



## PLAY OF INTER-SUBJECTIVITY OF CHARACTERS IN *SHESH KADAMBARI*

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper focuses on the enquiry of aesthetic and ideological shift in the new historical fiction from the earlier postmodern historiographic metafiction. Particularly, it analyses such changes with regard to the treatment of history in the new beyond postmodern condition. Such tendencies have been tried to discern through the main formative elements of the aesthetics of fiction, i.e. the characters and the art of characterization. The focus has been on the highly self-reflexive play of inter-subjectivity of characters. It has been seen how the characters cross through each other's subjectivities and try to "feel" and understand each other's positions. Such play of inter-subjectivity is formed within the cross-temporal play of different historical times of India's independence struggle and the contemporary postmodern condition of global moment. Spatio-temporal and ideological contextualization of the behavior/subjectivity of characters and their capability of crossing the limits of their personal subjectivities and entering into another's are the two theoretical poles within which the narrative advances the new beyond postmodern understanding of existing at a multidimensional space along with retaining one's own position. This philosophical stance may be taken as a dialogic corrective to both the ideas—unitary/essential identity and non-essential heteroglossic subjectivity as pure construction. The paper attempts at analysing such philosophic undertones present in this novel.*

**Key-Words:** Subjectivity, Agency, Action, Historiography.

### INTRODUCTION

*Shesh Kadambari*, a novel written by Alka Saraogi in Hindi, and then self-translated in English, touches the histories of freedom struggle of India but the focus has been on seeing

MANDEEP SANEHI

1Page



different ideological positions from other perspectives. The novel exhibits the highly self-reflexive play of entering into other's subjectivities and crossing the limits of one's own subjectivity. Ruby Di and her granddaughter cross through each other's liberalist modernist and neo-liberal postmodernist behavioral traits. They try to "feel" and understand each other's positions. Leftist ideological frameworks of both—time present and time past- have been crossed through by the non-leftist perspectives of both modern and postmodern sensibilities. Those sensibilities, in turn, through representative characters, intersect the liberal and neo-liberal attitudes/subjectivities. Ruby's *mama ji's* Marxist perspective further entangles with her elitist perspective. Her granddaughter Kadambari's boyfriend/partner's neo-Marxist vision influences Kadambari, which she mixes into her own to look at her grandmother's Marxist *mama Devidatt's* lost/re-found past. Such play of inter-subjectivity is formed within the cross-temporal play of different historical times of India's independence struggle and the contemporary postmodern condition of global moment. Seeing the past through the present and the present through the past, and different ideological positions of the same time through the other available modes of thinking, are deeply woven into the texture of this novel, making it a complex philosophical and critical piece of fiction. This way, the novel combines the modernist and postmodernist approaches toward the behavior of characters under the socio-ideological construction of their subjectivity within the limits of specific historical conditions, and also, toward their agential capabilities of crossing the limits of their ideological-formation, and participating in the course of history not only under their subjectivity but also out of their agential powers.

*Shesh Kadambari* chiefly revolves around Ruby Di's liberalist search for meaning and identity and the personal and historical circumstances of the making of such "liberalist" in her. Her uncle Devidatt and her mother's leftist perspective produces contention against her paternally inherited elitist liberalism, and her postmodernist grand-daughter Kadambari's neo-liberal values re-analyze and re-situate her modernist liberal values in a new perspective. The other perspectives, as per the strategic discourse of the novel, do not displace her subjectivity and the relative viewpoint but examine and reflect upon them within the boundaries of their own different spatio-temporal formation. All these ideological positions: modern liberal, modern-left and postmodern neo-liberal's alliance with the neo-left (reflected through the journalist Kadambari's partnership with a neo-left writer/journalist), intersect each other not to produce shifts in perspectives but just to "see" each other through their separate narrative zones. This dramatization of the conversation amongst the people of varied subjectivities has been, in *Shesh Kadambari*, realised in the concrete space of fictional historiography of the pre- and post-independence histories of India. The characters Ruby and Kadambari express and try to comprehend their psychic locations in a particular confluence of socio-economic time and place. Ruby Di's liberalist search for her identity and meaning is intersected, complemented and critiqued by her granddaughter Kadambari's new ways of

MANDEEP SANEHI

2Page



perceiving reality and meaning. These two characters form two polar narrative points of *apolitical elitist liberal search for identity* and *political middle class neoliberal individualism*—both criss-crossed by the leftism available in their times. The novel delineates the formative processes of such subjectivities without dealing with the issue of their conversion/slippage into any resistive-agency. Through the dialogics of these subjectivities in the space of history, the novel fictionalises the historical formation of their separateness that is necessarily, consistently and contingently both, a function and product of the dialectical progression of history and time.

The title of the novel signifies the remnants (in the form of denouement) of the dialogue of the pre- and post-independence Indian elite class' liberalism with the left. The character Kadambari fictionally metaphorizes such denouement in the form of neoliberalism's alliance with the left in the new postmodern age of synthesis in the Indian context. Her grandmother Ruby Di, a social worker, spatiates the fictional exploration and presentation of such dialectical and dilemmatic histories of India's quest for "self" and existence in the newly attained liberation. Through the prominence of the personal histories of a fictional character and subsidiarity of the general objective history as undertext, the novel channelises the corresponding association between the part played by general histories (including class) in the formation of subjectivities of individuals and the role of individual subjectivities in influencing/forming the general attitudes/tendencies of the historical time to come. The personal and historical and past, present and future, in this novel, have been presented in the dialectical relationship—as between the causal functionality and effectual denouement.

Ruby as a child is adopted by her uncle, whose ancestors got rich out of opium-trade during the British regime in India. The making and fading away of elite class industrialists/traders works as a subtext in this novel to form historical background to the complex of characteral traits present in Ruby Di. Despite the vocalization of her class-traits, into which she has been put by her adoption, her blood-based non-belongingness to this class and family situates her emotions and perceptions on the space of creative instability. The belongingness and non-belongingness both speak from the single space of her existence. This is what displaces her upper-class behavioral traits time to time and enables her to self-evaluate them as well as evaluate them from the temporally distant but related eye of her grand-daughter Kadambari. This very fact of her dilemmatic existence/identity capacitates her to reflect critically back on her family's opium-made-richness in a more unbiased and humanist way. In other words, her situatedness on the uncertain space of belongingness/non-belongingness causes her, at the same time, to behave as per the normativity of her class as well as come out of such subjectivity to comprehend its formative features. The elitist liberalist trait of social service combines with such self-reflective recognition, guilt and corrective decision in her regarding her family's indulgence in the opium trade. In her present context of 1973's after-

MANDEEP SANEHI

3P age



independence drug-trade in India, Ruby reflects upon the colonial and post-colonial histories of drugs in India, as Vasumani told her, as following:

*“Now our world is passing through the fourth epidemic of drug trafficking,” Vasumani had told Ruby, “the first after 1890, the second around 1920, the third after 1950, the fourth since 1965 till now in 1973.” Ruby’s palpitations increased. To what extent her family would have contributed in spreading the first epidemic? That very moment she decided to atone for it before she dies. Only this way she could return her father’s true love. This is the best way to observe her father’s death anniversary. After all she also has received a portion of his wealth. (177)*

Her cognizance of her history and subjectivity is what is outside her subjective formation as per the ideology of her class. From here issues the sense of guilt in her that she mixes into her liberalist peculiarity of social service, and decides to help the drug-addicts throughout her life. Doing this gives her a sense of rightness. This is her way to relieve herself from the historical burden of opium-trade of her family. But when she herself experiences the effect of marijuana/hemp, due to her husband and daughter’s mischief, her intensity to serve the drug-addicts subsides. Metaphorically, the opposition to one side/idea/theoretical stance comes out of its inexperience: its understanding either changes the course of opposition or reduces it to a certain extent. Her subjectivity alters when she experiences the relaxing/enjoyable effect of a moderate amount of drug. She feels “as if something has changed within her” after this experience (179). She starts looking at herself as having been irresponsible toward her familial duties in the pursuit of a woman’s identity. Her feminist concern of identity-search and its manifestation turn toward the opposite of it: what she feels she ignored in her past—her familial burdens.

*Shesh Kadambari* depicts such instability in Ruby Di’s character as an effect of her historical circumstances and class-position’s interaction with her most personal circumstances. Due to its fading eliteness, her family (that adopts her in future) is forced to marry off its kids in the middle class. Her mother who adopts her is actually her real father’s sister, whose middle class values of greed and insecurity interfere in accepting Ruby as her own child. Her real mother (*mami ji*) does not accept her fully due to her jealousy with her sister-in-law’s raised position by marriage in a rich family. She only gets the father’s love from a fading upper class person, who actually is not related to her from blood. The issues of their personal rivalry—Ruby’s doing work at her *mami ji*’s home and her being slapped by her mother—displace her sense of belongingness to both the families. This lack of love and insecure childhood lead her to a feeling of “nothingness”. Her subjectivity as an upper class liberalist bears a sense of emptiness and non-existence that embrangles her throughout her life in the

MANDEEP SANEHI

4Page



search for meaning and identity. Her mother who adopts her says to her brother's wife: "It's all right then. Keep Ruby with you. You think that only you can understand her pain as you've given birth to her. I've no right to beat her, I forgot that" (30). This stuns Ruby. This lack of belongingness results in her insecurity and identity crisis. She falls in the search for this lost sense of being throughout her whole life and could not relate with any of the family as her own. Even this lost selfhood and her identity-crisis influence her formulation of romance, in which she tries to find herself through her lover. Romance becomes a way for her to configure/assemble what got shattered in her past. She loves a Muslim boy. But history intervenes here and due to the Hindu-Muslim riots, he backs away from his love and marries somebody else. This failure to achieve herself through him again throws her on the infinite itinerary of the search for her lost identity. The narrative depiction of this failed romance in Ruby's life is striking:

*Someone would only be her— this dream consoled her when she entered the threshold of her youthfulness.... All the time she feels as if somebody is with her...mesmerized, watching her long hair like she herself does.... This love did come in her life, but even here, in the end, the necessity of other things proved bigger than Ruby. (31)*

Her class-position and personal and historical circumstances collaborate to lead her on the path of "social service", which becomes an anchorage for her eternal search for "something lost". While working in 'Vama Studies Group' and then running 'Pramarsh' on her own, she consistently tries to relate herself to others' pain, the liberation of which calms her own affliction. Toward the old age of her life, she meets Sawita, whom she tries to help in her familial issues and patriarchal exploitation. She finds Sawita's face in her face (32).

Resemblance of her eyes with Sawita's eyes manifests her identity-association. Ruby attempts to solve her own identity-crisis by helping her out in the matters of her life. By filling Sawita's life with happiness, she wants to re-attain her lost childhood stability and contentedness. The basis of this association between her and Sawita lies, also, in the sameness of their destinies. Both of them do not get love throughout their lives. The feelings of both are maimed by their circumstances. On the basis of this resemblance between the two, Ruby Di, as a social-worker, keeps her at her home and takes care of her during her illness. Even after expelling her from her home due to Sawita's disputes with her servants, Ruby Di requests Kadambari, in her final will, to give an amount of her inherited money to Sawita. The justification she forms for it in her will is as given below:

*I request Sawita to accept this money by her right whenever she needs it. She has this right because I have seen myself in her—the same way as we cross*

MANDEEP SANEHI

5Page



*through our kids' pains by seeing ourselves in them. If there is any caste of pain, owing to that, I and Sawita are as closest relatives as is nobody else in the world. (199)*

Social-service becomes the available choice to her upper-class (now upper middle class) subjectivity and she falls in the search for her lost identity through it.

The search for meaning and identity guide her life. She tries to observe life very carefully in order to comprehend it. By observing the smallest things/events of life, she feels: "The whole life is spent and the humans stay unable to see the nearest things around her. In the same way, they couldn't know how to live life" (36). Her enlightenment under her English education rationalises her brain but limits this rationality to incomprehensibility that her class offers to her. The unawareness of the other side of life that her elitist upbringing imposed upon her stops her from understanding the value of history in the making of individual lives. She could not comprehend her leftist *mama* Devidatt's concerns and perspectives. Instead her class throws her into the subjectivity of a liberalist humanist. Despite being an English education enlightened brain, she falls in the trap of soul, mystery and other spiritualist material. She thinks, "It is true that the notion of spirit offers solace that life has some final meaning, otherwise what is the use of knowing or learning anything" (40). She mixes her modernist penchant of knowing and learning with the limits of her rationality. Her liberalism limits the boundaries of her rationality and finally she falls in the spiritualist tradition of solving the mystery of the world vis-à-vis her own existence. This she expresses through her "social-service" ethic of making people "laugh" too (41). Instead of thinking about social-justice or changing the structuration of the world, she believes in serving people and making them happy within the same status-quo, without understanding the impact of socio-economic and political circumstances on the lives of people. But, as has already been discussed, her instability of class-position and belongingness makes her capable of seeing and recognizing the other sides of her experience. She observes and understands the impermanence and slipperiness of her Western history teacher's identity. The following depiction of his homelessness and nomad/vagabond personality, as felt by Ruby herself, conveys her comprehension of the non-modernist movability of meaning and identity; as against her own ontological and essentialist notion of the permanence of meaning and identity:

*Ruby's conceptions got destroyed immediately, she has known for the first time in her life that there are people in the world who have no need for a permanent place and home.... All the other people of her acquaintance always live at their permanent dwelling places and do the same things that they used to do in the past or what they were made to learn to do. (42)*



She recognises and feels the other way of being that may be termed as a departure from the general modernist sticking to fixities and permanence. She discerns; though not explicitly, the discourse of ephemerality and movability. But the novel does not force its unnatural application on her modernist subjectivity. Struggling with the limits of her ideological shaping and her available circumstances, it is more natural for her to be capacitated with the discernment of her limits. This cognizance may be seen as her going beyond her psychic-patternization by her specific class-position and available ideologies. Till her old age, she keeps thinking, “If there is life, it certainly has some meaning, we understand it or not” (197).

Relating her own and Sawita’s destiny to the meanings of their names whispers of the same hunt for meaning and purpose in life in relation to her liberalist feminist quest for a woman’s identity. The Christian element in her name puts her on the space of unease. She relates it with her alienation. Moreover she has to prove her association with the society she is living in due to the Anglo-Indian-ness suggested by her name:

*Throughout her life, she kept thinking whether there is nothing precious in her life that could necessitate her presence for anybody in the world? . . . her name presents her as a Christian. How many people she should tell that Ruby Gupta has no mixing of English or Anglo-Indian blood—it’s only her wrongheaded uncle Devidatt [a Communist] ... named her as Ruby for remembering any failed love of his. (6)*

Ruby Gupta observes a paradoxical relationship between the tragic fate of Sawita (whose family expels her from her home after her mother’s death) and the meaning of her name i.e. “the sun that enlightens”. Her quest for her identity seeks its fulfillment in solving the problems of Sawita. The similarity of their life-conditions due to being women attracts them toward each other but their different subjectivities and agential powers arising from their different class-positions consistently displace this sense of association. Till the end of the novel, this drama of the contradiction between their association and disassociation goes on.

This hunt for relief/liberation and meaning getting manifested in others entangles itself with her class-ascribed liberal feminism. She relates her failed love with a Muslim boy to her being a woman. Her elitist modernist liberalism does not let her feminist response get revolutionised. She just “feels” the wrong with her and tries not to alter it but to relieve her pain through social service to the women of lower strata with the similar pains. The boundaries of her class-position, on the one hand, subjectivise her not to discern the leftist-ideological position of her *mama ji*; on the other, her personal circumstances of the lack of belongingness and love and the general circumstances of a woman’s lot in the patriarchal world agentialize her to the extent of discerning her identity-crisis. Her agentiality, though,

MANDEEP SANEHI

7P a g e



could not escape the limits of her ideological position and does not reach any change-producing feminist awareness. She perceives such subjectivity in Sawita's character, and, what she finds in her mirrors her own ideological patternization. The following extract from the novel, in which Ruby is very carefully observing Sawita staring at the lines of her palm, displays such patriarchally handicapped subjectivity through the metaphoric undertext of history and politics:

*Sawita lowered her eyes after once looking at her. This suddenly reminds her of the dozens of hens with tied feet hanging on the sides of a person whom she saw in the morning while coming to the office. How much pain they must have been feeling—has Maneka Gandhi not written anything about them? They stayed hanging upside-down in a motionless, silent and dead-like manner. Ruby Di looked at the girl sitting before her contemplatively. (7)*

This account metaphorizes the synonymy between the condition of hens and women. The class oriented ideological formation of her subjectivity limits her feminist awareness only to the cognizance of the state of women as it has become. She could not explore the causal factors behind it. Her blurred perception finds solution to the women's cause only in the achievement of the lost individual identity and the social-service. Her limited cognizance lands her in the trap of "mystery". Her problem lies not in the liberation from ego but in achieving her identity. She believes in the "presence of some purpose or mystery" in the every wake of life. The disrespect she gets at her husband's home does not bubble inside her in an unnatural way. But, this character, behaving under the norms of the construction of her subjectivity, wears the cloak of "silence" in defense (15). Ruby's elitist liberalism struggling through violence-less unarmed "silence" connotes the wider historical reality of Gandhi's non-violent political struggle. Her perspective throughout the novel vocalises such historical connotations. When she enters into the realm of silence, that she supposes to resonate her resistance, her daughter Gauri—more inclined toward her leftist uncle Devidatt's theoretical perspective, says: "Look, the mother has again become a *moni-baba* [silent sage]—oh no-no, she has become Mahatma Gandhi" (16). At the second level of meaning, Ruby's elitist formation of identity and subjectivity conveys the type of the subjectivity of Gandhi that manifests itself in his non-violent political struggle— gesticulating at the causative functions responsible for the making of his theory of ahimsa and his elitist English education based liberalist perspective. There is one more example of the interplay of the referents of the same/single sign intersecting and complementing each other from the space of historical and personal. Ruby Di's "vision" of the "ruins of a building," that is going to get transformed into a "new multi-storied building" in the new times, replaces with an old glorious single storied palace (16), which signifies Gandhi's nostalgia for regaining the golden era/greatness of the country which is in a ramshackle state—the country which is going to enter the new times of

MANDEEP SANEHI

8P a g e





MNCs. This way Gandhi's hunt for India's lost identity and Ruby's search for her identity signify each other from the same metaphoric space. Vasumani, who guided Ruby's personal identity-quest to social-service, understands "her problem of being nobody right in the first meeting with her" (28). He calls it her "identity-crisis". The solution he offers to her to come out of this sense of nothingness and emptiness is "believing in herself" that Ruby finds contradictory to her experience of void throughout her life. She does not get any relief with this imposed instructiveness. Instead of complaining to her husband about the discrimination done with her by her in-laws, and exerting herself verbally, she wears silence as a mode of resistance (87). Her upper class subjectivity does not let her express her resistance in the loud words as used by her middle-class in-laws. Hence, continuing her quest for locating herself, with all the pains and emptiness of her life always with her, she expresses her resistance through the liberalist mode of struggle—"silence," and combines it with the ethic of the same category—"social-service". The history of Gandhi's liberalist way of resistance to the British government serves as a minor undertext as well as an expressive signifier of the ethics and the modes of their execution of the common rightist liberalist people of India as individuals. Such fictionalization refers to the interactive influence of individual and collective subjectivities on each other dismantling the bifurcation between the historical and personal.

The impediments put by her upper-class upbringing/conditioning/subjectivity, gradually, habitualize her reticence. "Pettiness on trivial affairs" at her in-laws' home, her "childhood lack of love," the deception she received in love, and the loveless life she led with her husband Sudhir all make her "seriously [mentally] ill" and "highly suicidal" as her psychiatrist calls it (89). From here her husband "lets" her work in a social-service organization, where she starts manifesting her suppressed upper-class way of expressing/finding her "herself". The electric shocks that she is given by the psychiatrist turn her memory into a "sieve" from which the burden of unrequired memories filters away and resurges suddenly, giving new direction to her quest for meaning and identity. This dislocation of her memory from the fixed paths of her subjectivity displaces/modifies her earlier perceptions of the world/reality. It does not mean that she starts thinking about the world in different terms but her comprehension of the world and reality starts allowing "other" perceptions to cross through her own. She, a modernist upper-class liberalist, allows herself and her quest for meaning and identity to be seen through her postmodernist granddaughter Kadambari's eyes. The autobiographic narrative she is writing in the form of this novel becomes a space of self-reflexivity when she visualises and evaluates her modernist concerns and mode of narrative via Kadambari's postmodernist parameters. She compares her own modernist narrative with the postmodernist narrative Kadambari is writing on the leftist/Marxist freedom struggler Devidatt:



*Then what should Ruby Gupta do, Ruby Di thought—she should write her narrative further or not—the narrative of a life in which there is nothing special? Would anybody sympathize with her after reading it or would they feel that it is the pastime of the well-off people to write foolishly in a self-obsessed manner about the trivialities of their lives? Should she ask for Kadambari’s opinion on it? Or she should tear and throw it into the dustbin and return back to her “ordinary” life of “Pramarsh-service” of the people? (103)*

Kadambari’s designation of Ruby Di’s identity-search through social-service is an endeavor of the fading upper-class trying to “expand its narrowing vanity/pride” (104). In this light, Ruby tries to rethink the reactions of other people (left-oriented) toward her that affected her pride she gained under the ideological formation of her subjectivity: “Then, was the repulsion of her husband toward her, her daughters toward her work and her organizations right?” (104). She allows Kadambari’s perspective to enter into her and question her ideological position from another’s perspective, but, she does it without leaving/altering her own position. She rethinks on how she non-absolutely kept her perspectives away and tried to follow the absolutist versions of the middle-class patriarchy of her husband. She remembers the humanist acceptance at her father’s home and the “love she attained from his friends” whose upper-class “status” was still secure (104). She also remembers the elite as not always worrying about money and not even conscious about their class, and the middle class as so worried that Ruby was not even allowed to take milk at her in-laws. There she was taunted as “*satpeerhia shah ki beti*” (“the daughter of seven generations’ lord”) (104-05). She compares it with the absolutist non-acceptance of her at her in-laws’ home due to her “inferior” gender position and “superior” class-position. Such contrast between the absolutism of middle-class and the flexibility of upper-class dichotomizes, metaphorically through the personal traits/stories of characters, the difference between the radicalism of middle-class (here only leftists) and the humanism of upper-class (only liberals).

Ruby’s class-interference may also be discerned from her feminist understanding of the causes of women’s exploitation. She accuses “poverty” as a natural entity that deprives the women of the lower class of their rights (114). Such ontological understanding of poverty as a natural available without any systemic cause and effect traces and rights not as a particular product of a particular system but as a general/natural/universal presence without any exploitative/limitive specificities of its generator system speaks of her ideological inescapability in understanding reality beyond the boundaries of her subjectivity. Due to this limit she adds “*Treta-Duapar*”, “*Karma*,” “Shiva as drinking the poison of the pain of people,” “*Krishna*” and many other mythological/spiritual versions to justify the ethics of her social-work. She thinks that by believing in the link between the destiny and *karma* “one can

MANDEEP SANEHI

10P a g e



be saved from pride” (126). Her ideological formation incapacitates her from recognizing the coordinated-working of capitalism and patriarchy in reducing women (Sawita and the other girls) to the consumable and disposable commodities. She observes, in her times, the rapes of the girls by their own fathers, brothers and uncles: Saira being raped by her brother (22-24), and Sawita and one more girl by their fathers. She also observes the growing prostitution in Calcutta not as a consequence of the a-chronological and unnatural emergence/imposition of capitalism— that did not develop through a natural course of history with associated changes in the morality and intellect of Indians, but, disturbed/intervened/confused the natural coherence of the ethics and values by inserting a new system and disturbing the natural course of the development of India. The resultant confusion in the economic and political system, disproportionate relationship between the material and cultural growth, and the imposed capitalism express themselves in the chaotic cultural values in which the feudal and the capitalist values all mix to distort both. The incomprehensibility of Ruby of the relationship between base and superstructure issues from her subjectivity. Alka Saraogi’s excellent fictionalization of the characters behaving under their class and cultural ideological subjectivization and their creative spaces of contradiction spatiating/locating their agency place her amongst the Indian novelists like Rahi Masoom Raza and Rajinder Yadav, whose comprehension of the socio-economic system of India and its influence on people is beyond parallel in Hindi literature. The agential/creative power of the discernment and comprehension of her own subjectivity, in Ruby, results from the contradictory space between her modernism/liberalism/upper-class-rightism and Kadambari’s postmodernist neo-Marxism. Kadambari’s theoretical position may rather be seen as the synthesis of the modern and postmodern tendencies spatiating their contradictory unity. That’s why, Ruby’s own and her next generation—her daughter’s, departure from her uncle’s leftist ideology has been antithetized in the synthesis of liberalism with Marxism. Points of contention between Ruby and Kadambari, in this context, have already been discussed in this chapter. The thesis and antithesis of Modern and Postmodern and Marxist and liberalist synthesize in Kadambari to form in her a new form of subjectivity, which easily gets interpellated by the neo-liberal policies, but also, partially, thinks through the revisionist Marxism. Such synthesis of the contradiction has been suggested through Kadambari’s words to Ruby: “If I grow older like you, I would like to become exactly like you. Absolutely free. Without any emotionality [that is patriarchally ascribed to women]. Balanced” (152). History and ideas—correspondingly, the identity and subjectivity of people, always keep on changing. Kadambari gives her half-written narrative to Ruby Di by saying—“the rest later on,” and “there was no time for Ruby to ask which ‘later on’, exactly later on when” (152). If the phrase “later on” captures the meaning of continuity, “the rest” suggests a temporary stay of meaning under the arbitrary shelter of signifiers. Like neo-Marxists/cultural materialists, permanent meanings/fixities have been displaced, not eternally, but arbitrarily, contextualizing them in their spatio-temporality. “The rest” is a signifier that arrests the eternal flux of meaning of the time to

**MANDEEP SANEHI**

11 Page



come; connecting it dialectically to its historical past. This signification, self-reflexively, reflects upon the nature of the aesthetics of the novel *Shesh Kadambari* itself. The narratives of a modernist and postmodernist within the “real” narrative of the novel gesticulate at the theoretical eye of the novel that explores the contradictory and synthetic points of both.

Summing up Ruby’s subjectivity, the struggle of a modern subject conditioned by English values through English education aims at liberation from the values of feudal and pre-feudal native culture. Her search for meaning and existence positions itself antithetically to the past culture of India as if it is something backward. Mark the following textual depiction in this regard:

*The calculations of the Vedas-Vedantas-Upnishadas on the basis of the differences amongst— satva-rajo-tamogun, mann-buddhi-chitt-ahamkar, and dual-non-dual, escape Ruby Di’s comprehension. She feels as if her English education has changed the structure of her brain in a way that they could not fit into it. (54)*

The new subjectivity gained under colonization and the pre-colonial identity-traits, in this example, struggle against and slip into each other. Ruby’s elite class-position and the history of her family’s proximity to the Britons in India throw her into the more western-enlightened subjectivity. Her mother’s nurture up in the non-englishised culture of Kanpur pierces into the “englishness” of Ruby’s in-laws. Tea, a metaphor of the colonial intervention, its denouements/after-effects and the changes under it, signifies the acceptance and habituality of such change as normalcy in the present upper-class. Middle-class, on the other hand, situated on the space of slipperiness—on the edges of both sides, may or may not experience the contradictions of such displaced normalcy. Ruby’s mother’s middle-class less-englishised nurture up in Kanpur expresses itself through the “hatred of tea”:

*Early in the morning, Ruby Di recollects a memory associated with her mother ... Mother used to say, “If the English people hadn’t come here, the things won’t have been like this. They don’t even wash their hands after attending the call of nature; don’t even know how to eat a mango; who has taught the whole Hindustanis to take tea.” Ruby Di could never understand fully the reason after her mother’s hatred toward tea. (54)*

The novelist relates this personal hatred of Ruby’s mother toward tea with the subtext of the history of the Gandhian struggle of India’s independence. Gandhi’s resistance against the British capitalist method of changing and then naturalizing/normalizing people’s tastes and choices only for selling its products in the market after creating and establishing its virtual

MANDEEP SANEHI

12P a g e



need in their heart appears in the form of Salt Movement (Dandi Satyagraha) of 1930. Ruby tries to understand the logic behind her mother's anger toward tea but remains unsuccessful. Mark the lines from the text that serve as an historical undertext to the personal story of Ruby's mother:

*Was it because nobody at her home in Kanpur had ever taken tea? ...Or was it because the mother became rebel against her husband's English manners, and like Gandhi ji's issue of salt, she made the issue of tea at her husband's home? Perhaps the mother was protesting against her brother Devidatt's imprisonment in the British jail by rejecting the British clothes, by humiliating the British women with her embellished extraordinary beauty in their parties and by not taking tea too. (54-55)*

Ruby's mother's hatred toward and resistance against tea for her personal reasons—as a daughter-in-law hates the ways of her in-laws, and Gandhi's freedom struggle (both story and history)—spatiate each other to metaphorically vocalise the polyphonic co-existence of both from the same space of reality/existence.

In comparison to Ruby Di's modernist subjectivity, the novel presents Kadambari's postmodern ideological shaping, which does not hang between the crisis of being or not being, in which identity-quest, search for meaning and purpose, and depth replace with the “simultaneous indulgence in many things,” no penchant for “perfection” and depth but the gathering of surface information of everything (174). Ruby thinks about her in this way:

*Then, has the human mind developed to the extent that it can do many things simultaneously and nothing hampers anything? Or the human mind has lost its capability of indulging in things fully for a longer time? It might happen in the near future that the humans see and listen something else while doing some third work. (174-75)*

It is only Kadambari's surface-level “surfing” on internet about Aligarh jail that is sufficient for her to produce a research article for some media-purpose (144). Ruby's concern with books replaces, in the new times, with Kadambari's business with her “laptop”. At Ruby's dwelling place, she comes to gather material (data) for some report. She searches for the material in the libraries of Calcutta for a day, reads it on the second day and writes down and finishes her report on the third day of her coming there. The very fourth day, she flies back to her work and living place (144). Whatever “research” she does, does not have any link with her existence or some other crisis. She does it without any “purpose” of her own, just for the sake of the work under the given instructions—for payment. The surface level information of

MANDEEP SANEHI

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postmodernists substitutes the in-depth analysis and comprehension of things by modernists. “Surfing” takes the place of “search/research”. Her subjectivity reflects the postmodern condition in the place of “knowing” and “understanding” the crisis of human existence. Her research is based on brief and particular “items” (articles), that too, of her “specific choice”. The social world of contacts converts for Kadambari into the virtual contact of “emails” and “chatting”. Ruby’s crisis of alienation despite having social contacts has been contrasted in the novel with Kadambari’s individualised virtual reality in the following words:

*‘I’ve to check my email. You know grandmother, I receive so many mails that if I don’t check them daily, my e-mail account will jam. You can entertain yourself with chatting. If you wish, you may present your age as sixteen years’....Ruby Di thought over it—your generation has no time for the living people but it can converse with the unknown people for hours with eyes buried into the screen of computer. She recalls to her mind an advertisement in a newspaper—alienation, anxiety, depression? (145)*

Here Ruby Di concludes with alienation as the destiny of humans—whether modern or postmodern, as suggested by the novelist. Kadambari accuses her from her postmodern space, thinking, she herself has the ability to analyze and comprehend the past modernist subjectivity of Ruby from the more capacitating space of present: “The thing is that *nani* (grandmother), you feel guilty all the time” for your upper class-position (148). On the other hand, Ruby, seeing from the past position of a modernist, thinks that she also comprehends the ever ready logics and the always present alienation of this new generation. Such attempts of characters from different generations at understanding each other’s ideological positions and subjectivities from their own differently contextualised subjectivities reveal the points of high self-reflexivity present in *Shesh Kadambari*, the uniqueness of which lies not in the narrator and the narrative technique only but also in the art of characterization—crafting characters with self-reflexive agentiality.

Hence, Saraogi fictionalises how people behave under their historical conditions according to the class-traits of their economic positioning, which further influences the general course of history. Even though, they remain individuals with varieties of “separateness” that lets “contingency” to pierce through “continuity” based calculations of history, the contradictions become measurable and immeasurable at the same time; and the dialectics does not remain a static formula but an ever fresh term capturing the essence of the world/nature as a process always in its “becoming”.



**PUNE RESEARCH**

ISSN 2454-3454

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

**VOL 4, ISSUE 2**

UGC Approved Journal No 48520 (Arts & Humanities) ENGLISH

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