

EXPLORING “NEW WOMAN” IN THE TRANSLATED WORKS OF ASHAPURNA DEVI AND SUCHITRA BHATTACHARYA

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*Abstract: The traditional roles of women, which frequently depict them as meek, subservient objects solely fit for domestic work, are argued in and challenged in the present paper. The woman has embarked on a journey where she faces off against men and tries to establish her individuality. Ashapura Devi and Suchitra Bhattacharya have portrayed ideal women in conventional familial roles but have reconsidered their attitudes and completely transformed how women are portrayed in their writings. Women are celebrated for their independent civic engagement by Ashapura Devi and Suchitra Bhattacharya, who portray them as the personification of power. Ashapura Devi and Suchitra Bhattacharya address issues that go against societal standards and depict women fighting to reclaim their place in society. The new women in Ashapura Devi's novels: *The First Promise* and *Subarnalata* and Suchitra Bhattacharya's *Dahan (The Burning)* and *Hemant Pakhi (Autumn Bird)* come from common households and deal with difficult circumstances by creating new identities with courage and insight.*

The evolution of women's roles throughout the ages has been noted and documented in the history of literature. The journey of the women of yesterday has been filled with pivotal moments and harsh criticisms, which they have managed with composure and tolerance. Women have persevered despite all the criticism and risky path. Women today have come a long way, becoming a powerful fraternity. The following paper explores how women have advanced throughout history, from the prehistoric to the most recent ultramodern era. The study addresses how women's independence, issues, and worries are portrayed in literature through female-centric roles.

The paper analyzes how contemporary women are portrayed by the selected female authors, Ashapura Devi and Suchitra Bhattacharya. In the past, women were expected to be silent, obedient, and always accused of being chatty. Because of their inferior status to males in a culture that men ruled, women were pushed to fulfill the expectations of men for a very long time. It should be noted that historically, most published authors were men, and the representation of women in literature was undoubtedly sexist. One important reason for this was that there was a severe lack of literacy in the ancient world. Most individuals who could write were men, and they did not view women with compassion and appreciation, viewing them as mere tools for domestic chores.

A full understanding of “Feminism” is necessary for any discussion on the emergence of the term “new woman.” Feminism is a deep awareness of one's own

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uniqueness as a woman and a sympathetic response to issues specific to women. The term “feminism” has emerged as a powerful rejection of the current systems of authority and gender roles at many levels, including the home, society, politics, and business. Feminism has been described in various ways by various authors, critics, and intellectuals.

“The essence of Feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that woman suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex; the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism,” writes Janet Richards in his book *Women Writers Talking* (1981). (3) According to David Bouchier, the feminist movement “includes any type of opposition to any sort of social, personal, or economic discrimination which women endure because of their sexes,” as stated in his 1983 book *The Feminist Challenge*. (2) Feminism can be summed up as a collection of philosophies and movements with the overarching goal of defining, creating, and gaining equal rights for women in all spheres of life-social, political, cultural, etc. Both Ashapura Devi and Suchitra Bhattacharya are Indian-Bengali women novelists who capture the suffering and tension experienced by women as they balance tradition and modernity with freedom and uniqueness, respectively. In their works, the female protagonists decide to rebel and battle against social conventions and currents that are regarded as traditional and culturally acceptable. By attempting to integrate themselves into the socio-cultural norms of the transformed society, they are also taking on new obligations.

In their works, they present the image of a modern woman who seeks equal sexual orientation and rights in society and the same position and respect as men. They are the rebellious women, stuck between feudal values and the rapidly approaching new life, who aspires to consciousness, respect, and autonomy.

After a protracted study into the discovery of her strong yearning to be recognized as an individual with individual freedom - autonomous femininity with unfettered mind and soul - the notion of the New Woman has evolved. In addition, the women protagonists of the selected works fight to eliminate patriarchal dominance and sexist views to transform society. According to a critic, Simone De Beauvoir, “One does not become a woman by birth, but rather by choice” (Beauvoir, 295). Feminists investigate the concept of women and their significance in a society where men predominate. As a result, the women protagonists of the selected works decide to rebel and struggle against the long-held conventional views, social conventions, and gender norms. K. Meera Bai states, — “The word New Woman has come to signify the awakening of women into a new realization of her place and position in family and society. Conscious of her individuality, the new woman has been trying to assert her rights as a human being and is determined to fight for equal treatment with man.” (Srivastava, 15- 16)

The women in selected novels do not surrender their conflicts so lightly. Early Indian English fiction depicted women as part of the family. However, after 1940, it started to portray women's involvement in the freedom struggle and how they were learning and feeling emancipated. The campaign for the improvement of women received a boost from the spirit of patriotism. The literature produced during the Freedom movement presents a fresh image of the Indian woman.

The selected writer Ashapura Devi's novel *The First Promise*, the first book in the trilogy, was first published in Bengali under the title *Pratham Pratisruti* in

1964. Indira Chowdhury later translated it into English. Additionally, the work won the coveted National Jnanpith award in 1977. The autobiographical aspects of this piece are also present. Ashapura Devi was given the title “kitchen writer” because she believed that all conflicts and uprisings originate at home.

In the Preface to her book *The First Promise*, she noted:

H[h]istory has invariably overlooked the dynamics of the domestic world. That domain has always been neglected. This book is about an unknown woman who was among those who carved out the etchings of a promise from within those ignored interior spaces of Bengal.

Here, she underlined women's silenced and oppressed state, where history was mute on the acknowledgment of their experiences. She continued to write in that atmosphere of complexities and disagreements, in any case. She provided a comprehensive account of how, through a dual cycle of accommodation with and defense against male-centric thinking, women might begin the reforms and challenge the structure from within.

The novel pays tribute to the common Indian and Bengali ladies who bravely overcame all odds. It tells the story of Satyabati, the forerunner of the first promise of reason. Satyabati was a brave young woman who taught herself to read and write on her own. She had a brave heart and was unafraid of risks. Satyabati broke every rule and became a rebel in order to achieve her identity. After overcoming countless roadblocks and obstacles, she fought to emancipate women. The work's protagonist, Satyabati, is a remarkable female voice whose journey from being a child bride to redefining herself has been documented in this novel.

The independence that every woman should have is highlighted by Ashapura Devi in the book *The First Promise* through Satyabati's persona. Satyabati was a tenacious, resolute, sincere, courageous, and reasoned protestor. She fought solely to change the social structure via self-consciousness and refused to bargain or haggle under the prevailing social structure. She felt free because she overcame the barrier and moved toward the modern city, which represented an excellent opportunity for her.

The main character Subarnalata, in the second part *Subarnalata* of the trilogy, has spent her entire life trying to become a writer. She is the mother of Bakul, the main character and writer of *Bakul Katha*, the third and final book in the trilogy. A helpless victim of man-centricity, Subarnalata had been moved from her father's home to her in-residence laws when Ashapura Devi closed *The First Promise*. In any case, she was distinct from the domestically subdued group of women.

Subarnalata was introduced by Ashapura Devi, who said, “Apparently, Subarnalata is a life story but that is not all. Subarnalata is the story of a particular time, a time that has passed, but whose shadow still hovers over our social system – Subarnalata is a symbol of the helpless cry of an imprisoned soul ... sociologists write down the history of a changing society, I have merely tried to draw a curve to depict the change.” The story of a woman is told throughout the book, along with how the change affected her. A trapped soul's helpless cries are portrayed in Subarnalata.

Therefore, developing women with more social power is a generational duty. Satyabati's pledge to herself and the next generation of women of a life of knowledge and moral decisions made this important novel at that particular time and even today a notable example of bravery. The strong women in Ashapurna Devi's writings are not passive; they fight for societal equality by speaking out against patriarchal notions.

The next selected writer for this research paper is Suchitra Bhattacharya. She has authored several books in Bengali. Her books have been translated into numerous Indian languages, including Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Oriya, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi, and English, by other authors. She has authored roughly 24 novels and a sizable number of short stories in numerous major Bengali literary publications. Her works include *Dahan (The Burning)*, *Kacher Dewal (The Wall Of Glass)*, *Kachher Manush (Close to Me)*, *Hemanter Pakhi (Autumn Bird)*, *Uro Megh (Flying Cloud)*, etc.

The selected work *Dahan (The Burning)* is one of Suchitra Bhattacharya's well-known works. The word "Burning" in this book refers to the burning pain every woman experience when she ventures outside society's prescribed course for her.

Dahan is translated into English by Mahua Mitra. *Dahan* is known as *The Burning* in English. The struggles of two girls, Romita and Jhinuk, are detailed in this work. This work appeared in 2001.

The quest for justice by two women is the subject of the novel. Rituparno Ghosh, who made a movie based on this novel, won an award for it. This account is based on a true tale that shook Kolkata in the early 1990s. The protagonist of this book is Romita Choudhury, a pretty woman who marries Palash. One evening, they left the house with delight, and Romita was waiting at the metro station for Palash, who went out to buy some items. Romita was, unfortunately, sexually assaulted by young males from an aristocratic household. Her husband attempts to stop them but was powerless to do so. He also got hurt during the attack.

A simple girl named Jhinuk Sarkar helped and saved Romita and Palash when she reached the spot. Jhinuk is a school teacher who loves her fiancé Tunir. Palash is a sweet man who turns cruel after the gang molests his wife. By committing marital rape on her, he, too, tortures her. His tension rises as a result of his pals starting to taunt and mock him. The inability to tolerate others' opinions causes him to change his mind and act rudely toward his wife. He later rebuked Romita and blamed her only for her molestation.

Romita's family and husband Tunir never accept Jhinuk's offer to help. Jhinuk craves genuine consolation and affection from other people. Her grandmother shows her genuine affection and sympathy. When Romita finds herself alone, her Canadian sister helps her. Romita and Jhinuk look for justice and freedom at the end of the narrative.

In the society that is the focus of the narrative, male supremacy is a major problem. Romita and Jhinuk both encounter this issue in the novel. The author vividly illustrates the dominance of men in the family and society throughout the entire work. Romita experiences both internal and exterior abuse, including harassment, marital rape, and public attacks. Jhinuk also experiences problems with her family and fiancé.

Perhaps the best work that examines various facets of issues of gender is *Dahan: The Burning* by Suchitra Bhattacharya. Work shows a victim's miseries, intimidation, and despair. Although they may not live in an area with people of the same class, standing, or race or speak the same language, women worldwide experience and fight in a framework primarily focused on men in a very similar way. The work explores the moments when a woman is harassed in a metro station, the backlash she receives from society, her in-laws, and her spouse, and the strength shown by a young woman who witnesses the incident. The work effectively communicates its message about women's dissent.

Dahan: The Burning clearly depicts the struggle of women against marginalization and subjection, which is a never-ending cycle of suffering for any woman who sets out to pursue her independence. The women in the book speak out against the male-centered culture's toxic mentality and the callous ways women are treated. Jhinuk is a striking, rebellious, fearless, unwavering, independent, strong-willed, and confident young woman who does not have the meekness and helplessness of stereotypical women. These women are the ones who show the way forward and drive social change. Suchitra Bhattacharya eliminates gender bias by creating such female characters. She rejects the fixed roles that the traditional patriarchal society has given men and women.

Women who have forged their own paths were repeatedly explained by Suchitra Bhattacharya. The finest introduction is found in her work, *Hemanter Pakhi (Autumn Bird)*. The novel was originally written in Bengali in 1997, and Swapna Dutta later translated it into English. It was then released on December 1st, 2003. It tells the story of the female protagonist Aditi Majumdar, a middle-aged, educated homemaker who begins writing after around 23 years of marriage. She eventually finds the confidence and will to communicate with the world on her terms.

She used to live with her husband Supratim and their children Papai and Tatai, and she was in her mid-age. She used to go through the routines during the day simply. With her dreary presence, Aditi was wearing thin. Hemen Mama, a member of her distant family, urged her to resume her writing once more as she had done so in her school, told her about the magazine he had founded, and asked her to contribute. Her first piece of writing was published shortly after, and she met new colleagues and became familiar with a new world. She received praise for her efforts, which caused her life to take a different course. Her family, however, lacked enthusiasm for her artistic endeavors. After some time, her husband, Supratim, forbids her from seeing her friends and labels them useless. She makes the difficult decision to cease writing and disregard her wishes for her family after coming to this realization.

She informed Hemen Mama of her decision in a letter. She wrote: "An ordinary woman like me is destined to live according to a set pattern laid down by the society. The way thousands of women have done before me, from the beginning of time. To look after one's home, husband and children until one finds oneself alone, quietly waiting for death." (247)

He inspired her and forced her to question conventional gender roles by encouraging her to think for herself: "When a man follows his star to become a writer or an artist and turns bohemian as a result it is considered a part of his artistic expression. But a woman always has to remain within the bounds chalked out by the society, whether she wants to write or paint. She has to keep within the

four walls of her home. No one is going to put up with it if she dares to move out even a single step.” (248)

After some time, Aditi was told by Supratim to stop writing and stay away from her friends since they did not live up to his standards. He claimed he did not say anything earlier out of sympathy because he wanted to give her a chance. Given that she had nothing else to do, he thought it would be close to a harmless relaxing activity. He could no longer tolerate that, though, as that was his home, and he would not allow her to continue behaving in such a way. However, when Aditi asserted that she had an equal claim to the house, he denied it, claiming that it exclusively belonged to him: “Is it? Please remember, your father and brother did not gift it to you in a will. I bought it with my own hard earned money.” (228) Sexism and male dominance have been pervasive in society and have done everything they can to lower the status of women. A man consistently demonstrates his power complex in this way. Supratim even questioned Hemen Mama's moral character. After hearing his remarks, Aditi felt smothered and disgusted.

She was puzzled by a question: “Who is Aditi? The wife of Supratim Mazumdar? The mother of Papai and Tatai? Was she born just to fulfil the needs of the three? Does Aditi have any existence of her own? An existence meant just for herself?” (248)

Aditi loses her assertive voice, which eventually leads to bewilderment and misery. The author thus depicts the journey of her female heroine toward self-discovery. In a family where the husband's will is given priority, and the wife is obediently put to the side, women's roles and status are lower than men's. She is present in the home to assist, comply, and endure suffering.

She then put her parrot free. The bird originally started to fall, but then it took off again and flew across the sky. The bird found a way to fly across the broad sky after spending so much time in captivity: “Was it because of its own innate ability? Or was it because of the irresistible call of freedom?” (251)

However, soon after, something inside her changed, and she tore the letter, letting the wind carry the paper fragments away. Every single woman's history in the male-centered culture is revealed in the novel.

Aditi had previously transformed into a bird with wings that knows it can fly but does not. Nevertheless, when she realized her potential and that she, like her parrot, could defy the standards imposed on her being a woman and free herself from the constraints of society, she vowed to forge her own path. Suchitra Bhattacharya exposes the predicament of every woman in the male-dominated society in *Hemanter Pakhi* alongside Aditi. The novelist condemns the patriarchal institutions which stifle women's intrinsic creativity.

Both of Suchitra Bhattacharya's novels, *Dahan: The Burning* and *Hemanter Pakhi (Autumn Bird)*, illustrate the hardships of women in a world where men rule. They reflect women's anguish and anger, revealing their struggle for autonomy. By stepping outside the confines of the female gender, Suchitra Bhattacharya celebrates the significant discovery of her female protagonists; she develops early rebels but also compliant characters like Romita in *Dahan: The Burning*. Patriarchy and tradition have a gravitational pull on some of her characters. Women's struggle to overcome sexism and establish their own individuality is depicted in the selected novels.

After a protracted investigation of the strong desire of the New Woman to be recognized as an independent woman with a free soul and mind and as someone with her own identity, the concept of the New Woman has finally come into being. She fights to eradicate patriarchal dominance and sexist beliefs in order to reform society at the same time, just like it can be seen in the character of Satyabati in the selected Ashapura Devi's novel *The First Promise* and Jhinuk in Suchitra Bhattacharya's novel *Dahan: The Burning*.

Ashapura Devi and Suchitra Bhattacharya address issues that go against societal standards and depict women fighting to reclaim their place in society. The New Women in Ashapura Devi's novels: *The First Promise* and *Subarnalata* and Suchitra Bhattacharya's *Dahan (The Burning)* and *Hemanter Pakhi (Autumn Bird)* come from common households and deal with difficult circumstances by creating new identities with courage and insight.

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