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### Mapping Men's Dilemma in *Ghachar Ghochar*

\*<sup>1</sup>Dr. Satish Kumar\*<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English, Hindu College, Sonapat Affiliated to M D University, Rohtak, Haryana, India.

#### Abstract

In societies where patriarchal ideology governs the partition of work is made on the foundation of gender or sex of a person. It means that the allotment of diverse responsibilities, roles and jobs to men and women is based on social assumption of what men and women should perform and are capable of performing. Subsequently, different jobs and responsibilities are given to men and women, according to their gender not according to their capacities and interests. In this way, the choices and likes of individuals are completely disregarded because the gender stereotypes play too powerful a role to be controlled by individuals. One has no capacity to defy or challenge such roles. No doubt, modernization has brought great choices and opportunities on individual level, but liberalization and democratization of societal institutions has not been achieved. Modern men and women thus confront difficult situation-on the one hand, facing rapid modernization on the economic and political spheres and, on the other hand, rigidity, traditionalism and lack of alternatives on the social sphere. They often find it thorny to put together the two worlds and, therefore, experience angst and anxiety. In such conditions, men consider that posing the traditional man guarantees them of a small amount of peace, besides securing for them greater social endorsement and esteem. That is why, they are likely to be more inclined to be traditional rather than resist the traditional patriarchal system. Steadily, this system gages men's voice, as much as they do women's, and puts symbolically shackles on their psyche which permits them to perform only those roles which are approved by the socio-cultural forces.

**Keywords:** Patriarchal society, masculine roles, provider, producer, dilemma, social expectations

#### Introduction

The most important roles men are expected to perform in tradition bound societies are those of providers and protectors of their families. They are required to meticulously fulfill their duties, not only to be aware of them. Generally, the term 'provider' means the responsibility of a man to earn enough to fulfill the crucial needs of his family; to provide material things and, to give psychological and emotional contentment to his wife, children and other members of the family. It also includes his duties to generate resources and opportunities of a better and hale and hearty life for his family, to offer opportunities of good schooling and work to his children and to fulfill his duties as the patriarch. It implies that men should assume a great liability to always provide for the family, not only economically but also mentally and physically. Stressing on the importance of the role of the householder, Swami Vivekanand writes, "The householder is the basis, the prop, of whole society. The poor, the weak, and the women and children, who do not work-all live upon the householder...."<sup>[1]</sup> Another duty closely associated to the role of provider is that of protecting all the members of his family. The term, 'protector' denotes a man with responsibilities to keep his family members protected from corporal and social harms, to defend the honour of his family, and to make sure their safety. His family members are tied to him and he is supposed to

uphold and strengthen them through the care and safety he is believed to give them. Purnendu Chatterjee aptly summarises men's role when he says: 'provider' role in domestic sphere, is associated with men as 'breadwinner', earning money or feeding family or providing them a social status through hard work.... In the domestic sphere, the protector is seen as a fearless, courageous man who protects the honour of the household by protecting women and children of the family<sup>[1]</sup>. However, to carry out these roles effectively, it is very importance for a man to know that his earnings keep his wife and children out of the jaws of poverty. Surely, he needs the contentment of a job well-done, or a business done with distinction. Even if the work is not pleasing or rewarding, there is a firm sense of satisfaction he derives from knowing that the necessities of his family are met out of his earnings. It depicts how much cognizant a man remains of his responsibility of fulfilling his family's monetary needs and material comfort as well. Though, this does not mean that the women cannot work and add financially, but the man must be the originator, supervisor and general manager. The overall management of the family matters should be his accountability, and if the wife wants to works outside the home, it is best if it is by his permission. Besides being economically sound, a man is also need to be physically sturdy and socially significant so that he can shield the

members of his family from various harms. This is so, because a traditional man thinks that women and children are frail and poignant, and in need of male protection.

Considering the importance of the masculine roles as practiced in society, the conventional men accept them as essential aspects of their personality. They carefully try to execute these functions in their lives presenting example to be followed by their next generation. The patriarchal moral codes are planted in the mind of their young children who lack intellectual resources to resist such psychological conditioning. Increasingly, these thoughts get fossilized and are used practically when the boys become adults. They grow up with a feeling that they are the central pillar in the family and, therefore, acknowledge it as natural that they should hold accountability and authority in family matters. They also become conscious of the fact that they are esteemed members in the kin group. They learn to give importance to family support highly and gradually realize how essential it is to meet the image of a so-called full man. Though some parents do not desire their male children to take part in stereotypical roles of provider and protector, these roles will be voluntarily available to the child through television, friends, school, and family members. So, most of the children are exposed to gender stereotypes, a condition which is never easy to be wholly controlled or blocked. This further hints that the adolescence as a discrete developmental phase is artificial phenomenon, particularly in conventional societies. Here, after one has come up from childhood, one passes through adolescence learning the dexterity of adult duties. He becomes familiar with the world of his society in preparation for his adult responsibility as a provider and protector. In lower-middle and middle classes, particularly in India, the continuous accent is on to learn and become proficient to share the burden of family preservation as soon as possible.

These roles of provider and protector convey to man a sense of duty, satisfaction and ego. But these roles cannot be performed without being, hard, authoritative, dominative, advanced and victorious. In fact, man's role in traditional society is designed around performance and attainment. He is often defined, and he also defines himself in terms of his position, job and achievements. He feels proud in being the bread-winner, protector and head of the family because his social milieu has taught him the importance of discharging these functions. Kamla Bhasin also points out that "Men are expected to be providers and protectors not just of their women and children but of the honour and wellbeing of their families, communities and nations. As providers and protectors, they consider it their duty to discipline members of their families and communities [3]."

In the beginning men enjoy their high status, authority and superiority given to them by their too much crucial roles of being protector and provider of their families. But this position and dominance do not come without the weight of responsibilities, pressures and troubles. They are bound to execute their functions, otherwise they feel dishonored in society and fall in their own respect also. Moreover, their position and pride are not everlasting; they have to struggle to preserve it by successfully performing their roles which, at times, seem to be challenging for many men. Contrary to the accepted perception, in today's world, men are as much the victims of the patriarchal ideology as women are. No doubt they have gained benefit from it in certain ways. There are many examples which show men getting trapped in the images and roles that society has fixed for them. Masculinity which glorifies man's attainment of higher cultural goals,

such as triumph at work, forces him to follow a risky life style. It diminishes his worry for health and personal happiness and, in the process, offers him tensions and mental pressures.

Nevertheless, socio-cultural forces always compel men to do their best to uphold the norms of manhood at high cost, otherwise, the humiliation and disapproval of society fall on them. To escape social shame and degradation they are bound to sacrifice their deep feelings and emotions for the sake of duty. Consequently this generates great anxiety and conflicts in their life. They find themselves in the web of prescriptions and proscriptions laid down by the patriarchal society. They can be often seen struggling with patriarchal codes to prove their masculine prowess. This further makes men's life uncomfortable and suffocating proving them victims of patriarchal structure. This robs men of many positive qualities which he could profess by being not only men but a complete and normal human being. Moreover, this also deteriorates their relations with members of their family.

The fact that a man gets respect and position in his family and society only on the basis of his earning capabilities is clearly testified in Vivek Shanbhag's novella *Ghachar Ghochar*. Being a part of the tradition-bound society, Vivek Shanbhag seems to have detailed knowledge of its workings. His novella reflects how the socio-cultural environment which influences the formation of gender identities assigns different duties and responsibilities to both men and women. Here one finds a realistic view of the efforts, successes and failures of a man in performing his expected roles in society. A deep study of his fictional world reveals how a man has to live in a tradition bound society.

Originally written in Cannada the book is translated in English by Srinath Perur. It is written in first person narrative and falls in the category of psychological fiction. The story revolves around a middle class family that becomes rich within a short span of time. Money plays a significant role throughout the story. The financial tension in the family is at the centre. Both the excess and the deficiency of money are the source of problems within the family. The arrival of financial prosperity to the family changes the attitude of its members within no time. The money also set up a hierarchy in the family. The narrator's father was at the top of the hierarchy in the family as long as he could earn for the family. The day he loses his job and consequently the title of the main bread earner of the family, he also loses his power and position in the family.

In the family of the six, narrator's father, Appa, is presented as a man of principles. He is a quiet and contented man who lives in his own world. He never stayed at home during day time, always going out in the morning and coming back in the evening. He used to be a salesman for a company dealing with tea leaves. His salary hardly met the needs of the family living in a city like Bangalore. They managed to get by in a small rented house and lived in bare necessities. But his being the bread earner of the family gave him a feeling of pride and satisfaction. Like a responsible head of the family he arranged for the education of his two children and his younger brother Chikkappa. For this everyone in the house cared for him and his work was whole family's work. His faith in hard work and honesty is reflected in his wise words: "Wealth shouldn't strike suddenly like a visitation, but instead grow gradually like a tree"(34).

Narrator's father was somehow managing the financial needs of the family until changes were made in his company's operation. The distribution system was being overhauled and

as a consequence all the salesmen were being pressed to accept voluntary retirement scheme. That was the time when people could not change their jobs easily. Loss of Appa's job was perceived as a disaster and the family was thrown off balance. On that day he returned unusually early and called out to Amma, narrator's mother. Though losing his job was a matter of great shock for him yet he did his best to look normal so that other family members might not take it too much seriously. However, Amma was panicked at the news. The narrator and his sister, being children, could not understand the full implication of the bad news. Like a caring and responsible husband, he noticed the anxiety of Amma and tried to sooth her: "This just means I've retired a little early. I can work elsewhere after two months. There will also be the P F money...."

The whole family was worried about their future without a proper income. Suddenly, Chikkappa, narrator's uncle, brought up the matter of starting a new business. He consoled his elder brother by suggesting that "whatever is happening is for the best." This was the first time anyone in the family had thought of starting a new business. That was a crucial moment for the family. The establishment of Sona Masala brought a sharp turn in the family. Chikkappa had his plans ready but the only problem was that of initial money to start a business of spices. Like a man who can go to any extent to provide for his family, Appa took his decision in half minute and told his brother, "My VRS and PF together will come to a lakh. It's yours to invest. And then the banks too will give you a loan. Start the business as soon as you can." That was all the encouragement he needed. He just needed a spark to light the fire, and here he got a burning candle. Chikkappa made his brother fifty percent partner in the business.

The firm called Sona Masala was established and later on was managed by Chikkappa. This made him a central figure and sole earning member of the family. He was the source of the sustenance of the family and as a result was regarded above everyone else at home. His meals, his preferences, his convenience were of supreme importance to all. The future of the family depended on his labour. The narrator reveals:

He receives all domestic privileges accorded to the earning male of the family. The first sound in the morning indicating he's awake, and tea is made. When it is sensed that he's finished bathing, the dosa pan goes on the stove. He can fling his clothes in the bathroom or in a corner of his bedroom or anywhere at all in the house, and they'll materialize wash and ironed in his room. Sometimes, on the pretext of work, he spends the night in his room at the warehouse. We're careful not to ask him anything about it.

Earlier the family used to live in a small house situated in a lower-middle-class area of Bangalore. The house had four small rooms, one behind the other like a train compartments. The house was suddenly attacked by ants. They were everywhere in the house so nothing can be done without knowing where they come from. The narrator's mother called the ants evil spirits in disguise.

The success of their spice trade makes it possible for them to move into a new house. Chikkappa arranged to buy a big house with separate room for each person. Soon new furniture was also added to the house. The new found financial freedom changed the relationship between family members. In their old house they were interdependent for buying anything. But now there was enough to buy things without asking for permission or informing anyone or even thinking about it. Appa's hold on the rest of the family slipped as he was no longer the chief provider for the family. In fact, all the

family members lost hold on themselves too. They were under the control of money. The narrator reveals:

It's true what they say-it's not we who control money, it's the money that controls us. When there is only a little, it behaves meekly; when it grows, it becomes brash and has its way with us. Money had swept us up and flung us in the midst of a whirlwind. We spent helplessly on Malti's wedding. No one asked to; we simply didn't know how to stop.

The narrator in the novel is a thoughtful person who prefers analyzing the actions of others rather than doing something at his own. He is just a looker on at the family drama. He cannot estimate himself without a reference to his mother, wife or sister. The family never looked to him as a person who would one day have to provide for all. Instead there developed an unspoken understanding that he will end up helping Chikkappa with his business. However, to save him from the tag of an ideal Chikkappa has assigned him a job in the office of Sona Masala. A regular sum is also deposited in his account as salary. But soon he realizes that there is no work for him in the office. The family wanted to preserve his self respect by making him feel that he is earning something. In fact, nobody wants to work when they get paid without doing anything. The same happens with the narrator. He finished his bath daily, gets ready, leaves home for Coffee House at the appointed time. From there he goes to the warehouse, sits in his office and reads three newspapers from beginning to the end. His day ends with a nap on his office sofa and then tea.

Marriage brought a major change in the life of the narrator. When the proposal came for him it was told that he was the director of Sona Masala. It was also true to some extent. But he never interfered in the family business. Soon after marriage his wife Anita started inquiring about his job but he never answered directly. He told her that his working hours were quite flexible and even he can leave his job and stay at home permanently. Anita took no time to realize that her husband was a sloth. She soon sensed that his rightfully earned personal income was precisely zero. The money they spent on honeymoon was not his earning. In any regular household family members glare when a wife begins to freely spend her husband's hard earned money but in their house nobody objected to it.

His mother had high expectations from her son's first salary. She would have a sari from it. He also worked hard to be something in life. The success of Sona Masala ended his mother's dreams and his hope as well. No one, including the narrator himself, realized when he began to earn. But for his wife Anita the income from his family business was not his income. She took no time in sensing that Chikkappa's status at home was far above than her husband. One day she began to ask some difficult questions to the narrator:

'Tell me the Truth', she said. 'What exactly is your work? Whose income does your house run on? Why don't you ever speak about your job? Where is it that you go everyday?'

He told her the whole story of the earnings of the house and tried to console her by convincing her that there is no dearth of money. It did not matter who is earning but all must run smoothly. Her reaction was not what he expected. She cried in Anger:

'Why did you cheat me? she asked, furious. Why did you marry when you are living off others? I don't need all this. I can survive on very little. But I want you to have a respectable job, whatever it is. At least can you not go to the warehouse regularly and accept only the pay you deserve for your work? How can you not feel ashamed of living off alms?'



He tried to calm her down by arguing that his father has half of the share of Sona Masala and that is ultimately his. She feels disgusted at it. She simply could not accept the fact that her husband has no personal income. She held that her husband and his family were two separate entities, but for the narrator what came to his family was his. She even proposed him to work so that they could stand on their own feet. She hated looking towards others to meet their personal needs.

On the other hand, his uncle Chikkappa felt that after marriage they need more money so a large amount was deposited in his account every month. The sum was larger than they needed for their expenses. But Anita had nothing to do with the money that was not earned by her husband. The narrator accepts the fact that in our society a man is expected to fulfill his wife's financial needs but he is surprised to know that in his case the money must be earned through his own toil. Anita's idea of self-reliance was totally different. She expected her husband to be the most assiduous of employees. Anita's upbringing was totally different that from her husband's. She was never shy of speaking her mind, especially when she disagreed with something that was happening around her. She had broken the unwritten law of the house by interfering in the matter of Suhashini and Chikkappa. On the other hand the narrator had no firmness of purpose and little sense of right and wrong. Unlike a real traditional man, he always followed the others, never objected to the wrong. When there was a verbal fight among the three women of the house he showed no courage to control the situation. His mother and sister glare towards him so that he can handle his wife. But he remained a silent observer. His sister Malti remarked over his cowardice: "Finish your lunch and leave with your tail between your legs."

The whole discussion on the life, character and disposition of the narrator hints that in our society a man earns his power and position by being a provider and protector of his family. As long as he earns he is respected and considered of worth something but the moment his income falls his position and power in the family also weakens. Things start slipping from his hands. In this sense the case of the narrator is very pathetic as he neither earns to satisfy his wife's ego nor is he tough and authoritative with his wife. The story ends but not his dilemma.

### Conclusion

Thus, a man has to yield under the pressure of performing his socially defined and expected roles. This quality of man is treated as an essential ingredient of masculinity. But it ultimately burdens man not only with the task of guaranteeing financial security of the women of his own family, but also to work as the protectors of the whole family or families under his care and responsibility. The narrator tries to discharge the responsibilities as a husband towards his wife which leads to a turmoil in his life. Shanbhag presents this aspect of the role of a man in the context of the larger patriarchal, social and cultural ethos of the Indian society in particular. He depicts this socio-cultural attitude by revealing how this perception of man and his roles as a provider and protector occupy almost a paramount importance in the definitions of masculinity. That is why, escape from these roles is viewed as the abnormal and shocking. The expectation that man must provide for his wife and children has got enshrined in law governing family relationships. Law imposes on men the duty of maintaining his wife and also supporting his children. Shanbhag, as a keen observer of society and human behavior, has rendered in his fiction very insightfully and artistically all these different

aspects of the life of man conditioned by the image and definitions of masculinity prevalent in his cultural and social milieu. He shows, on the one hand, the power and privileges it bestows on man, but he depicts with equal understanding and knowledge the struggles, stresses and strains it condemns them to. His novel offers a powerful portrayal of the tensions and travails it poses, particularly when men fail to find it difficult to live up to the expectations of providing and protecting their families successfully in every situation. His fiction gains in verisimilitude and authenticity by the way he has delineated not only the causes and consequences of these traditionally defined roles of men, but also by the manner in which he depicts the psyche, attitudes and behaviour of women in this respect

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