

Two Women in the Stories Kankal (Skeleton) & Girgiti (Chameleon) in the Light of Self Love

Abstract

The heroines of both the short stories namely 'Kankal' and 'Girgiti', written respectively by Rabindranath Tagore and Jatirindra Nandi are engrossed with their own beauty. It goes to such an extent that it amounts to Narcissism in Greek mythology, which is nothing but a psychological state of extreme self love. Both the ladies can be said as psychologically disordered. Still there are differences between the two. The heroine of 'Kankal' pines away and ultimately dies. Even in her death bed she wanted to be looked charming by the doctor. She used to see herself through the eyes of the doctor even to the last hours of her life. This may be called a case of split personality.

On the other hand, Maya, the heroine of 'Girgiti' enjoys her beauty when appreciated through the eyes of old Bhuban Sarkar. Her husband's praise for her beauty becomes monotonous to her. She feels a sort of spark in her spine being admired by Bhuban Sarkar. But when she realizes that Bhuban Sarkar is just like a dead tree, the spark in her spine stops. Infact, Maya searches her own self through herself love. The heroine of Kankal also was searching for the same thing but failed. Still the Keynote of both the stories are nothing but extreme self love.

Keywords: Narcissism, Psychology, Beauty, Imagine, Women, Beautiful

Introduction

We come across the story of self-love in the Greek Mythology. Narcissus, the son of Sisyphus, the river Goddess and Leiriopoe of the Greek Mythology, was famous for his beauty. Being enchanted by his own beauty, narcissus rejected his beloved and consequently courted death¹ The picture of the self love of Narcissus can be seen in the stories 'Kankal' and 'Girgiti' by Rabindranath and Jatirindra Nandi respectively. Kankal was published in 'Sadhana', Falgun 1298/1891 and Girgiti came out in the Saradiya 'Desh', 1365/1959. The gap of publication of these two stories is nearly sixty five years. Kankal is the significant one amongst the supernatural stories of Rabindranath. This story is covered by an outer frame and the narrator is an 'I'. On the other hand, the narrator of the inner story is also another I and in spite of being incorporeal, it is actually a story of a living, lively human being. It should be mentioned here that the narrator I of the first story is converted afterwards to the listener 'I' and the narrator of the second story becomes absolutely imported. In the story 'Kankal' the skeleton is actually a beautiful lady. She has narrated the colourful days of her life. Just two months after her marriage, the widowhood had shadowed her life. The father-in-law insulted her by calling her a poison-girl. Therefore she comes back to her father's house and started living there. She had nobody in her father's house except an elder brother. This leisure of loneliness has gradually drawn her towards her self-love. She is beautiful but because there is nobody to enjoy her beauty. She had psychologically deviated from her normal life. Day by day, the self love had gradually increased. She says- 'I knew it very well that a beauty like me is difficult to get any and everywhere.' While narrating her own beauty she says, 'The wide and large eyes that were set within the two sockets and the delicate smile that were there on the pink lips do not have any comparison with the present hideous laugh on the uncovered row of teeth.' This lady could never imagine that from her body astrology could be learnt. She informed that a contemporary doctor introduced her as 'kanakchampa' (golden champak flower) to his friend. She told to herself '...I was like a beautiful flower.' She was so much engrossed in her own beauty that she could not imagine there could exist a skeleton inside the Kanakchampa. The beautiful lady used to think herself a piece of diamond. Just as a piece

Madhushree Mukherjee

Assistant Professor,
Deptt.of Bengali,
Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose
College, Kolkata,
West Bengal

of diamond radiates light all around when shaken, so also in every movement of her body the beautiful postures became scattered in a natural rhythm. It was seen that the beautiful lady was observing the beauty of her hands again and again, because without a mirror the complete image of one's own self cannot be perceived. Therefore, to observe the beauty of the hands and the feet becomes her only support. She does not see her by herself only but tries to prove her beauty to another person in the name 'I' – 'I wish to present in front of your eyes that lively, youthful and blushing beauty of my sixteen years; it may make you sleepless for a number of days and repudiate far away your astrology, making it restless.'

Aim of the Study

The two stories Kankal and Girgiti are women centric. These two focus on the narcissism of the two heroines of the two stories.

The heroine of the story 'Kankal' was without any companion. Her elder brother also promised not to marry. Therefore in the inner part of the house she was absolutely alone. She did not herself understand as to when she was entangled in love with herself during her lonely period of life. While sitting alone under the tree in the garden, she used to think "the entire world has fallen in love with me, all the stars are eagerly looking at me, the air is blowing by her again and again in the pretext of long breath, and the grasses on which I am sitting stretching the legs, would have become senseless if they were animate. All the young men of the world have assembled near my feet in the form of those grasses." She could not be satisfied by receiving love only from the nature, she wants to get love from a person who is made of flesh and blood. That is why she had selected Dr. Sashisekhar, the friend of her elder brother. But as much we have got Sashisekhar in the story is in the vision of a victorious lady.² With the arrival of Dr. Sashisekhar, the undivided self love is observed,³ because –she said that when in the evening when she used to sit under a flowered tree 'all the men of the universe in the form of Sashisekhar used to come under my feet.' That is, the lady created a world of love within her own mind. That is why she thinks that Dr. Sashisekhar 'hesitated' to see her pulse when she was in fever. As she thought that the doctor was attracted towards her, she tried to become more charming to the doctor. At the time of the doctor's arrival she turned her face towards the window so that the red tinge of the evening drives away the paleness of her face. She thinks that if she could wear the blue glass bangles around her round wrist, the beauty of her hands would have been aggravated all the more, Not only for the self love but in order to prove her charm through her lover's eyes 'in the evening secretly I used to wear a yellow saree, tied my hair in a bun around which I used to put a string of bell flowers and used to sit in the garden with a mirror in my hand.' She was never satisfied with her own beauty. She used to divide herself within two in her own mind. She used to keep one part for herself and another for the doctor. Through the eyes of the doctor she used to see and love herself. This may be called split personality. That is oblique personality' and that is

why the lady divided herself into two.⁴ the perversity towards self-love creates this type of mental state. When this type of thought came to her mind, from that time onwards she did not think herself alone. 'While walking: looking below I observed how the toes played on the earth. I used to think how the newly passed doctor feels while looking at the steps.' She used to think after stretching her naked arm on a milk white bed sheet on her bed, 'somebody is observing this arm in this posture, someone lifted it with his hands, someone put a kiss on her reddish palm and going back slowly.' When self love turns to madness or perversity, there cannot be any normalcy in it. This may be called self love or Narcissism. Because of this Narcissism, life becomes intolerable. Just as the end of the heroine of the story became devastating self destruction and the destruction of her beloved.

At the end of the story also it is seen that the heroine is conscious of her beauty even at the time of her death. That is why she wanted to leave this earth keeping a tinge of smile at the corner of her lips, so that, when people will come to see her then also that smile will linger on her lips. That is, even after her death she may not lose her beauty. It cannot conceive anything other than a psychic case. At last we see that even after being a skeleton, she could not sacrifice her self-love.

Though Rabindranath tried to wrap the outer form of the story with a super-natural shadow, still he wanted to convey the sharpness of a deep self-love of a lady who was conscious of her beauty. So the beautiful lady even turning to a skeleton had told the story of her self-love.

In a comparatively modern age, after Rabindranath, in the famous story 'Girgiti', written by Jatirindra Nandi, the self love of a girl has been prominently painted. She loves herself. Even she enjoys her own beauty through the eyes of a different person, named Bhuban Sarkar. In the story of Rabindranath, the context of a different man is rather indirect and too much extent it is subdued. But in the story of Jatirindra Nandi, the subject has become directly perceptible.

Maya, the heroine of the story stands in front of a big mirror on the wall and becomes enchanted to see herself. She spreads one musical tune in the air like a mild whistling, in the excess of her joy. Maya is beautiful and for much many times she had heard the various descriptions of her beauty from her husband.

Maya takes her bath near the well of the rented house without any garment on her body. One day she became scared when she stood in front of the clear water of the well seeing her reflection in the water. Her forehead, chin and breast appeared fearful to her. Detecting the cause of her this kind of thought she stood erect and looked once again towards herself. In fact, it was her love towards the different parts of her body that made her frightened. Blind Maya, fascinated by the love of her body could hardly understand the momentariness of youthful beauty.

Maya covered herself when one day Bhuban Sarkar of the rented house appeared there during her bath. Because of this she thought that the Papaya tree, the young guava tree, the grasshopper, the

neem tree are not watching her bath being angry. Every day, during her bath they watch her hair, naval, breasts and the thighs. To Maya, not only self love but to expose her body to others was also important. She wants to exhibit her beauty towards others.

Maya does not want to listen about her beauty only from the husband as monotonous praise. She is 'tired' and 'annoyed' by listening about her youthful beauty from her husband. Therefore she tried to observe her own beauty through the eyes of another person. More than once she had gone to Bhuban to listen of her own beauty in different languages. Bhuban has compared maya to a sappling of Pomegranate. Maya thinks that during her bath the neem tree, Papaiya tree, the broken wall, the dried tree, the crows, the 'salik' birds and the flock of nightingales – all observe her arms, feet, knees, back, waist, eye brows, ear, eyes, nails. For this, Maya does not get angry. Rather she feels happy thinking that 'if they did not look at her in this way, she could not think herself alive. After Bhuban Sarkar compared Maya to a Pomegranate sappling, Maya took off her clothings and looked from the finger nails of her feet up to the parting on her head. She really thought that she was like a Pomegranate sappling. Just as life spreads over the trees, flowers fruits, stems and branches of a tree, so also Maya felt her boastful youth playing all over the body like a spark. She turned round and round in front of the mirror and saw herself for a innumerable times. In fact Maya is enjoying her own beauty through the eyes of another person. Bhuban Sarkar has compared the chin and the plate of hair etc. of may respectively with the snake and the lower part of the Karabi flower. Listening to this Maya also felt a shivering within her spine. Bhuban Sarkar called the running of Maya 'the movement of a female swan.' He told, 'I have never seen such beautiful back and waist.' The old Bhuban when asked Maya to look herself into the mirror, Maya answered that every day she does it. In fact Maya wants to say that Bhuban Sarkar himself is a sort of mirror. Because she sees the reflection of her own beauty within his eyes. Therefore soft tune comes out of Maya's voice.

Maya knows that Bhuban Sarkar observes her. Infact, Maya also likes to be compared with the nature outside from the old Bhuban. Maya thinks that the praise of her husband is that of a sensuous person. "If man could become as natural as nature and could see as the nature does,"⁵ then Maya's beauty could have been judged properly. It is therefore, that she wants to be praised not by her husband but by someone else. He is the worshipper of her beauty. When sometimes Maya feels in the subconscious state of her mind that the eyes of Bhuban Sarkar are glittering by seeing her body. After a moment she understands that the eyes of the old man actually resembles to those of a dead tree, pale and cold. Actually it is a dead 'mother' tree. Maya also feels that all men are not equal and all eyes are also not equal. Maya loves herself. She wants to be praised of her beauty but does not want to become a thing of physical enjoyment. She does not want to keep herself only for the other sex, that is not only as a commodity for men. That is why, to her husband

becomes old and monotonous. She does not become bewildered anymore by his hugs, kisses or emotional outbursts. Therefore, she comes running to Bhuban Sarkar in order to seek freedom from the monotony of her husband. She wants to listen from him the description of her beauty. She feels that the graceful posture of her proud muscels of her neck and breast are being observed by Bhuban Sarkar. Therefore Maya, under the pretention of wiping her sweat collects her end of the loin-cloth on her lap. To get some relief from the heat she pulls up her Saree and petticoat up to her knees. This is not only to get relief from the heat, She wants to attract others by her own beauty and get relieved by the praise of her beauty from Bhuban Sarkar. After listening the prays of her eyes from Bhuban Sarkar, when she feels that Bhuban Sarkar is but a dried up tree, her spark of heightening coming upto the half of the spine and vanishes then Maya feels like weeping. Maya wants to dedicate her beauty to Bhuban Sarkar. But the lack of enthusiasm of old Bhuban can not create a barrier to Maya's tears. Nevertheless, when her husband praised her beauty, Maya thought it meaningless. She satirically says to her husband 'Bah, that is why you have come out from the office quite early. Thinking of my beautiful face? In order to observe my powdered face in the evening!" Maya had two different feeling about two different persons. Maya knows that Bhuban Sarkar enjoys her beauty and her husband enjoys her physic. They are far apart from each other.

Conclusion

Beauty is not only for one's own self. It becomes meaningful when praised by others. Sometimes Maya becomes angry and resentful because her husband Pranab does not always look at her beauty. Maya remains always occupied with her own physic. Maya takes off her blouse and looks at her breasts as if in a state of dream. In the narrow sloping space, there is a firefly sitting in the form of a motionless green pearl. The light green ray emanating from the pearl had made her breast like a real green fruit to Maya. This sight rouses a spark in her spine. Seeing her breasts she feels that she has never been more enchanted and overwhelmed before. This extreme self-love towards one's body is known as narcissism. The Maya of the story Girgiti is more a Narcissist than self complacent.⁶ In fact this play of Maya is actual a sort of self discovery in the guise of narcissism.⁷ Maya has discovered herself in her self love. The heroine of the story 'Kankal' had also tried to discover herself but could not. But the secret of the female characters, that is the heroines of both the stories, namely 'Kankal' and 'Girgiti' is nothing but self-love.

References

1. Farhad Khan, *Pratichya Puran, Pratik Prakashara Samthan, 38/2A Bangla Bazar (First floor). Dhaka – 1100, Reprint; April 2012, page -84*
2. Kshetra Gupta, *Rabindra-Galpo : Annya Rabindranath, Granthanilay, 59/1B, Potuatola Lane, Kolkata- 700009, 4th edition : Agraphayan 1417, page – 23*
3. Tapabrata Ghosh, *Rabindra Chotogalper Shilparup, Dey's Publishing, Kolkata – 700013,*

- Revised reprint : 22 Sravan, 1410, August 2003, p- 104.*
4. *Ibid, Rabindra-Chotogolper Shilparup, Tagore Research Institute, 97, C, S.P Mukherjee Road, Kalighat Park. Kolkata- 26, First edition : Baisakh 1397 / April 1990, page- 124. In the next Dey's edition of 2003 also, the writer expresses almost the same opinion.*
 5. *Ibid, Sabujmanusher Janno Jatirindra Nandir Galpo, See Ujagar : Jatirindra Nandi Series- 1417, P- 126.*
 6. *BikashKanti Midya, Je chokh shilpir je chokh girgitir, see aforesaid ujargar, jatirindra nandi series 1417, p. 162.*
 7. *Manan Kumar Mondal, Jatirindra Nandir Galpo; Bichhinnatar Shilparup See : Aforesaid Ujagar, P- 178.*