

Education and Women: A Study

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ABSTRACT

Education cultivates brains so that a person can think. Since centuries woman had been denied education, consequently, they could not think; and whatever they could, that was forced patriarchal thoughts. So it has become extremely important to study condition of woman in absence and presence of education. And if at all women are imparted with education is it making her confident enough to think about her self- respect? Or is that education allows her to find out real meaning of life? Unfortunately, it seems as if woman is born to get marry and follow patriarchal norms imposed on her through woman advocate only. She is expected to give birth to children and bring them up to the requirements of the family. In the past, she was denied to educate herself because society did not find worth in imparting formal education to women as she is supposed to take care of her family only, and the short-story *Exercise-Book* by Rabindranath Tagore written probably in 1891 represents it well; the same situation in different form is there even after 100 years in the story *A Kitchen in the corner of the House* by C.S. Laxmi written in around 1990s where educated women are preferred for marriage-market but they do not have their say in any of the matters not even in food items to be cooked. And then the movie, *English-Vinglish*, stating children's expectation for parents to converse in English language and behave in English etiquettes, proves that even if a woman is handling her house hold chores perfectly, she is imperfect without education. It is interesting to study these three stories written in different time period. Studying the three stories as a journey of a woman on the pavement to school, *Exercise-Book* proves to be a causey, *A Kitchen in the Corner of the House*, a road and *English-Vinglish* a concrete highway. A journey indicating fear- voice- respect. But this is a beginning.

Since time immemorial woman has been considered *the other* and has been denied even some basic rights as a human being. May be due to her biological sex or social- psychological upbringing or cultural bent of mindset. But it is a fact that woman has become a victim during the blind race of civilization. Seriously, it is a grave concern- how a society can develop keeping half of its population in the sheer darkness? Fortunately, in India, there were and are some intellectuals who stood against the set norms and provide voice to women emotions and expressions due to which today though women are still struggling for a lot many problems but at least they can breathe in open by educating themselves. Education is extremely important for every human to live a better life. As it opens up thousands of *skys* to fly and create a world of one's own. This article is a humble

investigation into the woman world who wants to educate her-self, who wants to express herself but they are crumbled under the claw of illogical patriarchal rules. This article studies two short stories: *Exercise-Book* by Rabindranath Tagore, and *A Kitchen in the Corner of the House* by C.S. Laxmi and a Hindi movie *English-Vinglish*. Let's peep into the stories and analysis.

Exercise-Book:

Rabindranath Tagore is marvellous at projecting women's emotion through short stories be it *Wife's Letter* or *The Broken Nest*. He has beautifully expressed deep heart desires of women. *Exercise-book*, though it highlights social evil like child marriage, the story and the character of Uma strongly represents women's willingness to get education. The story begins with,

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KEYWORDS: woman, education

As soon as she learnt to write, Uma caused tremendous trouble. She would write 'Rain patters, leaves flutter' on every wall of the house with a piece of coal – in great, childish, curving letters. She found the copy of The Secret Adventures of Haridas that her elder brother's wife kept beneath her pillow and wrote in pencil, 'Black water, red flower'. Most of the stars and planets in the new almanac that everyone in the house used were, so to speak, eclipsed by her huge scribbles. In her father's daily account-book, in the middle of his calculations, she wrote: He who learns to write Drives a horse and cart.

The language of the description is quite subtle remark on freedom of woman. Here Uma is deconstructing the state rule of the monarch and spreading her rule over every- thing tangible in the house through her writings, as if she is scribing her own rules!. The author has added natural music and colours to the expression of the woman through the character of Uma by using 'Rain patter, leaves futter and Black water, red flower.' That also means if woman have been given freedom of expression through education entire earth will reveal her natural music. The beginning of the story does not only contain beauty of language but also a small step in the inner world of a woman who want to give voice to her feelings. Seeing Uma's passion for learning, Govindlal, her brother, gifts her a book. She adores her Exercise book. She records her feelings in it. And thus, her Exercise-book becomes a medium to express her feelings. Somehow marriage is a very dense thing. Women cannot escape. So do Uma. she also has to marry Pyaremohan, a man of stupid orthodox thoughts. Marriage snatches away Uma's freedom of reading and writing. On the occasion of Uma's departure from her father's house, she is advised by her mother and brother as follows:

Her mother said 'Do what your mother-in-law tells you, my dear. Do the house-work; don't spend your time reading and writing.' And Gobindalal said, 'Mind that you don't go scratching on walls; it's not that sort of house. And make sure you don't scrawl on any of Pyarimohan's writings.

(Selected Storied 142)

The above excerpt suggests an almost complete obliteration of one's individuality and identity. The mother's advice is a fine example of the rusted tradition and the complete denial of a woman's development. While Gobindalal's warning is suggestive of male dominance. Uma obediently listens to the advice but still expects to be provided

with the freedom to learn and therefore takes her exercise-book with her to her in-laws. The narrator of the story very accurately states the importance of the exercise-book in the following words:

That exercise book not only stands for the symbol of education but also a partner of her life with whom she can share her feelings- the book was a piece of her parental home: a much loved memento of her short residence in the house of her birth; a brief record of her parental affection, written in round childish letters. It gave her, in the midst of domestic duties that had come too early, a taste of the cherished freedom that is a young girl's due.

(Selected Stories 142)

At the in-laws' house, Uma secretly continues her practice of recording her feelings. She also notes that she wants to go back to her home. But Pyarimohan does not allow her to go back because he wants her to learn the domestic duties first. Though he is educated and is writing in the newspapers and attracts a large audience with his subtle and witty thoughts he fails to understand his wife's feeling and her love for learning. He is afraid of women's education. He opines:

Reading and writing, once started, would lead to play- and novel-writing, and household norms would be endangered. As he thought further about the matter, he worked out most subtle theory. Perfect marriage was produced by a combination of female and male power. But if through women's education female power was weakened, then male power would prevail unchecked; and the clash between male and male would be so destructive that marriage would be annihilated, and women would be widowed.

(Selected Stories 143)

Perhaps most of the males have domesticated this subtly illogical thought. And that is why there is a remarkable gap between male and female sensitive intensity towards understanding each other.

At the end of the story Pyarimohan asks Uma to give him the exercise book. Uma for a moment tries to resist but ultimately male dominance prevails. Uma never gets her book back. Tagore writes:

The girl held the exercise-book to her breast and looked at her husband, entreating him with her gaze ... She hurled it down, covered her face with her hands, and fell to the floor.

(Selected Stories 145)

Uma's only adored thing is snatched away. She could not bear the humiliation and surrendered to the patriarchal authority. But the same incident would never have happened to a male-child, and that is why the story ends with this remark:

Pyarimohan also had an exercise-book full of various subtly barbed essays, but no one was philanthropic enough to snatch his book away and destroy it.

(Selected Stories 145)

The final comment is suggestive of sheer irony. A woman cannot even have her individual space in the form of a book while, on the other hand, everyone has accepted male's infinite space in all forms.

This was the condition of education of women in around 1891, where women were denied education as they are born to marry and after marriage, her husband is her master. But if we look at the story – *A Kitchen in the Corner of the House* – written in around 1990 by C S Laxmi, the overall portrait of a woman is changing a little where educated women are in demand for marriage market but they have no voice in the house. But here the character of Minakshi plays a significant role in challenging set patriarchal rules. Otherwise, rest of the women were happy for becoming security guard of the bunch of keys, and their rule over their dirty, stinking corner of the house, a kitchen. So called queens of the kitchen, Devi Annapurna! How ridiculously illogical!

Though the story has been selected from the point of view of how education opens brains of a woman and how it helps live better, it is really interesting to actually go through the story to understand how women were treated in the past and how modern husband treats her wife then and how an educated woman can help uplifting other woman.

A Kitchen in the Corner of the House:

The story begins with the description of the kitchen,

...A row of rooms like railway carriages. Right at the end, the kitchen, stuck on in a careless manner. Two windows. Underneath one, the tap and basin. The latter was too small to place even a single plate in it. Underneath that, the drainage area, without any ledge. As soon as the taps above were opened, the feet standing beneath would begin to tingle. Within ten minutes there would be a small flood underfoot. Soles and heels would start cracking from that constant wetness. Kishan's mother - called Jiji by everyone - would present a soothing ointment for chapped heels on the very first day one entered the kitchen, cooked a meal and was given the traditional gold bangle.

Here, the kitchen symbolizes woman's workplace, battle field, and a kingdom without authority as they can not even suggest to expand the space of that kitchen, they will have to manage with whatever space has been allotted to them. No voice, just noise of making food and cleaning utensils! Kitchen also stands for woman's space in patriarchal society. As if the writer C S Lakshmi has caught hold of the neck of a woman standing upright holding her in the air so that she can see where is she standing? And why does she exist? The beginning of the story is very straight forward in stating why woman is born, what is her place and what are the expectations from her. Further, the description of kitchen goes like,

A zero watt light bulb hung there. The women appeared there like shadows, their heads covered, their deep-coloured skirts melting into the darkness of the room, slapping and kneading the chappati dough or stirring the fragrant, spicy dal. The kitchen was not a place; it was essentially a set of beliefs.

The writer has wittily used words for women like shadows, because they are shadows of their male counterpart and they don't have their own thought to express though the ladies in the house are educated, but except Minakshi, Kisan's wife, not a single lady has dare to put forward her opinion in front of Papaji, the higher authority.

On one occasion, when they were eating, Minakshi raised the subject. Papaji was building a room above the garage at that time. 'Papaji, why don't you extend the verandah outside the kitchen? If you widen it, we could have some chairs out there. If you then build a wash place to the left, you could have a really wide basin for cleaning the vessels. And then beyond that, you could put up some aluminium wire for drying the clothes.' Papaji looked for a moment as if he had been assaulted by the words expressing this opinion. Jiji in her turn looked at him, shocked. Daughters-in-law had not thus far offered their own opinions in that house. Radha Bhabhiji stared fixedly at her plate. Kusuma straightened her veil to hide her agitation. Papaji turned to Kishan. Kishan continued to eat calmly. At last Papaji cleared his throat and asked, 'Why?' 'The basin in the kitchen is extremely small. And the drainage is poor. If the servant woman washes the vessels there, the whole kitchen gets flooded.

Papaji felt assaulted because for the first time a daughter-in-law has raised her voice against injustice.

And she could do it perhaps because of her husband's support. Because Kusuma was also brilliant and skilled in various things as the writer describes,

But when Kusuma was found, she was like a fine illustration and commentary to Jiji's exposition. An MA in Politics. A diploma in French. It wasn't quite clear why she had studied French. It seemed that collecting a diploma in some language or the other was a necessary part of waiting for marriage. ... During this time of waiting, Kusuma had also embroidered cushions and pillowcases, handcrafted small objects, decorated saris with lace and embroidery. She had not missed out on classes in flower arrangement, bakery, sewing and in making jam, juice and pickles. She had learnt all these skills. She was the perfect daughter-in-law.

But she has never voiced her opinion. So should we consider marriage as confinement of woman-being? Or socially accepted self-imprisonment for women? So actually what works behind Minakshi to raise her voice and Kusuma to remain silent even when being highly educated? That is why the question arises, what kind of education should be called education? Kusuma could not win support of her husband while Minakshi gains support of her husband even when she cooks. But she could not become Papaji's favourite because she speaks her thoughts. Papaji remarks,

Dark skinned woman, you who refuse to cover your head, you who talk too much, you who have enticed my son . . .

That means woman are expected to be fair skinned and must respect illogical traditions. The writer has beautifully used the imagery of octopus, and her comment -women accepted their bonds with joy.

If their waists were bound, they called them jewelled belts; if their feet were held back, they called them anklets; if they touched their foreheads, they called them crowns. The women entered a world that was enclosed by wire on all four sides and reigned there proudly; it was their kingdom. They made earth-shaking decisions: today we'll have mutton pulao; tomorrow let it be puri-masala.

It is not that women are naturally attracted towards gold ornament, it is again painted and conditioned mindset, a gift of male dominance! Diversions and distractions! So that women miss more important things. Woman are happily accepting these chains in the form of gold. These chains can be broken if right education is provided to woman which has been proved at the end of the story.

It is not that if woman is educated they can escape from house hold duties, neither they can gain support of their husbands if they are working and earning. Woman is woman! Even if women are educated and help their household by earning from outside, they will have to play double role and double responsibilities, more work, more exploitation without any positive recognition. The incident of Radha, a working woman-wife and Gopal, a doctor-husband shows that woman can cook in the scorching heat in the kitchen because they are women,

Can you imagine what it was like, Kishan. I couldn't even stand in the kitchen long enough to make a cup of tea.' Kishan said quietly, 'Isn't Radha Bhabhiji who also has a job at the bank, cooking in the same kitchen at this very moment?' 'Certainly. So what? After all, women are used to it.' True.

Even boy child and girl child are conditioned right from the childhood what they are going to do in life?

Intermittently there was conversation with the children: 'Raju, what are you going to be, when you grow up?' 'A pilot z-0-i-n-g. ' 'You, Priya?' 'I . . . I . . . I'll make the that is in my house.' 'How cleverly she talks,' Jiji laughed.

Obviously, this incident provokes gender discussion, but this is about imparting right education too.

At picnic, though it was a picnic, women of the house were busy in making pakoras and serving males and their children, so while going back, Kusuma asks Minakshi to walk slowly because, Kusuma lingered. *'Mina, walk a bit slowly. I haven't even seen the birds properly yet.* 'Thus, every single statement of the story is fuel with fire. Suggest pitiable condition of woman. Woman could not have space enough to see the sky not even from the kitchen.

Besides the character of Minakshi, character of Dularibai, Jiji is also given some space in the story. The two generations! Dularibai recollects her *bidai* time instructions given by her mother,

"Take control of the kitchen. Never forget to make yourself attractive. Those two rules will give you all the strength and authority you will need."

As if controlling the kitchen is to get control over empire state building! how rubbish infusing of thoughts! Jiji also remembers her first day at her in-law's house where she must cook three hundred chappatis. On that first day, the palms of both her hands were blue with bruises. There were shooting pains in her shoulder blades. At that time Papaji said, "Shabash . . . you are an excellent worker." There she

let out a huge breath. That means if a woman could not make three hundred chappatis she is not an excellent woman.

The end of the story contains realistic emancipation of a woman through dialogues between Jiji and Minakshi. Minakshi tries to explain her Jiji to come out of the trivialities and become free of all. Cut herself from Papaji, children and ornaments. And just breathe as a Dularibai alone.

... And from that, strength. Authority. And when I have renounced all that, then who am I? Find out. Dip in and see. Dip into what? Into your own inner well. But there is nothing to hold on to . . . I'm fright . . . Dip in deeper, deeper. Find out the relationship between Dularibai. and the world. Had there not been those three hundred chappatis to cook every day, nor those fourteen children who once kicked in your womb If your thoughts had not been confined to mutton pulao, masala, purialu, dhanial powder, salt, sugar, milk, oil, ghee If you had not had these constant cares: once every four days the wick to the stove has to be pulled up; whenever kerosene is available it has to be bought and stored; in the rainy season the rice has to be watched and the dal might be full of insects; pickles must be made in the mango season; when the fruit is ripe it would be time for sherbet, juice and jam; old clothes can be bartered for new pots and pans; once a fortnight the drainage area in the kitchen must be spread with lime; if one's periods come it will be a worry; if they don't come it will be a worry If all this clutter had not filled up the drawers of your mind...

Woman are engrossed in spices and preparation of foods so much so that they forget their real identities and their relation with the nature. The writer is very straight-forward in her tone. She has simply shown a mirror to the superficial understanding of woman with which they have been winning and losing her empires. The writer also indicates woman's actual abilities which answers the male dominance in almost all fields. Woman had never been given opportunity to hone their skills. If they were not kept themselves busy in *masalas* they could have discovered new continents, written poems sitting upon Mount Kailasam, might have painted caves. Might have flown. Might have made a world without wars, prisons, gallows, chemical warfare.

English Vinglish (2012) By Gauri Shinde

The movie narrates a story of a homemaker Shashi who is a good wife and a good mother too. She responsibly performs her regular domestic duties

along with her Ladoo business. But because of her weak English she was not respected by her husband and daughter. Fortunately she finds out a chance of learning English in U.S. And gets command over language. Thus, at the end she earns respect in her family as a mother and a wife. So it is obvious that now a days, woman are not only performing her household duties perfectly but also they are thinking of her self- respect. So in a way it is a good beginning for woman and better world.

Findings:

- The first story, Exercise-book is written in around 1891 and usually the literature produced in particular time is suggestive of contemporary society. So the extract of the story is:
 - The story delineates woman's willingness to learn and express.
 - Marriage is inevitable for woman.
 - After marriage, generally husband becomes the master and woman, a slave. All the decisions of wife's life will be at the mercy of her male counterpart. Uma could not study and there was no one to snatch Pyarimohan's barbed books.
- The second story, A Kitchen in the Corner of the House written in 1990 portrays pitiable condition of woman in different form. Here,
 - Woman are expected to be educated, fair skinned and quiet for marriage market.
 - Woman are expected not be found with books, they are expected to remain at home only.
 - woman can study but finally she has to fight everyday battels of food and masala.
 - Marriage again is priority.
 - After 100 years also role of woman is the same and husbands too.
 - Voiceless woman.
 - If at all she will speak she would not be admired by patriarchal authority.
 - But the story also shows a ray of hope. Marriage bond of Minakshi and Kisan.
 - The story portray woman who can think about her conditions, and trivialities of her everyday work which can be given less importance. And also that there are much larger fields to work upon.
- The movie, English-vinglish, takes the woman to a little higher pedestal where she can think of respect and self- respect.
- So fortunately, after one and half century, woman is thinking of respect. This is perhaps the beginning of true education.

Conclusion:

So, to conclude, it can be said that,

- Education provides wings to fly in the sky of knowledge but role of a woman is appreciated in the society if she is a wife, mother and daughter-in-law and that also a silent woman. Therefore if at all woman has been provided education she is expected to remain silent. So education should be such which helps person to know her worth.
- Gender roles or gender discrimination is based on how a girl or a boy is brought up in a society. All over the world, woman have to follow certain set of principles, or decree to prove herself to be a woman fit for marriage. So girls are trained to be a home maker where she has to sacrifice her dreams, her everything. If she is a girl she has to behave in certain manner only. Selection of educational discipline is also based on gender. Most of the times, Even mother discriminates between her boy child and girl child. Girls have been facing discrimination at all the places whether it is home, educational institutes, play ground or work place. True education will help everyone to create a better society and the world.
- Education provides freedom of expression, but marriage curbs everything. Uma in the story Exercise- book represents woman of 19th century where they were denied education. But there is seed of hope for woman to get education.
- In the story A kitchen in the corner of the house, women are educated but only Minaskhi has her own thought. A thinking woman, the rest are shadows.

- Even very existence of woman in questionable! Kusuma's character. That means outcome of education matters the most.
- Kusuma and Radhabhabhiji both were educated but Minakshi could assert her point, they could not.
- True education can help in removing trivialities of life and concentrate on core or more significant part of life, i.e. emancipation of self. As rightly stated in the end of the story, A Kitchen in the Corner of the House.
- Marriage is inevitable part of woman's life. She cannot think of surviving without it in Indian society. And education does not mean running away from responsibility or accountability. Education means understanding the responsibility in better ways and fulfilling it and enjoying life by taking her own decision, living like a human-being. Shashi proves that.

Every Woman has an ability to learn faster on the ground of educating herself. They just need to unite and develop a support system for each other so that they can create a better world for everyone.

Source:

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