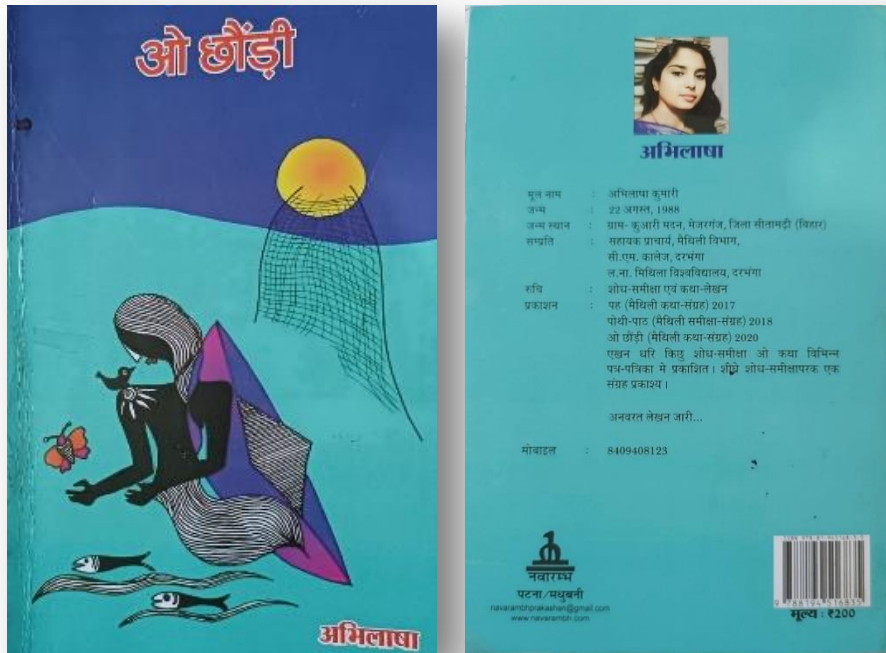


**Book Review of O Chhaudi(O Girl) by Abhilash(Nawarambh, MadhubaniPatna, Bihar,
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‘O’ Chhaudi (O Girl) : Treading the Untrodden Literary Path in the Changing Scenario of Mithila and Maithili firmament

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Introduction

O Chhaudi (O Girl) is the second short story collection of Abhilasha who is the most prominent, prolific and popular writer of Maithili literature. She is a professor of Maithili by profession and writer by passion. She sets a new narratives for women of the society to open up and lay bare their hearts for their long suppressed longings, deep seated desires and unfilled dreams. Through her short stories, she is trying to break orthodox traditions and taboos and establishing new paradigms where women can create her own identity and feel proud of their existence on earth. Women in general and Mithila women in particular have been the victims of various types of violence, rigid patriarchy systems, callous cultural norms and erroneous religious beliefs which make women servants, subservient secondary agents and slaves of the households. Abhilasha has emerged as the dominant voice for the women who have been voiceless since the inception

of human civilization and culture on earth. At this tender age, she has begged many awards and accolades such as Jyotsna Samman (2018), Dr. Ganpati Mishra Sahitya Samman (2020), Tirhut Sahitya Samman (2022) and Maisam Yuva Samman for Phulbhanga (2024). She authored many remarkable books such as Pah(2017), Pothipath(2018), O Chhaudi(2020), Phulbhanga (2024) and Yathaprasang(2024) which paved the path for coming generations. She introduces new discourses and reflects new dimensions to shaping Maithili literature. She writes freely and frankly on the issues which she comes across in daily life and concerns her deeply. Her profound attempt is to changing the make gaze and perception towards the second sex. They are not just the pieces of flesh and bones which need to be butchered on the bed whenever and wherever men want. They are also not just the doll's house to be used for the embellishments of the various homes wherever they go and become the marginalized members.

Review

All the stories collected in this present book portray and reveal the subconscious minds of women of different ages differently. The first story is *Pida*(Hurt) which deals the love for own mother tongue shown by the newly wedded bride who is just going to her sasural after marriage. It also shows conflict between two cultures – Mithila and Bhojpuri. Superiority or inferiority of culture is a myth. The writer gives readers the message that we should not look down upon any culture and language. We must have respect and reverence for all cultures whatever it may be. The bride in this story is deeply hurt when she finds that people of her sasural make fun of her language and culture. She vows to adhere to her own language and teach them her own mother tongue without fail. It is a pertinent story written on the time where love for Maithili mother tongue is falling apart. The second story *Laglai Jena...(It Felt Like...)* which shows the intervention of mobile technology to shaping the perception and realization of husband-wife relationship even for the aged couples. It also explores issues of mismatch marriage which results in extra-marital affair and elopement with the lovers. It also portrays aged female sexuality. The mother -in-law in the story realises her own sexuality and feels to rekindle her own romantic relationship with her husband when she saw her daughter-in-law enjoying this romantic relationship. She also demand a smartphone from her husband so that she can talk to husband on video calling. The deep seated love in her heart gets wings and start flying high but the social reality is bitter. There is a strict taboo in our society that aged husband and wife should not indulge in love relationship. It reminds me of a film *Lipstick Under My Burkha*(2016) which is also centred on an aged woman trying to explore her own romantic relationship. *O Chhadi(O Girls)* centres on many burning issues which are female disability, rape with a dumb girl, mistreatment with a disabled child, objectification and commodification of women irrespective of her age, mental and physical conditions. We often come across of such news in the newspaper or social media that mentally disabled women get raped and small girl child also

become victims of such incidents in our country. The writer highlights and emphasises on changing our perception toward female child and disable female child. The ending of the story is enigmatic that how the disabled female child dies- with the severe pain and trauma of rape or mother strangulates her own child since she realises that a dumb girl child has no future in this callous, chaotic and patriarchy society. The writer very subtly brings the issue of child rape basically those belong to deprived and marginalised sections of the society.

Jaant(Suppression) is the fourth story of this book which unearths the issue of freedom and flight of girl child so that she may be educated, employed and empowered in the changing scenario of the 21st century. Kamini is such an ambitious girl who wants to continue her study despite plethora of challenges which she faces for her further studies. She wants to fly high high in the sky so that she may prove her power, passion and potential. She is able to balance her household works and studies since she understands her family reality that is rooted agricultural activities. Having given the opportunity, women can take responsibility of her profession as well as her family and friends. It gives messages to the readers that a girl child should not be suppressed and oppressed on the basis of gender discrimination which is rampant in our Mithila society. The next story in this series is **Khakhas** which explores a contemporary theme that is sexual harassment, sexual abuse and rape but the rural illiterate masses do not report such incidents to police station since people are afraid of their social honour and family prestige. Even someone reports such incident, justice is denied and there is a long, complex and expensive process which requires huge amount of money as well as unnecessary tension and turmoil. This story is influenced by 'Me Too' movement which started in metropolitan cities but such incidents are very common in the rural areas. The writer is trying to tread the untrodden territory for which she must be acknowledged and appreciated profoundly. Majority of working poor women face it but they do not express. Even in the beginning of the story, women hesitate to sharing such happenings but gradually they did. The writer, through her such stories, is trying her best to awaken the consciousness of the people so that they will not fall prey to such physical exploitation. **Jwar-Bhata** is the story which evolves around Garima who is deprived of his parental love since her mother dies at early age and her father remarries. She is forced to live in hostel for her higher studies as she is not able to accommodate herself with her step mother. Gradually she falls in love with her friend's brother because she has been emotionally starved. The boy whom she loves profoundly, betrays her after getting a government job and secretly marries with his own colleague. Garima is deeply shocked and chartered broken down completely and suffers from mental depression. Having suffered from such acute mental depression, she decides not to marry and remain spinster, and to adopt a girl child and give her total love and care which she has not received in her lifetime. This story again is trying to break the long established tradition or social institution called marriage where woman is just the slave and servant in the hands of men who use them as per their physical gratification. **Relgadi Chhuk chhuk** is the first Dalit story in this book which deals with the life, domestic violence, dreams

and future of Fakira and Bechani. They are socially, economically, educationally and culturally deprived and they are in such a pitiable conditions where they are compelled to eat left overs from the village feast. They face plethora of problems since there is no trace of education in their family but they want her daughter to become a government employee. The story also throws light on the issues such as extra-marital affair, prostitution, poverty and adultery in subtle ways. Whatever may be the present situation of Fakira and Bechani but they are conscious of future generation. At the end of the story Fakira warns her wife not to bring *juthan* from the village feast. The ending of the story is satisfying and soothing as it symbolises social and educational transformation in the lives of Dalits. The story *Abhilasha* is a poignant narrative which is centred on the various social concerns such as child marriage, gambling, domestic violence, widowhood, poverty, patriarchy, drunk driving and death. Rakesh and Mukesh are brothers. Rakesh is not educated and he has become mentally unstable due to over drinking, gambling. He is married to Kanhaulwali who is just a student of 7th standard. It was a mismatch and child marriage. When Mukesh grows up, he also becomes drunkard and starts gambling. Rakesh's death in the road accident due to over drinking and rash driving torn his wife apart. She defies the idea of remarriage suggested by her own father despite so many financial, physical, emotional and social challenges that she face daily but she vows to work as a servant and nurture her five children all alone without any support from the family. The writer highlights the necessity of girl child education for her employment, enlightenment and empowerment. Marriage which is often over glamorised and romanticized cannot rescue women and provide relief from plethora of challenges but education can do. *Kamai (Earning)* is a a poignant take based on begging by women in the train to fulfil the basic needs of life. The story has been narrated so effectively that it make us emotional and sensitive to the common cause. Gulabiya and her baby sister are hungry but they don't have anything to eat and they are forced to eat leftover small pieces of biscuits. The two women sing filmy songs and try to persuade the passengers for money. The young and old passengers try to touch, molest and make vulgar comments but they pocket even such insults and abuses for the sake of fulfilling two squares of meal. Kamini is a mute passenger who watches all this but she couldn't do anything. The issue of child marriage has been also interwoven in the tale which highlights the pathetic plight of girl child in the society. At the age when they should be studying and empowering themselves, they are begging without thinking of their modesty and chastity. It is a also a cruel satire on our society which is known for glorious history and profound philosophy "*Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam*".

Abhilasha is trying to shape literary sense and sensibility of the modern Mithila readers with new perspectives. The narrative technique used in each story is fascinating and captivating the readers with its charms. The flash back technique is her forte and favourite which takes all the stories in the psychological realm of the characters. Each story collected in the book moves smoothly like the flow of the rivers and the way language has been used keeping in mind of the contexts and characters is enriching, exciting and imitable. The way writer is advocating and

exposing social evils especially pertaining to the women in general and women of Mithila in particular is placing her into the mainstream writer of Hindi and English such as Mamta Kaliya, Madhu Kankadiya, Mridula Garg, Krishna Sobti, Shashidesh Pandey etc... So, her work must be translated into English for the non-Maithili readers so that it may cross the linguistic barrier, geographical borders and political boundaries. *O Chhadi* (O Girl) is one of the most representative works of Maithili and Mithila which moves away from traditional themes and motifs and successfully launches contemporary socio-cultural concerns in the focus of the literature lovers. It is a worth reading text which at times compel us to think deeply and at times captivates the readers completely with the art of characterization, thematization, narrativization and localization.

Reference

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