, another woman character in the novel *Kanchan* we hear the echo of Beauvoir's statement that loving her husband and remaining loyal to him is 'a duty she owes to her husband and society' (Beauvoir, 481). Basanti Saikia is the wife of Boradacharan

Saikia, an Executive Engineer, who chooses her as his bride for her expert dancing quality. But after their marriage Saikia makes it a habit to go to club in the evening when Basanti Saikia practices dance. Basanti Saikia on the other hand has utmost interest in dance. In one of her speech in the novel, she states:

“Marriage is really ‘legal prostitution’ as said by Shaw or Russell. Marriage is an approved prostitution. Will I remain a partner of his bed for the whole life? Does he need me only to be Mrs. Saikia and Munmi’s mother? I too have a life, liking, disliking and interests to what Mr. Saikia remains quite unconcerned.” (Sharma Pujari, 62)

Basanti Saikia’s husband keeps him busy in gambling and drinking. He remains engrossed in his own activities by keeping himself quite unconcerned about her likes and dislikes. Basanti Saikia never thinks about her expectations desires and tries her best to keep herself busy within the space provided by her husband. He condemns the art of dance and never bears Mrs. Saikia practising dance at his house in his presence. Mrs. Saikia and Kanchan both are presented in the novel as a victim of patriarchy.

Kanchan being a woman living in a patriarchal society gets very few options in her life. She was in search of a companion and in Akashjyoti, her boss, she imagines to find a kind hearted man who will be a good companion of her but in reality Akashjyoti Phukan leaves her alone after satisfying his male lust. Moreover, he used her for managing his professional difficulties by offering her body on the hands of the members of enquiry commission. Here Kanchan’s narrative makes stronger Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion that “a prostitute is a scapegoat and man vents his turpitude upon her and rejects her finally. ‘A caste of Shameless women’ allows the ‘honest woman’ to be treated with the most chivalrous respect..... whether she is put legally under police supervision or works illegally in secret, she is in any case treated as a pariah” (Beauvoir, 569).

Thus, Kanchan's fallen status is a social construct. Kanchan values a conscientious life but circumstances forced her to embrace a degrading existence. This is resignation in the face of poverty. The repressive economic condition compels a woman to live in inhuman condition and Kanchan is one example of it.

Conclusion

Sharma Pujari's novel *Kanchan* brings to light the sexual and social inequalities faced by women under the dominance of social norms like virtue, honour and respectability. This study presents women as an object for fulfilling men's desire and the determiner of her identity is her oppressed sexuality. Fallenness or prostitution is considered 'immoral' conduct of a woman and this immorality marks her as a deviant character. Kanchan in the novel *Kanchan* is the story of everyday life. The life of a beautiful and attractive woman under the control of patriarchal authorities is very vividly portrayed through this novel. The character of Kanchan reveals the realities of complicated relationships of young women which place them in an oppressive and powerless situation to survive as a marginalised and 'other'. The novelist by recreating and representing the story of patriarchal supremacy and resistance tries to create a dignified position for the marginalised section of the society of women who want to participate and include themselves in the socio – cultural system as authentic individuals.

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Anuradha Sharma Pujari – Assamese writer, Author, Literature

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