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## **The Protest of Marginalized Women in Anurag Mathur's *The Department of Denials***

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### **Abstract:**

Basically marginalization is the social process where unfair and unjust treatment is given to the weaker individuals. These weaker individuals are forced to feel that they are not important or they cannot influence decisions in the society and the family they live in. Woman is one of the weaker individuals. She becomes victim of the stronger group represented by men. The forces like men's pride, traditions and patriarchy are responsible for the oppression and exploitation of women. Some women submit themselves to the traditional norms they face but some protest against their marginalization and oppression and show their rebellious nature by challenging the patriarchy. In the novel, *The Department of Denials*, Mathur explores the feminine identity of three female characters - Ashwamedha, Radha and B G who protest against the patriarchal culture. Though Ashwamedha's father expects her to live and behave like a typical Indian girl, she wants to live like an American. Though Radha is born and brought up in an Indian patriarchal culture, she revolts against the patriarchy and runs away from home and marries her boyfriend secretly. B G, with whom Babar, the protagonist, falls in love with and marries her also revolts against the Indian patriarchy. The objective of this paper is to depict the protest of these marginalized women who revolt against patriarchy and assert themselves as independent modern women.

**Keywords:** protest, marginalization, immigrant, ultramodern, patriarchy.

Anurag Mathur in his third novel, *The Department of Denials*, explores the feminine identity of three female characters - Ashwamedha, Radha and Behemoolya Gunvati alias B.G.

who protest against the patriarchal culture. Though Ashwamedha's father expects her to live and behave like a typical Indian girl, she wants to live like an American. Though Radha is born and brought up in an Indian patriarchal culture, she revolts against the patriarchy and runs away from home and marries her boyfriend secretly. B G, with whom Babar, the protagonist, falls in love with and marries her also shows her protest against the Indian patriarchy.

After the success of Anurag Mathur's first two novels, *The Inscrutable Americans* and *Making the Minister Smile*, as the best sellers, his third novel, *The Department of Denials* (1998) comes after the gap of two years. This novel is subtitled as '*Are All Women Leg-Spinner's?*' asked the Stephanian. In this novel, Mathur depicts the story of Babar Thakur, the protagonist, his sister Radha, his beloved B. G. and Ashwamedha, the daughter of Mr.Sood, the chief editor of the journal where Babar works.

The protagonist, Babar Thakur is a young son of Bahadur Prasad Thakur, a joint secretary in the Income Tax department. Though B. P. Thakur is completely and utterly honest, he suffers due to his corrupt colleagues and cunning, crafty and lusty politicians. His subordinates regard his honesty as abnormal, and his wife thinks that to be honest in the government service is to commit suicide. On the contrary, Babar and his sister Radha support their father and they are proud of him. Though it is a great jolt to his quest for identity as the Prime Minister of India, Babar is not worried. He knows that the government cannot sack his father because the constitution of India protects its citizens. Though he is transferred to the department having no work, his salary will continue to come in, and the family will not suffer financially

Mr. Thakur's degradation may or may not affect life of his wife, Mrs. Thakur and his daughter Radha but definitely, it affects career of his son Babar. After graduation Babar is very enthusiastic to begin his career as a journalist to fulfill his ambition to become the Prime Minister of India. He has been planning to get a job as a journalist in a reputed newspaper to begin his career. But he is doubtful now because his father has lost his important position in the government. So no proprietor of a well-known newspaper will offer him a job by respecting his father's word. As a result though there are a number of well-established newspapers, and Mr. Thakur knows them very well, he advises his son to join a newspaper which is not started yet because he knows that the establishment of a well-known newspaper will not respect his word due to his fallen status in the government. This proves as a turning point in life of Babar and his beloved, B.G. As per his father's advice Babar meets Sethji and expresses his desire to do the

job of a journalist. Sethji assures him to offer a job, but Babar is surprised to know the editor and his past experience in journalism. Sethji has appointed Mr. Sobhagya Sood, the NRI chap who has worked for famous American pornographic Magazine *Hustler*. Though Sethji is ignorant about what kind of magazine *Hustler* is, Babar knows that *Hustler* is a pornographic magazine of the worst sort. He expresses his doubts in front of his family regarding the future of the newspaper saying, “This is incredible. What kind of a paper is some guy from *Hustler* going to bring out?” (32). But for Babar there is no better alternative. He decides to begin his career with Sethji’s newspaper and get some experience and then skip to more established newspaper. So as per Sethji’s suggestion he meets Mr. Sood and finds him ever odder than he has imagined his personality as the editor because he invites Babar for dinner in his first meeting with Babar. Mr. Sood’s invitation for dinner in the very first meeting puts Babar into confusion which is clarified when he finds Ashwamedha, Mr. Sood’s daughter alone in the hotel room. Mr. Sood is in a search of an Indian son-in-law for his ultramodern daughter, Ashwamedha who is born and brought up in an advanced American culture. He forces his daughter to pose herself as a traditional Indian woman and behave like a modest and meek Indian girl so that she may win heart of Babar, the son from a traditional Indian Hindu family. He thinks that if Ashwamedha succeeds in winning heart of Babar she will be a good daughter-in-law of the Thakur family. While commenting on Ashwamedha’s identity as a marginalized Indian woman, the narrator says:

He [Babar] went up and found the room and rang the bell. The door opened and a vision of traditional Indian femininity stood before him.

She was wearing an orange sari with one end demurely draped over her head. A red bindi the size of a saucer covered half her forehead. Earrings carved into the letters ‘Om’ stretched her earlobes. But what he couldn’t wrench his gaze away from was a nose ring that looked the size of a bicycle wheel. (35)

Ashwamedha welcomes Babar and while speaking to him, she honestly further clarifies Babar that Mr. Thakur’s big position in the government is the reason behind the invitation of dinner to Babar. Though Ashwamedha is brought up in America and is influenced by American culture and wants to live like Americans, she pretends to be Indian to win the heart of Babar, the son of a big bureaucrat. She purposefully poses in front of Babar in a typical Indian Sari with a red ‘bindi’ on her forehead and earrings carved into the letters ‘Om’ which mark Hindu identity

of a traditional Indian woman. Babar clearly understands the behaviour of Mr. Sood and Ashwamedha and the reasons behind Mr. and Mrs. Sood's going away before Babar's arrival. To impress Babar, Ashwamedha criticizes American youths for indulging in dating, drugs, alcohol and sex before marriage. On the contrary she praises Babar for his virtues as an ideal Indian youth. Though Ashwamedha praises Indian youths, she rejects almost all eligible young boys her father finds for her. She finds one or other faults in the South Indian, Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi or Muslim boys because she wants to marry an American boy and not an Indian. For the sake of her father's wish she has to behave like an Indian girl against her will. But soon she discards the garb of a traditional marginalized Indian woman and shows her protest by putting on garb of an ultramodern girl. Her true identity is exposed when Babar sees her dancing in brief shorts and tiny top at the Oasis discotheque. She very boldly protests against marginalization of her identity as an independent woman in the discotheque. The narrator explores her real American identity as an ultramodern girl in the following words:

A young girl [Ashwamedha] dressed in the briefest of white shorts and tiny red top, with pink-streaked hair, scarlet slashes across her face and safety pins through her nose and ears, was undulating with a ferocious eroticism, in time to the music. Her eyes closed in rapture, her loose hair swaying from side to side, she looked like a carnivore of sex. ... Her eyes suddenly opened, and the first person she saw was Babar. Still gyrating with a naked seductiveness in rhythm with the song, she swayed towards him. She reached him and raised her hand to massage his cheek. (52)

Ashwamedha's completely changed personality shocks Babar. Before he comes out of the shock, she greets Babar and before giving him any opportunity to express his shock after seeing her in such type of garb, she puts her hand around his collar and leads him out of the disco to her hotel room. As soon as they enter the room, she unbuttons his shirt and "his clothes were half off, anyway, and she didn't have much to get rid of, and they made hasty love" (54). Babar is completely shocked to witness such a bold behaviour of just seventeen years old girl. He is completely confused to see two different Ashwamedhas - the one as a traditional woman in a typical Indian sari, bindi, and rings he has seen during his first visit to Soods and Soods' visit to his house and the other as an ultramodern girl in the disco and in the hotel room after disco where she takes the initiative to have sexual intercourse. After their intercourse, she makes it

clear that her father wants her to become a nice Indian girl and pose herself in a typical traditional Indian woman's identity so that she may win the heart of a nice Indian boy and marry him and live in India forever. She further says that it is her father's imagination of this image of her which does not seem to exist here. In fact, she wants to live in America, with Americans, as an American. And finally she decides not to marry an Indian. While analyzing her consciousness, the narrator observes:

'I really do not know how I am going to tell him' [Dad] the young girl finally said, 'but I am not Indian. And this,' she said with finally, 'is not going to work.'

'What?'

'Marring some Indian jerk'

'Oh, thanks,' said Babar, 'much appreciated.'

She laughed. 'You know what I mean. I can't lead my life for Dad. I have to do what's right for me.' (58)

Though Ashwamedha's father expects her to live and behave like a typical Indian girl, Ashwamedha wants to live like an American. As she is born and brought up in the American culture, she has almost become an American. She is much influenced by the American culture. She protests against the Indian patriarchy and proves herself to be a different woman. Her changed feminine identity is clearly shown through her dressing style, her behaviour and her boldness in taking initiative in making love. Mathur explores her identity as a second generation immigrant, a changed Indian girl in an American culture who protests against the traditional Indian patriarchal family system.

The second woman who protests against marginalization is Babar's sister, Radha. Radha is in love with Babar's friend Marshal Taneja who is a son of a retired clerk from middleclass family. Her mother is against their marriage because the Taneja family is middle class family with no good reputation. She is in search of a good boy from rich family with good reputation. Radha, though not as ultramodern as Ashwamedha, is an educated girl having modern thinking. She too protests against her mother's whims and the so called patriarchal Indian culture that doesn't allow Indian women to choose their life partners as per their choice. Radha runs away from home and marries her boyfriend Marshal Taneja secretly. When the news of her marriage given to her mother by Babar, she is shocked by the unwise and foolish decision of daughter.

Radha's mother becomes very angry and scolds her husband for spoiling their daughter. The anger of a traditional Indian mother is expressed in the following words:

'It's all your fault', they heard her through the door and over the TV. 'You've spoiled and pampered and ruined that girl. And now she's gone and wrecked her life. Marriedaman with a correspondence course degree who does god-knows-what work. Who'll marry her now?

They heard her weeping, the bathroom door slam and her voice stopped. (80)

Radha is Mathur's second woman character who is depicted as a modern and independent woman. Although she is born and brought up in an Indian patriarchal culture, she strongly protests against the Indian patriarchy by marring against her parents will.

The third woman who protests against marginalization is Behemoolya Gunvati alias B.G. Meanwhile, Mr. Sood gives up his job as an editor and Sethji appoints Mr. Kathor Dand as the new editor of his newspaper 'Political Pareeksha'. As per Sethji's suggestion Babar goes to meet the new editor in the new premises of the office where the new secretary, Tempest congratulates him on getting job as a journalist in the 'Political Pareeksha'. Babar joins his office as a journalist where he meets a beautiful young girl named Behemoolya Gunvati alias B.G. who also works in the same office as a feature writer. His meeting with B.G. proves turning point in Babar's life. He is attracted towards B. G. and tries to know about her from Tempest. Tempest tells him that B. G. is the daughter of a rich contractor and her name is Behemoolya Gunvati. As she hates the name given by her grandmother, she prefers to be called B. G. Similarly, B. G. is also attracted towards Babar. Tempest provides her detailed information about Babar including his father's big position in the government and his sister's love marriage with a businessman. She also gives B.G. advice that it is right time to strike and B.G. strikes by inviting Babar for treat at the Claridges Bar. After the treat and spending penning a few minutes in the Lodi Gardens, they had conversation about boyfriends, husbands and marriages and married couples. Through their conversation Babar comes to the conclusion that all women are actually leg-spinners. B. G's attitude towards life, society, and patriarchy clearly indicates that like Ashwamedha she too is independent ultramodern girl. She is the third girl in this novel who strongly protests against the marginalization of women. It is clearly shown through her conversation with Babar as:

'Well I' am not even married,' she [B. G.] giggled again.

‘Naturally. I mean if you were, you wouldn’t be here with me, would you?’ he agreed.

‘Yes, I might,’ she retorted.

Babar was taken aback.

‘Even as a respectably married woman?’ he asked.

‘Married, yes, respectably, no, if you mean I stop being an independent person after getting married.’

‘Oh, come on,’ Babar argued, ‘you wouldn’t carry on meeting other guys after you got married, would you?’

‘Yes, I would,’ she said promptly, ---

‘And supposing your husband thought you were sleeping with them?’ demanded Babar.

She shrugged.

‘His problem’. (144-145)

Through this conversation Mathur, points out that like Ashwamedha and Radha, B. G. too is an ultramodern girl who protests against the patriarchy. She openly and frankly tells Babar that she is not a traditional girl who respects the bindings of the Indian patriarchy.

So far as the identity of the three important female characters is concerned all the three girls who are marginalized in the Indian patriarchy assert themselves as an educated, independent and ultramodern girls who strongly protest against the Indian patriarchal family system. They smoke; they drink; they do jobs and have sexual relationship with their boyfriends before marriage and even after marriage they will not stop meeting their boyfriends and may have also extramarital affairs. Thus, Mathur successfully depicts the protest and revolt of these three marginalized women who break the shackles of the Indian patriarchy.

### **Works Cited:**

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