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Depiction of Acquisitiveness and Women's Liberation in Bhabani Bhattacharya's *A Goddess Named Gold*

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ABSTRACT

Our society is full of tenacious women. In the life of women, everything must be won through confrontation. Even in republic countries the lives of women were appalling few decades back. However, now the women occupied high-profile positions. Bhabani Bhattacharya, an adept, Indian writer and novelist presented female characters in an optimistic way and emphasized the hurdles of women in the novel *A Goddess Named Gold*. Impact of acquisitiveness of human is the additional theme discussed by him in this novel. The objective of this paper is to delve into the topic "Acquisitiveness and Women Liberation in the novel *A Goddess Named Gold*."

Keywords: Women, Struggles, Patriarchy, liberation and Positivity.

Bhattacharya, a distinguished Indian writer of Bengal origin. His prominent works include: *The Golden Boat* and *Towards Universal Man*. He got accredited through his novels like *So Many Hungers* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He who Rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow from Ladakh* (1967) and *A Dream in Hawaii* (1999).

Commencing with the title of the novel, *A Goddess Named Gold*, it bears symbolic significance by alluding to gold in its literal sense and, in a more profound sense, to the concept of

freedom. The representation of gold as material wealth extends beyond its literal meaning, serving as a symbol for the richness of the human spirit and intellect. Similarly, freedom is not merely a path to prosperity; it serves as a catalyst for inspiring individuals to engage in noble thoughts and actions, thereby fostering collective happiness.

The novel revolves around the village of Sonamitti, a place whose very name, signifying "the land of golden soil," serves as a vivid representation of India itself. Within this narrative, the names of the characters take on profound symbolic

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significance. The protagonist, Meera, embodies the essence of a new India, while the antagonist, Seth Samsundar, stands as a symbol of social and political exploitation.

The novel unfolds its narrative approximately a hundred days prior to India's momentous declaration of independence. Within the confines of Sonamitti, the village encapsulates a rich tapestry of experiences, encompassing both moments of jubilation and despair, as well as instances of prosperity and adversity. This community represents a microcosm of diverse societal strata, encompassing the affluent, the impoverished, the middle class, patriarchal society and others.

The crux of the novel's narrative centres on a pivotal plot element: a touchstone bestowed upon Meera by her wise grandfather, Atma Ram. This mystical amulet is believed to possess the power to transmute copper into gold, contingent upon Meera's ability to act in a genuine and unpretentious manner. —Wearing it on your person, you will do an act of kindness. Real kindness. Then all copper on your body will turn into gold... Parted from your arm, the touchstone will be dead, a worthless pebble. (Bhattacharya 85) However, the character Seth Samsundar, a money-lender, attempts to entice Meera under the guise of assisting her in a mission to promote benevolence within society by converting all copper into gold.

The central theme of the novel revolves around the concepts of women freedom and faith, wherein freedom pertains to both societal and political dimensions. It underscores the notion that genuine freedom is achieved through unwavering faith and diligent efforts, rather than the mere accumulation of material possessions. Furthermore, the novel emphasizes that the key to safeguarding this freedom lies in maintaining a steadfast belief in the potential and future of one's country. Syamala comments this novel as

May be termed as a women's novel. In essence it is a feminist novel

as the liberation of the country from the clutches of the Sethji is

accomplished by women only. Past history of India presents innumerable

examples of the fortitude exhibited by women in solving the problems facing

the country. The daring decision of the women in history proves

that women are endowed with greater mettle in resolving the issues. (Rao 80)

The formidable figures, such as Seth, who symbolize the British colonial presence in India, perpetually crave the acquisition of wealth and exhibit a penchant for exploiting their surroundings. Their insatiable appetite for accumulation knows no bounds, with Seth consistently asserting that business remains a realm divorced from trivial emotions, adhering strictly to the pursuit of profit.

The novel triggers off with an incident involving the rescue of a child and the sale of hoarded saris. It introduces the concept of the "Cow House Five," comprising six women: Meera, Lakshmi, Sohagi, Champa, Munni, and Bimla. Their daily gatherings occur within the confines of an unused cowshed located in Lakshmi's residence. These women, despite varying in age and social backgrounds, are bound together by a shared devotion to nationalism. Their unity is fortified by their collective experience of having been incarcerated for their participation in the nationalist movement.

In the novel's opening chapter, Bhattacharya delves into the historical context of the Quit India Movement of 1942, a significant event marked by the enthusiastic participation of thousands of people, including men, women, and children. He provides a reference within the narrative to the impassioned struggle for political freedom. During this period, under the distant yet direct guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, the people's dormant spirit was roused from slumber. As they awakened, they found themselves standing on equal footing with their male counterparts, marching proudly with heads held high. In a unified chorus, they advanced as a distinct column, traversing the meadows from Pipli to Kanhan, emphatically proclaiming, "Quit India!" to the British colonial rulers.

Within his novel, Bhabani Bhattacharya skilfully crafts two characters who stand in stark contrast to each other. The first is Meera, the protagonist, characterized by her selflessness, patriotism, youthfulness, and unwavering dedication to the betterment of the villagers and the cause of India's freedom. In direct opposition stands Seth Samsundar, the moneylender, a character driven by selfish motives, avaricious profit-seeking, and a shrewd and deceitful disposition.

The author prominently positions women at the forefront of his novel, underscoring their pivotal role as catalysts for India's quest for freedom. Bhattacharya portrays women as courageous and formidable figures who tenaciously confront myriad challenges in their pursuit of independence. Guided by the collective leadership of The Cow House Five, every woman from the village engages in a determined struggle for India's political liberation, confronting both the British colonial rule and the local profiteers with unwavering resolve.

Meera, the central protagonist who resides with her grandmother, holds a profound belief that if freedom is not granted, it must be earned through individual endeavours. She emerges as a symbol of liberty, serving as the inspirational driving force

behind the unity and determination of the village women in their battle against Seth Samsundar. In stark contrast to Seth, Meera is portrayed as a character devoid of self-interest, driven solely by her aspiration to improve the quality of life in her village. She places her faith in actions rather than mere words and possesses unwavering confidence in the collective will of the people. This is evident in her leadership during the organization of a protest march to Seth's shop, where they demanded fair pricing for saris.

In conclusion, Bhattacharya spiritualizes and intellectualizes women in this book to highlight their importance and role. He feels that women should get liberated "Where is true union between man and woman unless they accept each other as equals?" (Bhattacharya 225). He intellectually portrayed the power of women through the incidents like women took the decision to wage war on those who are a scourge on society.

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