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The Uprising of the Female Protagonist in Mulk Raj Anand's Novel: *The Old Woman and the Cow*

Hari Shankar Yadav

Ph.D. Research Scholar.

&

Dr. Sulekha Jadaun

Asso. Prof.

K. R. (PG) College, Mathura,

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University,

Agra, Uttar Pradesh.

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Abstract:

In the novel 'The Old Woman and The Cow', Mulk Raj Anand depicts the subaltern, brutality and inferiority to woman, although she is regarded as Goddess. Anand shows his deep concern for the subaltern status of women which renders them as slaves of men. Oppressions and suppressions of the common Indian woman have been an unending process. The question of woman's place and position in the society is a chief concern in this novel. Here is the presentation of a realistic picture of a woman's struggle in male-dominated society. Gauri, female protagonist, raises her uprising and protest to find out her own identity and revered place in the society. Anand advocates feminism through the character of Gauri. So, feminism is a way that directs at changing the exist in a power and conduct between men and women. This research paper analyzes the high evaluation of women as human beings to get equal right and status in the context of feminism.

Keywords: Uprising, feminism, victimization, accusation.

Introduction:

Apparently Indian woman is considered as Goddess, The Indian women are lordly regarded by some holy names as *devi* (goddess), *mata* (mother) and *laxmi* (wealth and prosperity giving goddess) while in reality and practically, the condition of common woman has been very pathetic. Instead of these holy titles and designations, we even today misbehave them publicly and abuse them privately. She is also considered child giving machine and thing of lust. "Patriarchy

subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as inferior. Male power is exerted directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life to constrain women." (Seldon,131-132) In the Indian society, a woman is measured inferior and male dominated while she must be respected and vital aspect of male society.

Mulk Raj Anand's novel: 'The Old Woman and the Cow' has a woman as its central character. This novel shows woman's problems and hardships. The leading character is Gauri, who is polite, obedient and simple village girl. When Panchi, bridegroom, goes to wed, he is very happy. At the marriage rituals, Gauri, the young bride, lifts her *dupatta* from her face, we look at a glance, "... a light wheat brown face with regular strong peasant features and the bloom of innocence in it."(Gauri,29) Panchi dreams his wife, "For there was the prospect of the prize of a girl when he could fold in his arms at night and kick during the day, who would adorn his house and help him with the work on land."(*The Old Woman and The Cow*, 5) He also remembers the words of his parents-in-law, "Gauri is like a cow, very gentle."(Gauri,11) So Panchi himself feels like a holy bull going off to marry the little cow, Gauri. He has also the orthodox ideas of a husband that a wife should always be under control of her husband.

The wedding which takes place in novel is an emotionless action in which love and woo are sunk in the long talking and negotiation and demand for dowry. In such marriages, bridegroom barter takes place like a thing which is purchased in market. On the first night of the marriage, a black and dark aspect of life, male barbarism is seen. Anand depicts the pathetic situation in one of his letters to Saros Cowasjee, "You know that every Aryan rape the helpless female in the arranged marriages of India on the first night. The cries are drowned in the music outside. And yet many of our modernists recognize Vedic rites at their weddings. This hypocrisy stinks." (So Many Freedom, 8) Gauri becomes a slave to her husband's desires and obligations. Her duties are to cook, to clean and satisfy her husband at night.

The novel 'The Old Woman and The Cow' can be divided into three distinctive levels. The first level covers the first two chapters which show Gauri as polite and gentle lady as cow. She suffers mutely in the hands of her husband and mother-in-law. The second level of the novel is seen in next four chapters in which Gauri drowns in dire situation. She is dragged out of the house and she has to dwell at Hoshiarpur. The last chapter, finally, represents the last level in which Gauri returns home to forsake her husband and break up her marriage affiance. Anand shows

Gauri's all aspects: the young girl, the married woman, the mother, the devoted wife and the tortured, but at the end, the readers can mark her as brave and triumphant uprising woman.

Gauri is very docile and devoted wife to Panchi, but he always accuses his wife for any loss or shortcomings or sufferings which is common in any husband's life. Mulk Raj Anand shows this through the character of Panchi. Famine and drought broke out in Piplan Kalan but Panchi says harshly accusing his wife, "Only after I have married, have all my troubles begun." (The Old Woman and The Cow,29) Gauri starts her married life as a docile wife. Obviously, she accepts all the norms of the patriarchal society and tries to fulfill all the desires of her husband. She dreams about her bright future and tries to be 'Sita' as her mother advises her. She follows the way of marriage affiance. She is an affectionate wife so she knows the need of her husband. She gives Panchi her gold ear rings and her wedding gift from her husband. She requests him to pawn them. "It will help us to pay for the seed and the lentils and the rice till the next harvest." (The Old woman and The Cow,63)

Gauri was bound with marriage affiance to provide peace and progress to her husband, Panchi's family, but she finds herself slave to Panchi's desires. She follows the ways that are asked by her mother to be like Sita. On the other hand, Kesaro (aunt of Panchi) and Panchi call her Kali. Kesaro , a ruthless and unkind mother - in - law, keeps on abusing Gauri . She calls Gauri by different names like 'filthy woman', 'sweeper woman', 'shameless', 'whore' etc. She denounces and reviles Gauri for being shameless going out without putting *dupatta* on her head. She also backbites to Panchi about Gauri and a prediction of his future. "Our house would break up with the coming of an inauspicious girl." (The Old Woman and The Cow, 96) Kesaro comes to meet Panchi , when Gauri returns from Hoshiarpur. Kesaro is not allowed by Panchi. Then Kesaro speaks ill of Gauri to the people that a prostitute from Hoshiarpur has come. The defame of Gauri's life is spread by Kesaro. This accusation naturally begins to trouble and oppress Panchi. These talking and backbiting create a devil in him so he bawls loudly and asks Gauri, "Tell me the truth bitch what is the proof of your purity?" (The Old Woman and The Cow, 281-282) Gauri does not bear this accusation and tells Hoor Banu, "He is a weak spoilt creature! spoilt by Kesaro. He pretended to be a lion among the men of the village. But really he is a coward." (The Old Woman and The Cow, 283) In spite of equality of man and woman, Panchi drives her out of the house knowing her pregnancy.

When Panchi affronts and insults Gauri, she leaves her husband's residence and comes to live with her own mother, Laxmi. Her mother does not welcome her in the home where she was born and brought up. Her uncle, Amru, backbites Laxmi about Gauri and tells, "Her husband has turned her out. This unlucky girl must have brought him troubles, as she brought difficulties to us." (The Old Woman and The Cow, 10) Her own mother, Laxmi, barter her out to Seth Jai Ram Das, a banker of Hoshiarpur. She cries out, "Oh mother, why are you letting him to drag me into hell. The goddess will punish you!" (Gauri, 127) This is the height of her victimization and persecution. Thus, she is backstabbed by her own mother who has to sell her daughter rather than the cow. The title of the novel 'The Old Woman and The Cow' is taken from this event of the novel. Anand gives this message to his readers that cow is better than a girl child in this lame and ailing society. When Seth tries to take away her modesty and make physical relationship with her, the girl becomes herself a shield to defend from Seth, "Gauri pushed him off by a violent wriggle and, then thrust him away, on the floor." (Gauri, 145)

It may be worthwhile to look into what Deniz Kandiyoti has to say about woman's position in new post-colonial nationalist agenda. She detects, "Since the emergence of woman as citizens is also predicated upon the transformation of institutions and customs that keep them bound to the particularistic traditions of their ethnic and religious communities, the modern state is assumed to intervene as a homogenizing agent which acts as a possible resource for more progressive gender politics," (Identity and Its Discontents: Woman and The Nation, 376)

It is very striking that Gauri feels bafflement in the hands of various men; Amru, Panchi, Seth Jai Ram Prasad, Dr. Batra etc. She is sold, bought and kicked out by the various men in her life. But finally, Gauri's destiny shines up in the hands of Mahindra. It is perhaps worthwhile to consider Gauri's status. This possibility is heightened in these words which were uttered by Mahindra about the pitiable condition of contemporary Indian society, "All life is our country today, everything in it, has been poisoned by the importance given to money, property and possession!..... First there were the white sahibs and now there are the brown sahibs." (The Old Woman and The Cow, 241)

After separation and relegation from both the families: husband and mother, Gauri comes in contact with colonel Mahindra who acts as an 'eye opener' and 'mentor'. Now she is awakened to her own real worth and importance. She becomes an independent, brave, and energetic woman

to face the problems of life boldly. She leaves her coyness and faces the struggle of life courageously, “Like Hardy’s Tess, Gauri has by now abandoned the Gods of her religion and yet she seems predestined by a malevolent fate to attract the attention of, she would most dearly wish to resist.” (Niven, 108) Gauri becomes herself up to date modern and educated individual and now she discards the *pardah* and considers it a stupid convention. Gauri quotes colonel Mahindra with satisfaction, “...education will make us masters of our destiny.” (Gauri, 240)

Gauri, like most of the girls and women in the society, is also subjected to sexual tortures in present juncture. She is stared and chased by lustful rascals wherever she reaches. Seth Jai Ram Das tries to outrage her chastity. When she attends the clinic of colonel Mahindra as a nurse, Dr Batra advances to her lustfully. He actually behaves like a tiger with Gauri, a cow. The Nursing Home, a shelter place for Gauri, is a turning point in her life. She awakens herself so she protects and rebels the present condition and saves herself. She collects the remnants of energy to prepare herself for unpleasant situation and she steps out never to return. “She wiped her eyes with the *pallu* of her saree, lifted her head and walked on, without looking this side or that.” (Gauri, 264) This acid test for her metamorphosis comes out when Panchi drives her out of the home once again. She does not go out of the house as a helpless, deserted and abandoned creature of the society but as a woman who is conscious of her uprising and rights. Now she is confident of fending for the worst situation of her life. Anand’s feminism is displayed in the novel.

Gauri is deeply distressed by imposing accusation. Her uprising idea cannot browbeat her. She recognizes her identity and courage during her stay in Dr Mahindra’s hospital. Her inner purity reaffirms and creates the courage that enables her to defy the groundless and irrational husband and the gossip-mongering society. Gauri rebels her husband saying, “And if you strike me again, I will hit back. (The Old Woman and The Cow, 283)

Gauri’s husband, Panchi, does not have the courage to resist society’s bad opinion about his holy wife. When Hoor Banu tries to console her. Gauri tells, “They are telling him that Ram turned out Sita because everyone doubted her chastity during her stay with Ravana !...I am not Sita that the Earth will open up and swallow me . I shall just go out and be forgotten of him.” (Gauri, 264) Gauri’s chastity is easily comparable to the situation in the Ramayana wherein Ram has to leave Sita to prove her chastity due to washer man’s doubt. Panchi wishes to test his wife, Gauri and asks her, “Tell me the truth bitch...what is the proof of your purity?” (The Old Woman and

The Cow, 281-282) Depressed Gauri cannot prove her purity so she says only, "I have been true to you." (The Old Woman and The Cow, 282)

Panchi seems to be Ram by listening to the heart rendering talking of the villagers but Gauri rebels her husband and the society so she refuses to be like Sita. She has obviously rebelled the stage of docility and politeness like a cow. Her face shows her uprising and awakening. "Her face shone from the pressure of her stricken heart, transfigured from the gentle cow's acquiescent visage of the time when she had arrived in Panchi's house, to that of a woman with a will of her own." (Gauri, 264) Gauri is quite happy when she comes to know that she is going to be a mother. She is carrying the baby of Panchi in her womb, but she cannot accept Panchi's brutality and wickedness any longer. Now she wishes to return to Dr Mahindra's Nursing Home to deliver her baby so that, "Her child would not be the coward like Panchi was or as weak as she had been." (Gauri, 264)

In patriarchal society, Gauri rebels. So, Anand does favor and endows Gauri that she overcomes her docility and achieves her independent identity so she openly shows her revolt against her coward and timid husband as well as the whole male-dominated society. Gauri's uprising in real sense is feminism which is emancipation of Indian woman. Anand advises that Indian women themselves awaken to break the bonds and ties that grip and coil them tightly. Female emancipation is possible, if women are free for getting economic independence. In the end of the novel, Gauri develops herself as independent decision-making woman. Promila Paul Sudhakar rightly draws attention, "Through a woman, Gauri the heroine falls in line with Anand's suppressed heroes. But when most of his heroes register their protest within the frame work of the evil society, Gauri sheds her narrow domestic coils before they could strangle her to death and escapes into the refreshing world of modernity."

Through the novel 'The Old Woman and The Cow', Anand was very keen to express those females along with males should be cognizant and conscious to write their own luck by their own hands. It is fact that human is the noblest among all the creatures of the world, so males and females should know that human being can make his own destiny to achieve his name and fame. Anand wanted to show the world that, like Gauri, female protagonist, of the novel 'The Old Woman and The Cow', every woman must fight against her exploitation in the society like Gauri. She has

struggled against the primitive and traditional customs to snatch her right to dwell peacefully in the same society as a respected human being.

Thus, Anand has showed the exploited life of Gauri successfully. She symbolizes the power and purity of Sita. She awakens her right so, like modern lady, Gauri does uprising against the male-dominated society and her husband. Her character is praiseworthy among all memorable female characters in Indian fiction. Gauri's character is a reflection of feminist concern. Anand succeeds in drawing out female modernity in Gauri's uprising against patriarchal society. She has the power and purity of Sita of The Ramayana. So, she becomes one of the most memorable female characters in entire span of Indian fiction of the world. Gauri is the symbol of modern woman who is hungry for self respect and economic freedom. In this way, we can say that she represents the role of courageous Indian woman. Her uprising will be a guiding pole star to a modern woman looking for her existence in this complicated society.

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