

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

16 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

VOL. 16 ISSUE-2, APRIL 2025

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

The Representation of Women's Role in Family and Society: Feministic Reading of Mannu Bhandari's Short Stories

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15316434>

Article History: Submitted-31/03/2025, Revised-14/04/2025, Accepted-24/04/2025, Published-30/04/2025.

Abstract:

“Isn't my happiness your happiness? Isn't my success your success?”

This paper scrutinizes Indian society's expectations and restrictions on women, tensions between tradition vs modernity, individual desire and Societal expectations and the struggles of women in patriarchal society and focuses on women's experiences and empowerment. Indian women's writing, such as present study deals with Mannu Bhandari's short stories, it highlights the ways women especially poor middle-class women has her journey of emotional experience contribute towards Indian women's writing, language, and how Bhandari beautifully portrays of her individual feminine feelings in post independent India. Her writings provide insight into literary discourses of gender equality circulating in the immediate post-independence India. Her linguistic use of sentences, tones, symbols, speeches, silence, images through her female point of view makes her a true feminist in the era of 21st century literary feminist critique, who essentially points out all the minute details of feminist poetics in her stories. Yet, in order to make positive change in society with regard to social justice oriented, more feminist researchers need to reach the broader public and close reading of texts to interpret game narratives or characters as misogynistic, patriarchal attitudes of society, binary relations.

Keywords: feminine, linguistic, silence, patriarchal, binary, gender.

Introduction

This paper focuses on her short stories book “The best of Mannu Bhandari: The wise woman and other stories” , translated in English by Vidya Pradhan and foreword written by Namita Gokhale. The late 1950’s and early 60’s when she wrote some of her most prominent novels was a moment in India's intellectual history when the young republic was scrutinizing itself with a new self - awareness. She was associated with “Nayi Kahani” movement that mirrored the angst of the new and emergent middle classes, and the conflicts that arose as they struggled for a contested individualism, and the right to articulate their hopes, desires, pinioned as they were in the timeless traditions of a conservative society. Bhandari battled resolutely for every inch of intellectual and personal space all through her life which is also reflected in her protagonist. The selected stories that I've chosen to discuss here are : “Punishment”, “The New Job”, “Rooms, Room and Rooms”, “The wise woman” , “Trishanku” and “The Tale of a weak Girl”. All these stories somewhere deal with female protagonists' inner conflicts that she / her faces during her journey, trapped between traditional vs modern mentality of society, quest for identity, a room of her own, struggle and rebellion for her education, they're not weak, they're weak only in their circumstances in which they were born.

Mannu bhandari is known for her well craft works “Aap ka Banti”, “What Next”, “Ek Inch Muskan”, etc. This Paper will analyse her female protagonist's journey of emotional sensitive experience, which foregrounds the problems a woman faces in the third world countries like India. The present study focuses on close reading of the stories that focuses on contextual understanding of gender roles and stereotypes, patriarchy and power dynamics, identity and intersectionality, language and discourse, how particular stories address oppression, subvert ideologies, power structures and how women's bodies are represented.

Women's writing in India after Post Independence, the basic major concern and desire for women to have sexual freedom, economic independence, human equality, female expression, deeper understanding of female desire and gender equality. Her writings still resonate with readers of each generation, written in an easy, simple and sharp penetrating language that enclosed persons in her warmth and trust of that language. The themes of her stories contribute to a universal female cry, female experiences, marriage, jobs, child bearing, and women's unfulfilled dreams which were left unsaid, unheard by many but Bhandari presented their viewpoints in a realistic, sensible manner which generally Indian women rebelling against long established tradition.

Close reading, like all kinds of textual analysis, also centralizes the researcher's (or the critic's, viewer's, or player's) own interpretation of the mediated content, a long-established aspect of studying media (Kracauer, 1952). Critical understanding of a media text requires an interpretive analysis that goes beyond a surface-level reading, as Alison Harvey (2020) has discussed in her book *Feminist media studies*:

A close analysis of the signs, codes, and symbols of media texts and how they construct and present the world provides a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the functioning of representation than simply asserting that the presence of images of particular people indicates fairness, equality, or justice. (p. 41)

The new paradigms of urban life, and the quotidian negotiations of everyday reality, included a questioning of the time - honoured allocation of male and female roles. The unfamiliar phenomenon of the working woman was viewed with suspicion, and the women's brigade of the "Nayi Kahani" literature write with feeling about the inequalities of gender and the unrealistic expectations of a backward - looking society. Nayi Kahani literature movement in India, which emerged in 1950's and 1960's, focuses on the experience and lives of middle - class , urban, educated women which bhandari beautifully portrays in her short stories. The

movement explores the lives of urban housewives, working women, women in unclear families, women navigating between modernity and tradition and how they're experiencing loneliness, isolation and disillusionment.

- **How do linguistic symbols, metaphors that reflect power dynamics, shape their identities and experiences throughout the stories?**

Bhandari explains the use of language in her fiction writing:

... “Either I write short story or novel or drama, from the beginning, I believe that transparency in language is the fundamental and compulsory tool for the language of fiction. The function of language should join the reader immediately and directly with the story and not creates hurdles in his way. Some people believe that simple, clear and direct language fails to disclose deep and complex threads of sensitivity and fine layers of meanings. But hasn't been Jainendraji's language destroyed this belief? I will add that to write in simple language is the most difficult task to achieve. I don't dare to claim that I have achieved that stage but my efforts are always in that direction' (Bhandari)

Toril Moi states in her book “what is a woman: and other essays” states that women's bodies are human as well as female. Women have interests, capacities and ambitions that reach far beyond the realm of sexual differences; however, one defines these. Investigations of the meaning of femininity in specific historical and theoretical contexts are indispensable to the feminist project of understanding and transforming sexist cultural practices and traditions.

- **How do women's language patterns intersect with other social categories such as class, race and sexuality?**

The language functions served as women's language found in female character's utterances also marked Hypercorrect grammar, politeness, rhetorical question, avoidance of strong swear words, emphatic stress that sounds to utterance deeply moveable, stress their utterance to come for attention to look into the serious matter. They use rhetorical or tagged questions to engage the listener and encourage them to consider the protagonist's perspective. Hypercorrect grammar is also used to be as a way to avoid being stigmatized as "uneducated" or "unrefined", although in the stories most of the women are well educated, they possess sharp mind and use their intelligence to observe, understand and analyze their surroundings. They used expressive, metalinguistic and directive function to guide and aware the next generation or next women often with empathy and understanding. Besides this, they also possess emotional intelligence that helps them to recognizing and managing their emotions and others.

The following quoted lines from her selected short stories best reflects the anguish of her female protagonists in each chapter and their mental anguish. It also serves the authorial intention in writing the text, and how the stories reflect the social, political and cultural context in which it was written. They're portrayed as weak, submissive, dependent, soft, emotional, vulnerable but they're strong, strong-willed characters who sacrificed their dreams for their dear loved ones. The problem that lay buried, unspoken by Indian women's voices before 1960's are conveyed through these stories, which throws into question the standards of feminine maturity, feminine adjustment, feminine fulfilment, feminine maturity, by which most women are still trying to live.

"But i kept quiet" (Punishment)

The issue of silence in a way that moves beyond the mere need for women to speak and be heard. In the story, the protagonist is a little girl who speaks about how she is treated by her

family and parents, how she has to cook food for seven people twice a day, all the household chores.

She has a young brother Munnu, whom her parents sent to village to study till her family condition improved after her father's return from jail following twenty-five years. Throughout the texts she is considered as 'other'. It was this little girl Asha who sacrificed her studies, walked miles to save her daily bus fare, then look after her little brother and do all the household chores and understand the condition of her financial problem which her family faces. Limited subjectivities gives her a way to self - scrutiny and speak out the issues through her codes such as "quiet", "silence", "sacrifice", "crying", "sadness", "misery", "grief", "endure" and "innocent" and the title of the story itself suggests that "Punishment" of her father is bestowed on the girl child.

One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" the most quoted line of Simon de beautiful—has been disputed by more recent feminist scholars, and a substantial body of research in biology and the social sciences supports their argument that some sexual differences (besides the obvious ones) are innate rather than "situational." Instead of rejecting "otherness" as an imposed cultural construct, women, in their opinion, should cultivate it as a source of self-knowledge and expression, and use it as the basis to critique patriarchal institutions. she is always under men's guardianship; in this case her "father", in his absence she is confined to another paternal male relative (uncle) fulfil that function as "guardian".

The place of women in society is always the one they assign to her. she is confined to domestic labour, as the image of virtuous women demonstrate from a very young age in India.

Here, Bhandari beautifully presents how social structure and traditional codes scatter the life of young girl.

"She felt herself divided among the five rooms and the sixth, the kitchen". (Rooms, Room and Rooms)

Virginia Woolf in her essay says “One would have to have a room of one's own, with a lock on the door, and not only a lock but a key, to be able to write, to be able to think, to be able to exist as a woman in the world.”

Woolf's essay becomes a rallying cry for feminist writers and thinkers, highlighting the need for women to have control over their own spaces, time, and creative expression.

“No need to sparkle. No need to be anybody but oneself”. (A room of one's own)

Constructed around Woolf's idea that to write fiction a woman must have money and a room of her own, this revolutionary work depicts a woman's predicaments as she struggles deep within for some place of her own where she can work without restrictions.

“Could we afford them in just 75 rupees? I was the one who did the accounts, I should know. I knew exactly where the money was going. But what could I say to him? He was paying all the lawyers' fees, and I knew how expensive that was.” (Punishment)

Asha's awareness of financial situation is dire and critical, and her concern about the expenses, it was she who managed the accounts, so she knew exactly where the money was going. She highlights that paying exorbitant costs of legal fees, and struggling to make ends meet, her knowledge and concern of her family's financial situation puts her in a difficult position

“I had gradually taken over the household chores as Amma's condition deteriorated. How would she manage now? How would she work in this condition.” (Punishment)

Asha's assumptions of household responsibility at a young age indicates her premature responsibility, her loss of girlhood carefree days, may accelerate her transition into adulthood. In Indian cultures, especially daughters are expected to take on responsibilities.

It is only through the first-person narrative of this girl's perspective, we could understand the entire environment of their family situation be it financial, social, personal or private conversation which she has observed and felt.

“Women's brains can deal with the known, the ordinary, the everyday, keep track of traditions and social customs, and in short take care of everything that requires rational action without reflection.” This is clearly visible through Asha's sense of perception about her family members, her crystal clear observation and minor details of the realistic portrayal of her family.

“I stopped taking the bus to school. I would walk the three miles. Rain or shine I didn't complain. I would wonder that in the two years and three months since Papa had been suspended, how did we manage to spend so much that the bank account was empty,

Amma's jewellery had been sold... so many other things were gone.” (Punishment)

Asha's remarkable resilience and sense of responsibility in the face of adversity and critical financial condition of her family forces her to make difficult choices, as she gives priority to get education instead of taking bus her decision to walk miles is her commitment to education. Her amma's frequent illness add to the family's struggles making it more difficult financial condition and as being “eldest daughter” of the family she was expected to take on more household responsibilities, including caring for her younger siblings, and managing the household. She recognizes the importance of schooling and is willing to make sacrifices to pursue it but later we find that in mere seventy-five rupees one would not be able to educate their children, pay off legal fees of lawyers, couldn't afford expenses of medicines, so she decided to take the decision that *“I would not go to college”*. The decision shows the sensibility and resilience of Indian girls where she can't complain and fight for their own desire but her “silence” and “tone” of her voice and speech in the first-person narrative in which she poignantly describes and makes it clear what her wants were. It is only through this little girl that we can see the past, present and future condition of their situation in which she dealing. In case of her younger brother munnu was easy, he was sent to village to live with their uncle and aunt and continue his education there.

Societal pressure:

Indian girls may face pressure to conform to traditional roles and expectations, which can lead to strong sense of responsibility and duty.

Her sacrifice and sense of responsibility are a testament to the strength and maturity of young girls in India and underscores the need to address societal, cultural expectations that place undue burdens on Indian girls and women in an early age.

“Mrs Chopra would have remained silent normally but his nonchalant tone inflamed her. It's very easy for you to tell me not to worry... but I'm going to be the one doing everything....Leaving the rest of her thoughts unspoken she wiped off the carefully applied nail polish angrily.” (Chains)

Our protagonist Mrs Chopra is worrying about their new coming guest (her father-in- law) who is visiting to stay a few days with them.

Toril Moi shows that Wittgenstein's philosophy teaches us how to think through examples. Ordinary language philosophy can offer a powerful alternative to contemporary identity, helping to make sense of women's experiences through language. The question of women's writing and the language of Mrs Chopra suggests her unspoken thoughts. For example, the thought of missing an evening party, preparing a ready room for papa's room, cook was on holiday for a week, to take her son Vinay to outside for her vacation but she has to leave now.

“It is just October and when the cook is not around you should be helping your mother, shouldn't you? It's your duty.”

Here, her father-in-law suggests this to her granddaughter Pammi in his authorial voice, symbol of “patriarchal attitude”, patriarchy imposes stereotypes, divides men and women and strengthens the iniquitous power relations between men and women. Despite love and affection, there was a brashness about Papa's personality that bothered Beena. How she puts

her powerful expression of her inner turmoil revealing her vulnerability and sensitivity in these following lines :

“It's a principle of mine to be independent and let others be independent too. You are begging me to live with you because I live by myself... if I started living with you...” here he broke off and began laughing.” The passage also highlights the frustrated conditions of Indian middle class women's lives by the lack of privacy, the routine of family life which she has to handle everything, domestic chores, the problem also discussed by Betty Friedman's “The Feminine Mystique” (1963) .

“Her husband was so devastated by the loss (of child) that he left his wife and home to live in a holy place and there was no other member of her family who could assuage her loneliness.”
(The Lonely One)

After he left her,

Narrative life of an abandoned soma bua, whose husband left her twenty years ago because she had lost her young son, abandoning her to face life alone; though it is not mentioned clearly how. From then, until today, she remains a lonesome, freaked out life. The depiction violence on women, results in the hysterical condition of women as a semiotic element in this woman centric story, unearth depression, nervousness, unexplainable pain, and over-emotionality in ‘Soma Bua’. Soma bua's emotional pain is palpable as she struggles to cope with her loss and loneliness. Despite her abandonment, she finds solace in neighbourhood, considers them as her family, however she is often excluded from family functions and her attachment to neighbours whom she considers her as Childs and herself mother of them highlights her deep-seated need for human connection.

It tries to light on the issues and need for inclusive communities to help abandoned women to rebuild their lives, supports them.

“I have been deceived; I have been cheated.” (The Actor)

Cheating and deception is used to gain personal profit and advantage, in a romantic relationship. Ranjana, a talented actress was deceived by Dilip, a masterful actor who used his charm and charisma to cheat her out of her money. Dilip's performance was so convincing that Ranjana was completely taken in by his polite and caring demeanour. It is also evident through the double standards and connotations of language “Actor” vs “Actress”, the term “Actor” is often associated with masculinity, implying strength, bravery, and cunningness while “Actress” is linked to femininity suggesting her vulnerability, emotionally vulnerable, quickly melt on someone's misery. When a man deceives a woman, it's often seen as a sign of cleverness rather than dishonesty towards woman. Language also perpetuates these Stereotypes, making it more acceptable for men to engage in deceitful behaviour.

Dilip used his cunning art skill to manipulate Ranjana's emotion and gain her trust which is evident in the following lines:

“Women are attracted to men who seem indifferent to them. Wasn't I right?”

He exploited her kindness and generosity taking advantage of her vulnerability. Lying, deception, snooping, intrusive behaviour, cheating and false fake lines which he promises to Ranjana to manipulate her emotions and trust.

“I believe in enduring love. You can call me traditional or hopelessly romantic, but the passion of Laila-Majnu is my ideal of love...I can't begin to imagine a life without you.”

Those convincing and promising words which made a woman's life not only problematic but also left her feeling betrayed, hurt ,shattered her trust on men and confused ,making it difficult for her to form a healthy relationship in future . She has also lost a significant amount of money (twelve thousand)which she lend him on her own trust of love,which can have a financial stability in her future.

The tale also challenges such toxic masculinity and dismantles such norms and standards where men seems to hold the power to cheat and exploit women. It also perpetuates an awareness to educate ourselves and society to be aware of such signs of deception.

"I'm not going to quit my job. Not working is better than working like this." (The New Job)

This is the reason why there are depowered women even among the educated middle class and upper classes of the society. "Rama" wife of Kundan, once served as the college's second female professor with her only colleague Mrs Burman. This highlights that the education and employment of women in India were so low that only two married female professors were working in the college and she had left her job exactly twenty eight days ago because of her husband's new job promotion, she has been shifted to new, and it was her duty to give instructions to workmen to set the new furniture, the long, sheer curtains, to take care of her son, to get her ready, making breakfast and even she has to decorate the house often when her husband's foreign visitors come for any business deal. After this daily hectic life, she doesn't get enough time to prepare her lecture, work on her thesis, all these causes her health issues and get tired easily which leads her to quit the job and engage in only these matters.

"Biological determinism presupposes a pervasive picture of sex and considers that biology grounds and justifies social norms. Social norms are expressions of biological facts."

The story focuses on two important concepts that still exist in society "sex" and "gender", and "gender" is oppressive social norms, gender is the oppressive result of a social production process. This is classic exactly of a feminist rejection of biological determinism. According to Rubin, all societies turn biological sex into gender one way or another, she writes that "human sexual life will always be subject to convention and human intervention."

Bhandari doesn't wrote to show sympathy for educated housewife, but unveils the problem that how her husband telling her that how lucky she is when she left the job, because she get relieve from stressful days of college life in the following lines of Kundan:

- *"You are under so much stress these days."*

- *"Who cares about ancient history anyway? No one's life is going to be ruined if they don't learn about the Chola, Chedi dynasties, right?"*

- *"After all what's the point of spending all your time teaching other students when your own child is being neglected."*

It seems that a good education given to women to value and understanding of her surroundings and care everyone except or without looking at her own worth. The problem lies in sympathetic advice, scolding words, and other invisible forms of oppression that makes the surface of the water unclear.

We could find the dissatisfied voice in Rama, that she asks after quitting her job that:

"I've been working for ten years... how will I keep my mind engaged now?"

Her discontent with her present work which doesn't gives her satisfying pleasure, stirring her inwardly, she has had a college, she had work to do, but the most rewarding job is "being a good housewife" is all that matters?

"Why didn't I tell him what I wanted clearly, why did I agree to his plan. But her thoughts remained in her head." (The Tale of a Weak Girl)

A young girl, stifled by the suffocating grip of patriarchal control, struggles to express herself, her desires and her thoughts into action. She is constantly reminded of her place in society, that

she is a girl child, and as such, must conform to societal expectations. Her thoughts, desires, feeling trapped, unable to express herself resenting the societal expectations and patriarchal control, struggling to find her own voice and sense of self.

Languages use us as much as we use language. As much as our choice of forms of expression is guided by the thoughts we want to express, to the same extent the way we feel about the things in the real world governs the way we express ourselves about these things.

“Nobody cared about my feelings, my wishes. I had woven my dreams of a golden life so carefully; do they count for nothing now? No, I won't let this happen, tell me a way out otherwise I will die, I will kill myself. I am not going to let this injustice happen while I live.”

(The tale of a weak girl)

Features of language characteristic of powerlessness and dependency are probably shared across all roles of subordination. The heart wrenching outbursts of Roopa in a letter to her ex-lover, worn down by the weight of neglect and disregard, pours out her anguish and desperation. Her words are a poignant reflection of the pain and frustration that comes from being consistently overlooked and undervalued. She had dared to dream of a brighter future, carefully weaving her aspirations into a tapestry of hopes and promise. She feels like invisible, like her feelings, and wishes are not worthy of consideration. Her words are a plea for patriarchal society to acknowledge girls' feelings, desires. The tale is a stark reminder of the ways in which patriarchal societies perpetuate inequality and silence women's voices, echoes of countless women's stories silenced and marginalized.

“Misery is my fate. I lost my mother as an infant, I found you but lost your love, how can I be happy?” (The tale of a weak girl)

Roopa's early loss of her mother has left a void that remains unfilled, after that she has lost her former lover whom she still loves; sign of unrequited love leaving her a deep sense of longing and yearning, she has been compelled to marry someone else prioritizing to her father's concern over her own desires. It also highlights the issues where middle-class women's lives are often dictated by men, or guardian figures; women are denied the power to make their own decisions, leading to feelings of powerlessness and despair. It is also evident that suppression of emotions and desires can lead to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, unable to move anywhere.

“What madness is this? What will Pitaji say when he hears this, what will the world think? Has something like this ever happened before?” (The tale of a weak girl)

Patriarchy and fear of “other”

Bhandari explores the girl's sufferings as well as her efforts to harmonize the native and the acquired ideas as well as her problem after education.

“Whenever I asked him about his family, he would recite a few couplets which went something like, ‘I have no home or hearth, I belong to nobody and nobody belongs to me. Between the earth and the sky I am all alone.’ (The Wise woman)

We find that false promises to marry and other forms of deception even after you're married and having a physical affair with another woman is an offence in India. It is also true that “consent” of the woman plays an important role in the offence. Story of a simple, ordinary, working woman of forty-two, she is not a thinker, teacher, writer, and preacher and she makes it very clear at the beginning of the “her” story but the what happens when a woman is duped by a man into having sex by lies and deception, what should the response, act of that woman, how would she express that she was cheated, whom she would tell the “game of seduction” and “deception and guile” to everyone, which is what she do here.

She understands how Mr. Shinde has not only cheated her but also the woman who is there in his home (his wife), she is equally cheated. In one such incident, he has tried to console her that he will force her wife for to “start legal proceedings”, what could it imply that he wants to force her for divorce, Marriage is regarded as a spiritual union of two people that not only brings them together, and divorce also plays an important role in Hindu society and are controlled by laws and traditions that are meant to protect the interests of both parties but what if she (his wife) didn't agree, he tells that would force her to do. Isn't that considered as a form of “coercion”?

“The love affair of eight years was just a game whose cards Shinde had cleverly dealt. Once the veil lifted and my vision cleared, I could see the hand he had dealt himself.”

To make us aware of the unravished truth and women's issues which the protagonist of the story left to us are: try not to fall in love with a married man, and nowadays “love” in the bosom of home and hearth, not in the realm of mind and body. The tone of the voice of the woman underscores the struggles women face in a relationship, which is not based on mutual respect, trust and intellectual connection. Mr. Shinde's master of words use charm, magnetic, poetic words, sending gifts, cards, etc for his benefit, success, prosperity, money, fame and respect and on the other hand he has used his house wife to take care of his family and children.

“Once I was a happy, lively person; now I stayed silent and morose.

The only thing I said again and again was, ‘Mummy, you know I am going to do exactly what I want.’ Though I couldn't have said what it was that I really wanted.” Problem of women's silence: a pervasive issue; “But how do I fight with my mother, who could be herself one minute and Nana the next?” (Trishanku)

- “Tradition and Modern” mentality in “Trishanku”

A teenage girl named “Tanu”, for whom the title the story metaphorically is used. Trishanku was a Hindu mythological character who was stuck between heaven and hell, between the two realms and turn upside down, unable to go either way and thus the term “Trinshanku Swarga” was coined - indicating a state in which a person is caught between his or her desires and possessions, and is neither here nor there. This is exactly happens with Tanu, who places insights how cultural and social norms that restrict their norms and expression in these lines :

“The four walls of a home may provide security but they also place limits on your life.... schools and colleges may develop your brain but in the name of discipline, their rules and regulations tend to crush your spirits.”

The very first lines make it clear the limitations placed on her, the mother figure in the story is a paradoxical blend of modernity vs tradition reflecting the complexities of cultural identity and societal expectations. It is also a sense of internalized oppression where she is aware of her own desires but feels unable to express them. Statement also highlights the conflict between respect for authority, family obligations vs modern values (for a sense of longing to individual freedom, oneself and autonomy).

Methodology

This study employs qualitative research design, utilizing textual analysis as the primary method for examining the selected short stories of bhandari with secondary data from various sources, articles, essays , research papers, feminist studies in India and identifying and analysing themes, issues, language, tone , symbols, imagery which resulted in portrayal of female characters throughout the texts and their experiences. However, it investigates the ways in which literature can contribute to social justice movements and promote positive change.

- **A need for a “room of one's own”**

This is the story of a girl named Neelu from the short story “Rooms, Room and Rooms” who has grown up in a conservative middle class Indian family, in a house of five rooms only, and her amma was I'll a lot of the time, so it was up to Neelu to keep the rooms in order. Besides being a bright student, she was also good at house chores and every time she had to struggle to clean the rooms to create a room for her self-study, she finds used breakfast plates, empty vessels and oil-stained pages of newspapers in rooms here and there. She was forced to do her work and her studies in every room. When she qualified post- graduation with grace marks, her parents started deciding about her future: someone wants her to become a doctor, while her mother wants her to find a job as early as possible so that they'll find a suitable match for her, so that she could at least earn her “dowry”. “Dowry” is a social evil in Indian society. Principle 4 of the Cairo Manifesto from 1994 states, "the advancement of gender equality and equity, the empowerment of women, the elimination of all kinds of violence against women, and the promotion of women's control over their own fertility are the cornerstones of human development."

Education is necessary not just to learn how to make a living for herself but also to broaden one's perspective and understanding of the world. Women who are aware of their rights are better able to protest discriminatory practices like dowry.

She knows the importance of education, financial independence, and equality of opportunity to creative freedom that's why she decided to leave her hometown and went Delhi and got a job as an Assistant Professor in a girl's college. She also completed her PhD within four years.

There she married Srinivas who was a widower with a daughter. It was Srinivas who rescued her from her sniffing room and asked her to help him in the office. Her life spilled over from the four rooms of her house to the seven rooms of the office.

The question is that why a woman has to struggle throughout her life first to get education, then for permission to do job out of state or, town, then to struggle mentally alone, live a lone life of a research scholar, then to find someone who expects her to help in his works and in between these a girl or woman has to endure everything, one has to endure all kinds taunts and jeers from society which is unutterable. The above iconic statement symbolises the struggle for intellectual freedom and women's empowerment. It continues to inspire feminist thought and activism, reminding us of the importance of promoting women's voices and perspectives and how much it is necessary to stand up for oneself.

● Why to compromise or sacrifice career vs Responsibility in “The New Job”

The Burden of dual roles;

Bhandari poignantly portrays the struggles of working middle class Indian women through Rama's story. Rama; a working woman finds it increasingly challenging to balance her professional aspirations with her maternal responsibilities and household duties. Despite her dreams, ambitions she is forced to make sacrifices for the sake of her husband and her son. Because of this, Rama's professional growth is also hindered and ultimately, she quits her job of Assistant professor exactly twenty-eight days ago which she was contemplating, the decision comes at a great personal cost, affecting her health, mentality and overall wellbeing.

Rama's story is a testament to the sacrifices made by women in patriarchal societies, where their roles are often limited to caregiving and domestic duties. When she was sobbing after taking the decision to quit the job, Kundan comforted her. *“Trust me, you won't miss the job for a single day; you will be relieved. You are under so much stress these days.”*

When Kundan suddenly got a job in a foreign company, he had to throw parties at home under the pretext of introducing foreign guests to Indian cuisine, he decided that Rama would take charge of the interior decoration; but Rama had no time, this also reflects that she has to do because she was his 'wife' to fulfil his duties as society imposed on her .

"First thing in the morning she would get Bunty ready for school, then she would get ready, give instructions to the servants and work on her lecture while having breakfast . Then she and Kundan would leave at nine o'clock. She would get back at three, take a short rest, and then the work of the evening would begin. By the time she went to bed around eleven, she would be exhausted. (The New Job)

In this condition, Kundan would get irritated, and told her *"don't be silly. How can you be tired?"* Women's talent, skills and ambitions are often left unexplored. It is also evident that women's physical condition is also left unnoticed.

"I've been doing this for ten years. If I could just put in another six months of work, I would have my thesis and become eligible for the selection grade, but in this state.." and she began crying."(The New Job)

"Isn't my happiness your happiness? Isn't my success your success? "(The New Job)

This line is asked by Kundan to Rama , indirectly he wants to convey that the happiness of a wife lies in the success of husband's business. Men's sentimental language can inadvertently suppress women's voices and desires. Centring men's desires, their language often prioritises their own needs and women's autonomy and decision making power is undermined. Sentimental language can mask the power imbalance, making it harder for women to assert themselves.

Conclusion

Bhandari was a truly transformative voice in the communication, linguistic tone, intentions, symbols in the understanding of feminine desires and needs, inner lives of women, their strength and their fragility and the odds they battle against, then and now, especially for the new middle classes as they wrestled with the puzzles of modern life. Through close reading of her stories give voice to marginalized experiences and issues explored are dowry, mental trauma, loneliness, abandoned widow, women's unrecognized services, divided identities, pregnancy and importance of education of girls which are best highlighted here.

However, looking at close reading of her short stories, “nayi kahani movement” aimed to portray the changing roles and aspiration of women in post-Independence India, highlighting their struggles, desires which left unsaid, unheard by their surrounding family environment.

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