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Seven Steps in the Sky - A Woolfian Analysis

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Kundanika Kapadia is an outstanding revolutionary female novelist of Gujarati Literature. Her novel Seven Steps in the Sky is the English translation of Gujarati Novel named Saat Pagla Akashma. It was given Sahitya Akademi Award in 1985. It belongs to the category of novel as a record of the observation about woman in different walks of life. It poses the problems of woman's equality, individuality and liberty. Woman's love, share, honesty, sympathy and co-operation all these expected by male husband in a family but in return she does not get true love and contentment of self-fulfillment.

A Feminist Approach in 'Seven Steps in the Sky' :

'Seven Steps in the Sky' is Kapadia's masterpiece. She has adopted feminist approach in this novel. Here, She presents a traditional Indian housewife who is poor. "Seven Steps in the Sky" is Kapadia's master-piece. Here she has adopted a feminist approach. Today we find progress in different fields of life, but here is no significant change. In the status of women, she deserves a life of contentment and self-fulfillment. On the contrary, she lives a passive and suppressed life. Kapadia firmly believes that 'only a wailing baby gets milk'. A woman herself should start a fight against the evils of suppression and injustice.

According to Kapadia, an Indian woman is capable of become a successful ruler, organizer and fighter, too. But she is ignorant of her potentials. In this novel, Vasudha has also an inner urge to fly high in the sky like a free bird But she is bound the her household duties. She is a household slave. The novelist's message is that all the women should continue their collective efforts till they reach their goal of liberty and equality. Here Sumitra represent such women. She is a beacon light to the distressed and tormented women of her society.

With the coming of 19th century, a revaluation of all sorts took place concerning feminism since long rather to say ages. It is assumed that male is the first the referential point of human life to whom woman is the second or the other. Such indifference denotes man's hierarchical superiority over woman. Some woman writer like Margaret Atwood, Anita Desai, Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, Kundanika Kapadia, Arundhati Roy play a vital role in the present Indo-Anglican fiction.

“Seven Steps in the Sky” is Kapadia’s master-piece. It won her the Sahitya Academy Award. She has adopted a feminist approach in this novel. Here she presents a traditional Indian housewife who is a poor victim of the male-dominated society. The novel is a record of her observations about women in different walks of life. Today we find progress in different fields of life; but there is no significant change in the status of woman. She still belongs to the oppressed class. She is tortured both physically and mentally. The novelist asks,

‘Is woman equal to man?

Does she have separate identity?

Is she in need of emancipation?

Woman plays a magnificent role as a daughter, wife and mother etc. but she has not got the recognition which she deserves.

Both “Seven Steps in the Sky” and “Nectar in a sieve” deal with the marriages of their heroines. Can a family life become complete without a woman? No, she is the essence of a family life. Then what should be the attitude towards her? She deserves a life of contentment and self-fulfillment. But does she get? On the contrary, she lives a passive and supported life. A woman always wishes to have sweet relationship with her husband. She seeks security, co-operation, sympathy, honesty, equality and genuine love for her husband but generally, a woman remains a passive partner throughout her life. She rarely enjoys mutual trust and respect.

‘Seven Steps in the Sky’ is a novel which talks about the story of its protagonist Vasudha and her married life of thirty-two years. It revolves round the story of Vasudha, her friends, and relatives. Finally, she dares to challenge her husband Vyomesh’s authority and leave home to fulfil her aspiration. Theme of responsibility, woman’s suppression, social and physical imprisonment are successfully presented through the character of Vasudha.

Moreover, the novelist has discussed the social status as well as the exploitation of woman in male-dominated society. At the end of the novel, Vasudha is reborn, rebuilt and rethought woman made by the novelist in Anandgram.

‘Seven Steps in the Sky’ is an inspirational book about woman’s equality and empowerment. We have seen the rebel of the novelist in her voice against age-old misconception about woman. In our society, woman liberation comes when people change their mindset and consider women with equality. Women also change their mindset about themselves. It is a tale of superficial feminism.

The Title : Its Appropriateness :

‘Seven Steps’ is the symbol of marriage ceremony in Hindu society. Sky is the symbol of freedom and space. The story tells of Vasudha, who after thirty-two years of marriage and servility, dares to challenge her husband’s authoritative behaviour and finds her way to growth and fulfilment.

A Voice for Woman’s equal rights :

“Seven Steps in the Sky” represents a voice in argument for equal rights and sharing the true joy of life. It is a Gujarati novel published in 1984. The novelist from a feminist view frames the problems of all women in the society giving full weight and consideration to what she does. What a woman can do, as she wishes is not offered by society. This denial of giving rights and liberty to women is because of this pain struggle in them. It has been the long-vexed problem depicted here in this work. The novel is a record of the observation about women in different walks of life. It poses the problem of women’s equality, individuality and liberty. A woman wishes equality and loves from male-dominated society. The heroine Vasudha’s wishes are wishes of every common woman who exists in married life. The novelist through this work leads her readers to think over woman’s passive and suppressed living in a family. Woman’s love, share, honesty, sympathy, and co-operations all these are

expected by male husband in a family but in return she doesn't get true love and contentment of self-fulfillment all that she deserves indeed.

Freedom and equal rights to women :

Kapadia's works point out certain basic issue problems related to status of women in traditions board Gujarati family. Through out the work, the novelist focused her attention on man, her role that is burden some and family that dines to provide any such staysail. The novelist's main aim is to draw a true picture of a male dominated middle class society of contemporary woman and her situation in Indian family. Like other modern woman novelist. Kapadia has always to say something new fresh pointing and exciting to tell. She is enough bold to express bitter realities faced but Indian women.

It represents her earth of the suppressed second sex with the entire family approach. She presents the grim and sorrowful picture of woman called a beast of burden. A woman is made a poor victim of male dominion in society or home. So the status of woman is the basic theme of this work in the introduction of the novel, the author herself says, "All are unequal in the onward between are more unequal.

Kapadia entitles her discussion among women when characters this novel like Anna Alpa, Vasudha and Vinod. After a long struggle and realization of the self in Indian family perceptive Vasudha has to tell the close of the novel to Adiyata

'I was not in search of happiness... I was in search of my right to become truthful.

The theme of Responsibility :

Vasudha is the female protagonist in this novel. When she enters her husband's house, she becomes free from her girlish selfishness and egoism. Her family becomes the central point of her life. Now it is her duty to please others. She feels herself an alien. She finds herself in the midst of strangers. She has left everything behind, her home, her parents, her friend, her free laughter and her games. She does not get and support from Faiba also because she is also nothing more than a work-horse. Here Vasudha is dominated by Faiba and her husband Vyomesh. She wants someone who can understand her feelings. Faiba lives for Vyomesh only. She finds satisfaction in renunciation only. Here Vasudha says, "Why do women get married ? Why should I marry? She compares herself to be bird in a golden cage. She can not fly high in the sky. She is caged in responsibilities. Her duty is to care for her husband, bring up the children and do the household duties. She had to live for them and give up anything and everything for their sake. She has deep love for Vyomesh, but he goes not reciprocate same feelings towards her. When she is about to become a mother, she thinks, "This physical responsibility for bearing the child" But after the birth of a son's she find some meaning in her life. Now she wants to be a real woman. At last, she reconciles to the role of a wife and a mother, She feels she is destined for this only.

Theme of woman's suppression :

Next to it theme of woman's suppression at the hands of male world has been elaborated discussed by Kapadia. Ranjana does not belong to a rich family. She has the lowest status in the family, but she never complains. Her husband Deepak never co-operates her in any matter. He does not accompany her on Raksh Badhanan Day to her brother's house. Like Ranjana Leena is also very unhappy at her husband's house. She has to do all the household duties alone. No one is ready to help her.

Once Vasudha goes to Lolita's house. She finds her in depression Lolita always tries to appear happy and satisfied. She makes a mistake by telling her husband. Sudhir that before marriage, she had inters in a young boy of her college. Sudhir is highly suspicious and thinks

that she has still relations with that boy. Such a woman has to suffer through her life.

Vadanti has the same such problems. Her husband Satish is a music critic. She wants to make progress in the same field. But Satish thinks that a woman's greatest ambition should be not have loving husband, children, a beautiful house and a new care. Vadanti does not want to live such a submissive life.

Theme of Social and Physical Imprisonment :

One another the time of social and physical imprisonment is woven in this novel. Therefore a critic Ill Pathak considers this novel as a story of "Woman's Journey from Prison to Kailas". Means a woman freedom can come only when she dies, there is no chance to escape or save herself from this cage from birth to death. Women like Vasudha and Lalita has to suffer the pangs of life laden to them. Indeed in order to prove her point and basic issue of woman's life, Kundanika Kapadia has made an extensive use of the character and episodes to explain or exposé the woman's family is a self prison. Vasudha is dominated by Fiaba and her husband Vyomesh. She is alienated. No one is ready to understand her feeling. She compares herself to a bird of the olden cage. She is caged in responsibilities which are unavailability she rethink it "Why do women get married" Why should I marry?"

A male does not impart the same feeling toward her what she gives. During the days of her pregnancy she thinks. "This is a seed from a man I am providing it facility to row and yet he has no physical responsibility for be the child."

'Seven Steps in the Sky'-A landmark in the history of women's literature in Gujarati:

Sat Pagla Akashma - 'Seven Steps in the Sky' - eminently a committed novel is Kundanika Kapadia's tour de force. It is a landmark in the recent history of women's literature in Gujarati. Hardly any other book by a woman writer has evoked the range and variety of responses, sparked off critical controversy, aroused popular interest the way Sat Paglan has. During its serialization in a Gujarati daily of Bombay she was hugely acclaimed and wildly admonished: "You deserve Nobel Prize", "You should be jailed", "The character of Vasudha: I guess I've met her, I know her....It's me", etc. It soon became the rage of readers. Where the book-trade is in doldrums, its two editions during the first year of its publication speak volumes for its enormous popularity. For its seriousness of purpose, intellectual energy and large canvas, the novel is commendable. It is a loudthroated protest against injustice and indignities inflicted on women by men. Many a woman reader at least is apt to Identify herself with one woman character or another in the novel if not with the heroine altogether and hear in her voice an authentic and sincere cry that remained strangled and unheard for long. At one level, it is a quest for self - realization through total love and total freedom. Here is a work of art that so much obliterates the line of demarcation between art and life that the novelist could have as well said: "This is no book. He who touches the book touches woman". Woman is so vitally and outstandingly at the center of the novel that but for her symbolical concern the novel might have as well said: "This is no book. He who touches the book touches woman". Woman is so vitally and outstandingly at the center of the novel that but for her symbolical concern the novel might have as well entitled it 'woman' as it was intended originally.

Woman is the protagonist of the novel, caught in to meshes of a social structure where inevitably man is an antagonist. Sprawling over more than five hundred pages, Sat Paglan unfolds more than seven stories of women as victims, prey to the manmade conventions and practices that exploit and oppress them. The four walls of their homes are prison-walls as it were denying them love and freedom, which are at the thematic and symbolical center of the novel that is subtitled in its long Shavian preface as Woman's Pilgrimage: From Captivity Kailas, the preface that promises to answer several question raised in the novel - an attempt to assist art in its didactic function. Here the creative process loses quite a bit of its autonomy and

is conditioned and controlled to serve a missionary cause. I've taken interest in the Women's Lib Movement right from the start. After gathering all the material I intended to write a treatise called Woman. Meanwhile, reading Woman's Room, etc I thought if I too had to communicate all this why not write a novel? Indeed a formidable genesis for a work so ambitiously planned. When a treatise is chosen to be turned into a novel, inculcates a great conflict between the artist and the propagandist. The mould here is rather feebly built, and the burden of ideas and incidents nearly cracks it leaving the content of the work aesthetically untransmuted, even raw. The novelist is blissfully conscious of this. "Most of the situations in the novel, "she points out, "are based on facts, and that way this is a documentary novel". Facts often submerge fiction, and we have dissonance between art and life, imagination and actuality, illusion and reality threatening to fracture the novel.

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