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Neemchadhi

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Neemchadhi was lying listlessly on rough ground, moaning feebly, uncared of, unattended by her family as she had no family within the family. Her name was not neemchadhi, her real name no body knew as her mother expired with the very birth of her. Her grandmother, who harboured in her heart great repulsion and venom against her mother, in order to avoid care and love to her, associated, though roughly, her arrival to world with her mother's exit from the habitat of mortals. Cursing Neemchadhi, as she recalls now, she used to pass caustic remark on her- 'with your first breath, you mother breathed last.'

At this time Neemchadhi can understand why she was hailed as ominous and ill-fated as it was a well planned gesture of family to shrug off lovely responsibility to bring up a child with affection and care.

This stance of family saved it from care of Neemchadhi in real terms, made her presence tolerable to family in status of a servant but how deeply it scarred the little heart, nobody cared for. Neemchadhi now was to move on cinders laid in her way by her own family viz. her motherless status, lack of affection of mother in her life, to handle the curses and onus of her mother's death, social disapproval as an unwanted child; a little child to tread on such burning, simmering ambers and cinders of life!

Fortunately or unfortunately, in her household there was only one female presence – her grandmother who occupied her cot as her throne the moment Neemchadhi gained strength to do household chores. Now she used to curse Neemchadhi only when she was in close proximity of her otherwise Neemchadhi faced less harsh words and criticism in her own house. Every situation has its own merit and demerits, so happened with Neemchadhi; male company of brothers and father in house and shrill comments of grandmother nipped in the bud the fair attributes of womanhood – soft voice and forbearance, brought up among males and with a shrew mentor – her grandmother, forbearance, patience, soft voice were alien virtues to her. Her company equipped her with a shrill voice, peevish temperament and to answer back anyone, anytime, anyhow.

Some are the behaviour and habits which are gender-specific, work as blessings and affordable demeanor in one gender, are a matter of shame, impudence and audacity for other gender. Same happened in case of Neemchadhi. Her acquisition of hot temper of man earned her a sobriquet – Neemchadhi. There was no mother for her who could either correct her, teach her rectitude or fight for her, against ill-treatment to her. Reaction of people to her manlike posture and articulation further intensified her grievances, corroded

her softness if left anyhow, and emboldened her to handle the world with a whip to tongue.

Girls generally, grow up, not brought up as boys with preferential treatment; when they grow up they are put to household services under pretext of training them for future life as matrimony was the sole career for them. So was the fate of Neemchadhi, she was married after her services to grandmother were over with the latter's death and her *bhabhi* joined her family to relieve her of household work.

A new chapter added to the life of Neemchadhi with marriage and thus ensued a new struggle of survival for her. In her home, she at least, had a father and a confidante, her little brother to share some grief and get some solace, but now in new house, there was apparently none to hold on. In her house time flapped its wings on considerably high speed and she enjoyed an independent, carefree life; but in her new house the ordeal of life clutched the clock and hack its normal speed at least, to Neemchadhi. Her strength to do manly and tough & rough work easily burdened her with more work and even allowed the men of house to enjoy at her expense, her husband was in army and used to be away from home and on duty at remote station, even when he was at home, Neemchadhi could not avail herself of his affection, care or love for there was nothing feminine in her, no feminine sensibility at all; her hard work, work of a labourer in sun and wind robbed her of soft beauty, her involvement in work, by choice or force her, temperament like man to pass caustic remarks or adopt a shrill voice alienated her husband from her. She recalls how he used to tantalize her verbally and when received a fair deal from her, used to hit her hard allowing her curse him in silent corner of house.

In your husband's family when husband is not so supportive to you, the entire family starts targeting you, so happened with Neemchadhi, her husband family soon learnt the kind of equation Neemchadhi enjoyed with her husband and thus emboldened by the indifference of her husband they ill treated her in his absence or presence of him. Even if he tried to check atrocity hurled on her, her mother-in-law could paste on him the tag of 'henpecked husband', his male ego did not allow him this tag, however plight of wife he could easily afford; sadly, verbal release of afflictions heaped on her was not easy for Neemchadhi in-laws home. Neemchadhi was to pay a heavy price of it and what was enstored for her in future, she was seriously not aware.

Man has a peculiar or you can say, a weird instinct. He can pull on with a female dumb, addle-headed provided she should nurse his ego, clutch his feet, cling to him like a vein but egoistic, self reliant, composed women are definitely, not his choice. This was the very serious reason why Neemchadhi was misfit in her matrimonial home despite hard work and her tireless efforts to suffice the need of family.

Sycophancy, conspiracy, flattery are woman's weapon to control man, beauty is also a premium and privilege of woman to have man in her folds but Neemchadhi was never introduced to these jewels of survival for a woman as she had no mother or sister to

guide her in her relation to her husband or in-laws moreover, the girl's family, in conventional household, makes sure that girl should suffer endlessly in her new home, may sacrifice herself in name of honour but should never come to natal home, never tarnish family's image in society.

This approach is for a girl only, if she fails to adjust with husband or in-laws, according to the 'code of conduct' prescribed by them, she is threatened to be thrown out of house as if that house where she worked like a servant, gave family the progeny was never hers, but the concept of adjustment by the boy or groom is out of question as if adjustment is a word never taught to him.

Guided by such doctrines of patriarchal society, threatened by in-laws to be thrown out of house, suffering mute approval of natal family of torments of new family, a woman always remains tied to tyranny of man and his family.

A woman's life is more miserable as she is charged with the spear with several blade on it viz. cruelty and tyranny of man, his demanding nature and undue, untimely aggression; demand and pressure of his family, even her family to tolerate it anyhow; criticism by fellow females, blaming her mis-demeanour for ill-treatment from her husband. This multipronged strategy works against a woman so vehemently that she is reduced to a robot playing a second fiddle to man, working upon his dictates. What a huge waste of life, talent and softness! no body realizes the worth of life for a woman, talks of proliferation and emancipation of woman are hollow, sham and shallow as she has three permanent critics – man, society and her fellow woman whose envy towards her poisons her life.

Neemchadhi was named so, because she was shrill, she was uneducated, nobody taught her Shakespeare, and nobody told her what Shakespeare wrote about his character *Cordelia* in *King Lear*, his play –

Her voice was ever soft, gentle & low an excellent thing in a woman.

She was breathing with difficulty but the flow of thoughts in her mind was torrential. She recollects dimly how she refused to comply with abusive language of her brother-in-law and exchanged as good abuses as he issued. As a result, his male ego got hurt and he thrashed her in full view of entire family. Neemchadhi was punished for coming out of her role, stepping out of her shame but her brother-in-law was justified for brutal killing of sister-in-law as she was to be blamed for infuriating him for not providing him hot water well-in-time and thus inviting his wrath.

What for women are if they don't serve man! But this maxim is for woman who is not supported by her husband and not applicable otherwise. Neemchadhi fixed her eyes on her daughter, a tear tricked down from the corners of her one eye as the daughter lifted her tiny hand to wipe it off. Now realized Neemchadhi that a woman cannot wield aggression as it is a feature rather ornament of a man only.

Her shrill voice and ill temper as family said, liberated her from hell of a life but now the onerous onus was to be shifted to her daughter, visuals of her life in her daughter's future sent a chill down her spine. She struggled to drag herself to door so that she could approach some doctor, her little daughter helped her in her effort as she was her sole guardian, when she passed by the room of her mother-in-law, she overheard:

If she dies, we will blame her for adultery, notorious *Chaman* will help us confirm that she had a liaison with him. Don't worry son, aggression sometime brings such problems but control yourself.

These words spliced all elements in her composition. Constitution of her body was now infirm and fragile but she was committed, in role of a mother, to her daughter to survive against wishes of male cabal to propagate male hegemony and recommend eventual absence of woman from mainstream to marginalize her.

She dragged herself out of house, accompanied by her daughter only, took a rickshaw to hospital and bright light of hope kindled around her to revive her with new energy, new vigour-solely for her daughter.