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## ***The Stigma of Womanhood* by Mansi Sinha is a Tale of Woman in a Transgressed Tribe**

**Title: The Stigma of Womanhood**

**Year of Publication: 2005**

**Author: Mansi Sinha**

**Genre: Fiction**

**Hardcover: 102 pages**

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### **About the Author**

Mansi Sinha was born in Assam and is a budding writer when she penned the novel *The Stigma of Womanhood*. Mansi addresses the issues of the modern age through the global language English so that her voice reaches universally. Creative writing was the instinct of Mansi Sinha and so she felt natural to pen novels and short stories. The pivotal objective of the novelist is to portray the social evils prevailing in the society. Mansi residing in Rupai Siding which is more of a sub town in Assam knows the nuances of the place. This made her capture the finest details of the life in Assam. Unlike the writers and poets who glorify the place they belong to, Mansi boldly points the issues and leaves it in the hands of the reader to serve the judgement.

**Keywords:** Issues of women, patriarchy and sinful society.

### **Introduction**

The novel *The Stigma of Womanhood* was penned by Mansi Sinha and it was published in 2005. The novel depicts the social conditions of women in Assamese community which is prevalent in India. The novel depicts reality of the past and the present society. The writer, Mansi Sinha belonging to the Assamese community has stepped forward to point the blunders in the society. The fiction revolves around a small town of Assam especially focuses on Bishnupriya Manipuri community. In this community, women do shave their heads after

the death of their husbands so as to show that there was nothing left for them to groom. The novel tries to outline various social evils like terrorism in the Assamese community and communal riots which remains to be an untold misery of the people surviving in the concerned place.

### **Plot**

The novel opens with the heroine who is in her thirties but yet to get married. The protagonist, Shreya is unmarried and jobless which depicts the toughest situation in a woman's life. Though her parents seem to be worried about her constantly, Shreya enjoys her life amidst of nature. Shreya relaxes in the lap of nature and prefers to be alone. Shreya's life changes after receiving a phone call from her friend, Mayetri. Mayetri invites Shreya to her home which is kilometres apart from the outskirts of Assam. Mayetri wants Shreya to get married to Manas' friend Sanjay who is a Bihari officer. Having heard about Shreya already Sanjay has spoken about her to his parents and was excited to meet her. After getting to know the interests of Shreya, Sanjay decided to take their relationship forward. Soon Shreya and Sanjay get married with the consent of both the families. When Shreya and Sanjay had a baby there was a communal riot which broke out. Sanjay was called to control the angry mob but he was killed in the riot. The Assamese Bihari riot snatched the Bihari officer Sanjay from Shreya, an Assamese woman. Shreya's lamp was put out and was pushed to remain in the darkness forever.

### **Title**

The title *Stigma of the Womanhood* symbolizes the disgraces associated with being a woman or the marks left on woman by the society which is an external factor. Stigmas such as women who remain unmarried in her 30's is being judged and mocked by the society. In some cases, there are women who have received the highest amount of education but still the situation remains to be unresolved. Society comes up with another set of rules and assumptions for the women who are illiterates or neo-illiterates. Situation gets worsened for a widow. A widow is expected to shave her head and wear white garb. Also, a widow is the most suppressed form of human community. The novel speaks about the story of a woman who remains unmarried for a long time and then gets a fairy-tale wedding but fate reverses and she becomes a young widow.

## Themes

Depression forms the ultimate theme, since the protagonist is in the aura of depression from beginning till the end of the novel. Shreya feels depressed due to the unnecessary queries of the society regarding her marriage. Living in the outskirts of Assam, Shreya's family feel peaceful from the talks of their relatives but Shreya feels lonely and stays alone. Her life changes after falling in love with Sanjay. Things take quick turn from pain to pleasure after getting married to Sanjay. Alas, the happiness is short lived and Shreya is pushed back to depression when she hears the news of Sanjay's death.

Inter caste marriages were highly opposed in the society. Adding fire to the fury, Manas' sister Anusha ran with Partha, a guy who belongs to another caste. Manas and his family was heartbroken hearing the news and lost their temper. Mayetri knew the story well so she remained to be calm and composed. Manas' was against the Assamese community although the friend of his wife, Shreya belongs to one. The family of Manas tried to bring Shreya and Sanjay closer and they spoke in support of inter-caste marriage but when the same happens in their life they spit venom against the case. Shows hypocrisy and double standards which tears apart the society.

Patriarchy is clearly evident when Manas utters that women are given excessive freedom in the society and so they take their own decisions. In *The Stigma of Womanhood* Manas speaks, "This blunder has taken place because we have given her excessive freedom. It's our fault. Girls should not be given so much freedom. But my realisation is too late!" (40). Manas continues to argue that girls should never be given such freedom as the parents would have high hopes for their marriage. Also, in an Indian society a wedding is connected to that of a family's dignity which makes the parents go hyper when their kids take a decision on their own.

Terrorism plays a pivotal role in the novel. The novelist wishes to portray the dark side of Assam and so narrates the outline of terrorism. Due to terrorism Shreya's uncle gets kidnapped and gets killed when the ransom was denied. The two beautiful daughters of Shreya's uncle are left fatherless in the cruel world. Moreover, Sanjay took pains to eradicate the terrorism and was successful only for a time period. Terrorism prevailed mainly due to unemployment issues prevailing in the society. Moreover, the people who were disappointed with the government began to take brutal steps against the corrupted officials. From the

beginning the author indicates about terrorism through Shreya's reaction, "She cursed the terrorists and cursed the government as well" (21).

Communal clash took the life of many people and Sanjay was one such main figure who lost his life in Assamese Bihari riot. The Assamese Bihari riot broke because a rumour was spread that Biharis attacked Assamese passengers when they were passing Bihar in train. So, a girl from north-east was gangraped in Bihar and her complaint was not filed in Bihar. The Gujarat police lodged the complaint and searched the party and criticised the Bihar railway police. When the railway exam was conducted, the Bihari youths arrived to Assamese centre and was not allowed to write their exams. The hatred which was collected for a long time set a spark and it became a riot drinking the bloods of many. Sanjay's house was the only Assamese mansion in the Bihari area. So, Sanjay's parents were killed by the mob who fissured their throats. Sanjay was also hit by a spade in his head and was killed. Sanjay was proclaimed to be dead even before rushing to the hospital.

### **Setting**

The novel takes place in Rupai Siding, a rural place in Assam. The landscape surrounding the outskirts is given prominence. The description of natural setting given by Mansi Sinha reminds that the place is far from the madding crowd of pollution and industries. The setting suits the mood of the creative work and the mood of the protagonist. The mood of the heroine adheres to that of the natural setting which is one of the artistic technique of Mansi Sinha, the novelist.

### **Commentary**

The love story between Shreya and Sanjay appears to be a realistic one since they both appear to be so mature even though coming from a sub town background. Shreya's liking towards literature and Sanjay reciprocating the passion towards poetry sets a mood of relaxation after portraying the gloomy life of Shreya. Everything turns topsy turvy when Sanjay gets killed. Shreya was taking a long rest in the hospital and was spinning dreams about her life with their new born baby, she was unaware of the mishap which took place. Shreya's parents and Mayetri's husband cremated their body without informing the new mother. Later Mayetri revealed that Sanjay was no more. Shreya burst into tears that her future was ruined.

In the mansion all the relatives of Shreya and Sanjay arrived to perform the funeral rites. Things began to calm down after few days. But the life of Shreya and her child was not the same anymore. Shreya was angry that the news of Sanjay's cremation was hidden from her and they never allowed her to see the face of her husband for one last time. Though Government declared a compensation amount of five lakhs it appears to be futile for Shreya.

The novelist ends the novel with eye opening details of money not being able to buy the lost lives of people. Man is a social animal and he can never kill other human as he possesses the sixth sense. No human on earth has the right to kill other human since everyone is bestowed with the rights to live on earth. Coming to the novel, none can restore the lost light and hope in the mansion of Shreya so prevention is better than cure.

### **Conclusion**

The novelist has done an appreciative task of pointing the beauties in the Assamese community along with the dirty politics happening which has led to the outburst of terrorism and communal riots. Mansi's focal was on the stigma of woman but the reason for those stigmas consists of layers in it which needs to be sorted out. The novelist holds on to the belief and uses Shreya as her mouthpiece to declare, "If human beings work unitedly like the ants, there will be much progress in the world" (100).

### **Reference**

Sinha, Mansi. *The Stigma of Womanhood*. The Women Press, 2005, pp. 21-100.