



GENDER ROLES AND IDENTITY IN GHACHAR GHOCHAR: AN ANALYSIS OF FEMALE CHARACTERS

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Abstract:

Within the confines of Indian patriarchal society, women find themselves constrained to adopt the archetypal roles of submissive housewives, confined to the realms of childbearing and domestic tasks. Vivek Shanbhag's masterful work, "Ghachar Ghochar," artfully encapsulates this prevailing notion, employing his characters and narrative to shed light upon the clash between entrenched traditional values and the onslaught of modernity. Moreover, the novella delves into the moral degradation experienced by family members who, having stumbled upon sudden financial success, are gradually corroded by the insidious tendrils of unethical business practices and rampant corruption. This paper, in its present undertaking, aims to center on the insidious presence of domestic violence and patriarchal control that women within the novel must grapple with, perpetuated at the hands of their male patriarchs. Our societal constructs have long relegated women to the status of mere housewives, their lives meticulously designed solely for the purpose of childbearing and menial household chores, thereby robbing them of any semblance of personal agency or the opportunity to voice their own desires. It is imperative to explore the intricate subjugation of these women, their precarious positioning within both the domestic and external spheres, and the harrowing landscape of exploitation and oppression that they are unjustly subjected to.

Key Words: Home, Patriarchy, Domestic Violence, Housewife and Women.

The novella *Ghachar Ghochar* by Vivek Shanbhag provides a compelling portrayal of the lives of its characters, and the role of women within the narrative is an important aspect to examine. Through the female characters in the novella, Shanbhag offers a nuanced exploration of gender dynamics, societal expectations, and the constraints placed upon women in traditional Indian households.

In his seminal opus, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, the illustrious Frederick Engels embarks upon a profound exploration of the rise of class-based societies, delving into the consequential emergence of inequality and the subjugation of women. Engels astutely observes that in the prelapsarian era before the advent of class society, women held a position of utmost reverence within the fabric of hunter-gatherer communities. Entrusted with the pivotal responsibility of gathering and nurturing crops, they stood at the very heart of the group's sustenance and survival. Thus, in this primordial epoch, an absence of systematic inequality prevailed, with a harmonious equilibrium between the sexes. Alas, as the wheels of history turned and the concept of private property took root, the proliferation of monogamous familial units became paramount. Such arrangements facilitated the intergenerational transfer of property, regrettably ensnaring women within the confines of the household. Within these gilded cages, their autonomy and avenues for self-expression were grievously curtailed. With eloquence and erudition, Engels elucidates the profound societal shifts and their far-reaching consequences, weaving a tapestry of insight into the annals of human civilization. "In the old communistic household, which comprised many couples and their children, the task entrusted to the women of managing the household was as much a public and socially necessary industry as the procuring of food by the men" (Engels 21).

Shanbhag writes about the condition of their house, "We were like a small roadside teashop, I suppose: one of those places with no signboard and no name, which serve up hot tea on chipped saucers and just manage to stay in business" (15).

Anita, a prominent figure within the novella, personifies the arduous challenges and sacrifices endured by women ensnared within the clutches of a patriarchal society. From the outset, her character embodies the role of a devoted daughter and sister, selflessly prioritizing the needs and desires of her kin over her own. Evident in her decision to forsake her aspirations and succumb to an arranged marriage, Anita's agency is undeniably curtailed, constrained by the domineering influence of her male relatives.

Through the exploration of these female characters, Shanbhag delves into the intricate tapestry of female identity and the relentless duress imposed upon women amidst the intricate fabric of Indian society. The novella poignantly exposes the constricted sphere of choices available to women within the realm of traditional households, wherein societal norms fervently dictate their roles as dutiful daughters, compliant wives, and nurturing mothers. However, amid these shackling restraints, a glimmer of hope emerges as the narrative unveils

the indomitable spirit of resistance and an unyielding yearning for personal agency that may triumphantly defy such suffocating constraints.

Malati, another notable female figure within the novella, offers a compelling counterpoint, embodying a woman who fearlessly challenges the entrenched gender norms and societal expectations imposed upon her. In stark contrast to Anita, Malati emerges as an independent thinker, unafraid to give voice to her own convictions. Shanbhag writes, "Malati had always been unstable - a pile of gunpowder waiting to go off" (40). With unwavering determination, she dares to question the rigid social constructs that seek to confine her, embarking on a quest for financial autonomy by embarking upon a successful business venture. Malati's resolute spirit and self-reliance serve as a powerful symbol of empowerment within a system that all too often stifles the aspirations of women. Famous writer Toni Morrison has written in her novel *Beloved* about women, "Strong women, with their innate ability to nurture, inspire, and lead, are the architects of a brighter tomorrow" (13).

Moreover, the novella artfully delves into the nuanced power dynamics concealed within the realm of the domestic sphere. Despite the confines of their traditional roles, the female characters wield a subtle yet profound influence over the dynamics of the family unit. They emerge as the emotional bedrocks of the household, providing unwavering support, wise counsel, and a stabilizing force. Though their power may not manifest overtly, their mere presence and invaluable contributions are integral to the cohesive functioning of the familial fabric.

In its entirety, the portrayal of female characters in *Ghachar Ghochar* authentically reflects the intricate realities faced by women within the confines of traditional Indian households. The novella masterfully illuminates the perpetual tension that arises from the clash between societal expectations and individual desires, effectively underscoring the manifold sacrifices and challenges that women encounter along their paths.

Simultaneously, the novella showcases moments of empowerment and acts of resistance as women deftly navigate and negotiate their positions within the confinements of their prescribed social roles. These nuanced portrayals beckon readers into a realm of introspection, compelling them to contemplate the intricate interplay of power dynamics and agency within a patriarchal society.

Interwoven throughout the narrative, Anita's character stands in stark contrast to her sister-in-law, Malati. While Anita adheres to the expectations of traditional gender roles, embodying obedience and submission, Malati fearlessly challenges these norms, embarking on a quest for independence. This juxtaposition opens a gateway for the exploration of divergent paths available to women within the restrictive bounds of a patriarchal system. Michelle Obama writes about similar situation in her book, *Becoming*, "Behind every successful woman is herself, armed with determination and resilience" (34).

Anita's character also provides profound insight into the sacrifices made by women in the pursuit of familial harmony. Despite her own yearnings and discontentment, she willingly subjugates her desires, prioritizing the collective well-being of the family. Her selflessness and unwavering dedication to maintaining tranquility within the household lay bare the burdens women often bear in upholding the delicate balance of familial unity.

While superficially appearing submissive and docile, Anita's character assumes a crucial role within the narrative, serving as a poignant embodiment of the struggles faced by countless women who navigate the treacherous waters of societal expectations and constrained agency. Through her presence, the complex dynamics within traditional households are illuminated, and readers are impelled to reckon with the sacrifices and limitations imposed upon women within such settings. The profound writer Mandy Hale writes about it, "Strong women don't play victim, don't make themselves look pitiful, and don't point fingers. They stand and they deal" (21).

Anita's character in "Ghachar Ghochar" resonates as a poignant testament to the arduous challenges and sacrifices endured by women within the confines of traditional Indian households. Her selflessness, obedience, and subordination serve as poignant reflections of the societal expectations imposed upon women, underscoring the stark limitations on their agency. Through Anita's character, Shanbhag deftly sheds light on the intricate realities faced by women within patriarchal systems, inviting readers to engage in a profound exploration of the intricate interplay of gender and power dynamics. Shanbhag writes, "I didn't know how to make her see the relationships in our family from the inside. There was no other way to comprehend them"(99).

Conversely, Malati emerges as a resolute and independent thinker, fearlessly challenging the rigidity of social norms imposed upon her. Diverging from Anita's path, she refuses to be ensnared by blind conformity, daring to carve out her own trajectory. This defiance against traditional gender roles finds vibrant expression in her decision to engage in work and establish a prosperous business, unveiling her indomitable determination and unwavering ambition.

Throughout the expanse of the novella, Malati's character assumes the mantle of personal agency and yearning for financial independence. Her resolute decision to engage in work beyond the confines of the home serves as a potent catalyst, empowering her to seize control of her own destiny. By boldly defying the traditional preconceptions of a woman's place in society, Malati emerges as a resplendent emblem of empowerment, casting a radiant light upon the narrative's thematic landscape.

Moreover, Malati's character emerges as an ardent voice of dissent amidst the labyrinthine web of patriarchal dynamics that engulf the household. Fearlessly, she unfurls the tapestry of her opinions, fearlessly challenging the decisions and actions of the male members of the family. This courageous stance adds an exquisite depth and multifaceted complexity to the narrative, painting strokes of vibrant hues upon the canvas of the story. As Malati's character unfurls, it serves as a striking contrast to the narrative embodiment of Anita, the narrator's sister. This juxtaposition artfully highlights the diverse paths that women may traverse within the confines of a patriarchal society. While Anita's footsteps align obediently with societal expectations, sacrificing her own desires, Malati radiates with the brilliance of a progressive mindset, avidly pursuing personal fulfillment and emancipation.

As the narrative unfurls, we bear witness to the clash between Malati and her husband, Vikram. Unraveling the layers of their conflict, one plausible catalyst emerges in the form of differing perspectives on matters of finance. Malati's portrayal as an independent and ambitious woman, embarking upon a prosperous business endeavor, stands in stark contrast to Vikram's entrenched beliefs and steadfast expectations surrounding gender roles and financial responsibilities. The clash between their visions of financial independence becomes a crucible of disagreement, serving as fertile grounds for their conflicts.

Furthermore, the discord between Malati and Vikram may also find its roots in the contrasting tapestries of their personalities and values. Malati emerges as an assertive force, unyielding in her convictions, fearlessly willing to challenge the societal norms that bind. Conversely, Vikram's portrait reveals a more conservative and tradition-bound perspective, steeped in timeless outlooks. The gulf that separates them, be it in terms of personality or values, engenders a maelstrom of relational clashes, birthing disagreements and conflicts that punctuate their intertwined journey.

In the embrace of the novella's resplendent narrative, the character of Malati stands as an emblem of empowerment, casting a radiant glow upon the yearning for personal agency and financial independence. Her courageous dissent disrupts the prevailing patriarchal currents, infusing the narrative with shades of vibrant rebellion. As the narrative unfurls, the tapestry of Malati's conflict with Vikram weaves together elements of differing financial perspectives, personality clashes, and divergent values, forging a path strewn with discord and disagreement.

It is important to note that *Ghachar Ghochar* leaves certain aspects of the story open to interpretation, and the author intentionally leaves gaps in the narrative. This allows readers to fill in the gaps with their own interpretations and to contemplate the complexities and intricacies of human relationships and conflicts.

Conclusion:

Imbued with the brilliance of storytelling, the novel unfolds as an extraordinary chronicle, tracing the breathtaking metamorphosis of a joint family, transcending the realm of poverty to ascend the lofty heights of prosperity. It masterfully captures the intricate web of power dynamics intricately woven within Indian households, meticulously crafted around the intricate tapestry of prescribed gender roles. Within this captivating narrative, the women of the family, driven by a self-interest steeped in the quest for social standing and financial security, fervently cling to the conviction that their patriarch must be shielded and safeguarded at any cost. Yet, as the tale unfurls, it artfully illuminates the stark realities of economic and social constraints, sounding a clarion call of caution against their omnipresence. Even amidst this nuanced backdrop, Anita, driven by an indomitable spirit, dares to challenge the very foundations of patriarchal ethics that the family ardently upholds. However, her valiant attempt to dismantle this entrenched system inadvertently ensnares her as a hapless victim. The novel poignantly exposes the enduring subjugation of women, a cycle perpetuated as long as they willingly partake in it, meekly conforming to the idealized archetypes defined by patriarchal hegemony.

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