



Modern Female Desire vs. Patrilineal Tradition in Krishna Sobti's Listen Girl

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Authors

Pritee Suresh Nikhade
Research Scholar

Dr. Prafulkumar Prakash Vaidhya
Professor of English
Institution of Higher Learning, Research &
Specialised Studies in English
Sardar Patel Mahavidyalaya
Ganj Ward, Chandrapur, Maharashtra, INDIA

Abstract

Krishna Sobti is widely recognised as a feminist writer in the literary world of literature. She portrays women and their struggles against patriarchal societal norms. This theme is explored in many of her novels including "Listen Girl". It is translated work of Krishna Sobti's Hindi Novel "Ai Ladki". The writing depicts numerous sociocultural conflicts of women of old and new generation. Krishna Sobti portrays the picture of women's plight in existing society through two female characters: Ammi, mother whom the daughter calls, Ammi or Ammu, and her own daughter, whom she exclusively calls hey! Girl (hereafter Girl). Ammi, follows the traditional patriarchal norms throughout her life and sticks to the same steadfastly. Girl, the representative of the new generation, challenges the patriarchal societal norms. She believes in having basic human rights and strives for the parallel facets in her life. Her efforts are to achieve self-fulfilment and enablement in life. The conflicts prevailing between old and the new generation are visible in the acts of Ammi and her daughter. Ammi follows patriarchal system whereas Girl claims modern female desires and wish to have personal choice, her body and voice. The research highlights the

hardships undergone by the mother in her life. It describes life courses of Girl and her efforts to overcome the fetters of patriarchy. It paves the way to abolish the detrimental patriarchal norms which are impediments in the way of women empowerment.

Key Words

Krishna Sobti, Listen Girl, Tradition, Modernity, Patriarchy.

Introduction

Krishna Sobti is the most popular author in the feminist Hindi literature. Female characters occupy prominence place in her writing. These characters challenge deeply rooted societal patriarchal norms. They do not blindly follow set rules and expectations of society. Sobti skilfully describes the changing gender roles in modern era. She claims identity and freedom for women through her writings.

Listen Girl exposes the conflicts between the old and new generation through the characters of Ammi and Girl respectively. The novel unfolds the life story of these characters through conversation between them. Ammi represents the old generation. The existing patriarchal culture is followed by her throughout her life. She sticks to old values of patriarchy. She remembers the memories of her past about her sacrifices and personal desires and instructs her daughter for her future life. She tells her daughter that she has followed societal standards

throughout her life. Family was important to her. She sacrificed her ambitions and desires for the sake of children and family. She regrets for this and feels unhappy for her servitude approach to the life. She is still in shackles of patriarchal rules. She tells her daughter that she wanted to climb the mountain, but she didn't find time for that; her husband's household work consumed all her time. This shows her regret in life. She spends ample of time on household chores. She explains that handling household chores teaches one the virtue of measuring. She is more committed to patriarchal rules than the moderns.

Girl is a representative of modern women of new generation. She has clarity in her thoughts. She is more independent, self-aware. She poses questions to patriarchal society. She demands equality for all women. Her arguments with her mother are in favour of abolishing detrimental patriarchal rules to women empowerment. She puts in efforts to create her own identity beyond being a daughter, woman, or human being. She is aware of changes happening in the society. She accepts ideas of equality and empowerment of women and implement in her life. She differs in this regard to her mother. Her mother lacks modern outlook and passion to challenge traditional patriarchal values.

Difference of traditional and modern opinions is discernible when Ammi and Girl discuss the issue of marriage. Ammi believes that marriage is essential and integral part of human life. She differs with modern day concepts of marriage. She firmly asserts that marriage brings social status, stability and emotional steadiness in the life of woman. She deeply concerns the marriage of her daughter. Girl listens patiently her mother's arguments and concerns including complaints and advices. Ammi puts efforts in convincing her daughter for marriage. She cites her life experiences and tells the stories of childbirth. She states that giving birth to child is like wearing a jewel. She tells the daughter that to be with a person who cares for you and vice versa makes a huge difference in life. The patriarchal traditional cycle of marriage, children and family is corroborated by Ammi. Girl resists her mother and social pressure for marriage. To remain unmarried throughout the life is considered stigma for woman. It seems improper to her. Girl is willing to tie herself in the wedlock, but shows no urgency. Her ideas about marriage are clear and fixed. She questions her mother about family, marriage and woman life. Ammi responds her questions and informs her about the significance of marriage in woman's life. She poses counter-question to her daughter. "Think and tell me, child, when the need arises, whom will you call?" (Listen Girl, 63). Girl replies very confidently, "I won't have the help, But I will respond if someone calls me" (Listen Girl, 63). Girl differs in opinions with Ammi in making marriage an unavoidable and essential part of human life.

The discussion of marriage is extended to family life and role of women within household. They contrast each other in opinions on the same. Ammi claims that the worth of women in family depends on her performing household chores and her efforts in taking care of family members. It is the bounded duty of woman to keep the house neat and clean. It is the primary responsibility of woman to perform all household chores with no grudges against family members. Ammi accepts and instructs her daughter the patriarchal norms like raising a child is the duty of a mother rather than father. She invested much of her time in shouldering such responsibilities. She considers doing such duties is natural course of life. She never questions her own choice of doing works assigned by patriarchal society. It is possible that she may feel regret for considering such work as women's domain. She states, "I can run this house with clockwork precision, but I did nothing purposeful or important for me, myself. (Listen Girl, 73). She prioritizes the works of other members of the family. Never cares of her own life.

Girl is against the traditional role of women. She believes in individual freedom and self-respect. She believes in pursuing her own dreams, interest, and ambitions. She never wants to chain herself in the shackles of family life, household work, children, etc. She desires to make herself free from the traditional gender role for women and pursue her own path of life. Marriage and family, she considers, are not more important than one's life, ambitions, and dreams. She endeavours to find her own path of living. It differs from the path chosen by the traditional women. She states in this regard, "I am what I am and will remain the same" (Listen Girl, 63). It indicates that she is not willing to change herself for the sake of patriarchal society.

Ammi follows strict and assigned gender roles by the patriarchal society. Consequently unknowingly she follows gender discrimination assuming gender roles maintain balance in the family and the society. When Ammi feels pain in performing household chores, but fulfil all duties without fail. Her assumption is it brings honour and stability to woman.

Girl is aware of social injustice and boundaries imposed by gender discrimination. She poses questions to her mother regarding this injustice existing in patriarchal society. She asserts that gender roles oppress women from living the life freely. It affects their freedom and limits the opportunities in life. She demands equality in work and in life. Her attitude and voice against the assigned patriarchal gender roles becomes the bone of contention between them.

The arguments and disagreements between Ammi and Girl on the matters of marriage, gender roles, family life and gender discrimination reflects the transformation taking place in modern societies. Ammi sticks to traditional cultural values and standards and don't want to lose it. The patriarchal culture and values bind her. She doesn't consider this an impediment in the way of achieving women empowerment. She rarely comes out of this servitude. Girl repudiates the concepts of marriage and gender roles based on patriarchal system. She proclaims societal pressures and patriarchal expectations from women limit the choice of women.

Ammi prioritises marriage, family life, cultural values, and religious practices over individual freedom and womanhood in life. Girl takes exception to it. She gives importance to individual choice and freedom, self-respect and equality in all matters of the day.

Conclusion

The conversation between Ammi and her daughter highlights their approaches to life.

Ammi undergoes the societal bias but lacks courage to fight against it. Her cultural grooming, in her time and society, shape her personality. She believes that woman survive by silence and sacrifice. She willingly accepts certain tasks like cleaning, cooking and caring family members considering this as a female domain. Girl differs with her mother in opinions and acts. Girl, living under the same roof, survives by speaking and claiming modern female desires. She stands firm on her opinions and refuses to change herself for anyone. She challenges patriarchy by embracing personal freedom and self-respect above anything. Her life exemplifies to women seeking escape from the patriarchal norms.

Bibliography

1. Jha, Rama and Krishna Sobti (1981) A Conversation with Krishna Sobti. *Indian Literature* 24(4), 63-69.
2. Sobti, Krishna (2002) *Listen Girl*. Katha, New Delhi.
3. Wolfreys, Julian (2013) *Key Concepts in Literary Theory*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, Scotland.

—==00==—