

Domestic Violence In Divakaruni's Story "The Bats"

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Abstract : This article explores the life of a mother and daughter caught into an intelligible world of domestic violence. This brings out the struggle of a victimized woman who tries to escape her destiny.

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The first story in the collection of *Arranged Marriage* is "The bats". It's deep probing into the murky existence of women particularly of lower-middle class, portrays the claustrophobic world of a mother-daughter, caught in an abusive relationship. This story has been narrated from the point of view of the daughter who longs to free herself as well as her mother from the confines of her father. Divakaruni has portrayed the mother as an object, a helpless creature, and typical representation of crying, silently

suffering Indian woman. Throughout the story both the mother and daughter remain nameless. They are described either as a mother or a daughter. Moreover, the mother and daughter reveals the victimization of thousands of women living an unidentified almost invisible lives across India. Not only mother has to go through suffering but the daughter's life is deeply affected by watching her helpless mother. She gives an account of her mother's suffering :

“That year mother cried a lot, or maybe she had always cried. That was the first year I was old enough to notice.... I noticed something funny about her face not the dark circles under her eyes. Those were always there. It was high up on her cheek, a yellow blotch with its edges turning purple.”¹

The daughter's sensation of fear is expressed through her description of her father, “demon like figure” whose shout made the walls shook like they were wallpapers.

“His hands were especially big with blackened, split nails and veins that stood up under the skin like blue snakes”²

Her utmost dream to escape from the suffocating world of suffering is fulfilled when she comes to know that her mother plans to leave the house secretly. The- mother-daughter went to a distant relative, an uncle of her mother , who lives in small village of rural

Bengal. The daughter appears delighted and stunned at the same time :

“I wonder how she would have bought our tickets. She never had much money and whenever she asked for any, father flew into one of his anger”.³

Apart from her gloomy home the small village appears her an earthly paradise with it’s “bamboo forests”, “real well “and “big rivers with silver fish”. She is enjoying company of her grand uncle detaching from her mother, for she feels no need to worry about her. However one night she discovered her mother crying like she earlier did. She tells us---

“Who I did notice ...was kind of a quiet then one night I woke up to her crying, just like before I lay there listening to those racking, muffled sobs that seemed to go for ever. It was like sliding into a dark bottomless hole.”⁴

Though the daughter desperately wants to console her mother but stops herself. For she can sense her desires: “A part of me wanted to go and put my arms around her, but the other part was afraid of what she might tell me, what she might want.”⁵

The daughter finds herself unable to discover the real reason of her mother’s crying in absence of her cruel father . However, she tries to forget her mother’s tears for sometime

due to the bat's sudden appearance on the mango orchard...and ruined hundreds of mangoes in a day. "The bats were real problem. They had descended all of a sudden on the mango orchard, and within a day they had bitten into and ruined hundreds of mangoes... The old man first used drum and sticks to send them away. When it did not work ,ultimately he had to use the magic powder [poison]to kill them." Even the poison could not drive the bats away: "every morning there were just as many bodies".⁶

While the grandfather could not comprehend the reasons behind bats coming but the daughter can perceives bat's fate, for she relates the tragedy of bats with that of her mother:

"I guess they just don't realize what's happening. They don't realize that flying somewhere else they will be safe or may be they do, but there is something that keeps on pulling them back here."⁷

Here the daughter compares her mother's ignorance with the bats. The story develops in the manner of folk-fairy tales when the daughter got a ring from the stomach of a fish with the ancient spell carved on it. The old man tells the daughter that the ring belonged to the sorcerer of Kalodighi; the one that grant all wishes: " See one day when the sorcerer lay sleeping in his silken pleasure boat ,his hand trailing in the cool water a rui fish came up and bit off his ring finger ." The ring motif resonates with the mythical

story of Dushyanta and Shakuntala. Shakuntala was cursed by sage Durvasa. Shakuntala under the curse of Durvasa loses her ring into a river where a fish devours it. When the daughter happily reaches home with her grandfather and magic ring. The mother shows them a letter from her husband. This letter gives a great blow to the daughter as she cannot believe that her mother is still in contact with her father. The mother defensively tells the reasons of writing the letter:

“I wrote to him, I could not stand it, the stares and whispers of the women down in the market place, the loneliness of being without him”⁸

The mother's sudden decision to leave the village and get back to her husband is shrouded in several implications. Obviously the mother, not being an economically independent woman, has to depend for her survival on either her husband or her uncle. The prevailing patriarchal norms of the society do not respect a woman who alienates herself from her domestic-conjugal relationship. In order to fit into the conventional norms she needs to get back –to ready herself for patiently coping with the abuse and oppression, living marginalized in India suffering for ever. Initially the daughter refused to go and tries to stop her mother by showing her intense hatred in these words:

“As melted metal filling my arms, legs, rising from stomach into my throat so I could

spit it out at her . I gathered my breath for it but when I saw her eyes wild open like a little girls as she reread the letter. I realized that she had not been lying on purpose she just did not know the way I did.”⁹

However the magic ring brings a ray of hope to the daughter. at Calcutta the daughter would hide the ring .Until the earlier event is repeated ---the mother is brutally battered, bleeding, she undertakes another journey to her uncle , but sooner than the previous occasion she comes back along with the daughter at Calcutta back to her husband’s house. This time the daughter discovers that she has lost the ring.

“The loss of the ring symbolizes the curse----ordeal of innocence and also the loss of innocence .In the Lacanian sense the experience connotes the transfer or shifting from the early stages of mother’s /natures/semiotic stages to the Oedipal phase [Lacan 1988:222]--the patriarchy that makes her recognize that cultural compulsion and constraints must make women come to the terms with prevailing of the patriarchal /conventional point of view compelling a relationship of violence and repression . Female life is baffled about on vicissitudes of emotions. The unliberated section of women is specifically subjected to social processes and inner turmoil. The girl’s childhood with which she had a brief , idyllic but intimate contact is now ended . That was the period of the nurturing of her own secret self . Coming back to the father’s house ----is entering into the conditioning

---culturing to which the mother must subscribe. The girl however, may not be inept, silent, subject like her mother. For her the quest is to find her identity. Her new growth involves trusting her ability to think and getting a new speech like her mind. Unlike her mother, she is sensitive and generous with language she may look forward to a liberated future and enjoy a rich but painful freedom of spirit.”¹⁰

References:

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3-Ibid.p.2

4-Ibid.p.3

5-Ibid.p.7

6-Ibid.p.7

7-Ibid.p.8

8-Ibid.p.11-12

9-Ibid.p.14

10- Prof. Vanashree. “*Urge for Autonomy, Eco-Feminism : The Movements of Innocence and Experience in Chitra Divakaruni's “The Bats”*”. Critical Practice. vol.VI.no.2 June, 1998. 59-64.