



Representation of Childlessness in Saurabh Kumar Chaliha's *Duporiya*

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Abstract:

When it comes to motherhood and childlessness, gender studies and post-constructivist feminist theory are left with a gap in the literature. The conventional norms of society frequently perceive childless women as incomplete. In literature as well, the feminization of infertility has given rise to clichéd representations that are tinged with negativity. This paper is an appraisal of involuntary childlessness as reflected in Saurabh Kumar Chaliha's story *Duporiya* (Midday). In order to uncover, refute, and expose the myths surrounding infertility in Assamese society, the study investigates how Chaliha defines the position of childless women within the community. As there are two narratives in the story, and the childless woman in the story is the focus of both, the tool of is used in this research paper. The finding of the research shows that a childless woman in Assamese society experiences equal humiliation from men and women because of the patriarchal dominance in the community. Since childless women were previously seen as useless, the writer's portrayal of his female protagonist with admirable qualities helped to improve society's perception of them. Additionally, Chaliha has discussed the psychological effects of infertility on females. This present paper is an attempt to explore the representation of childlessness in Chaliha's story *Duporiya*, which has been taken as the primary source of information. The secondary sources include articles from books, journals, and magazines. The present study is based on a critical analysis and interpretation of the above-mentioned story of Chaliha from the perspective of theory of narratology.

Keywords: Childlessness, Female Bond, Focalization, Loneliness, Narrative, Society

Introduction:

Motherhood continues to be central to conceptions of femininity in our culture; women without children are portrayed negatively and are perceived as unintelligent. Cultural portrayals of women who attempt but are unsuccessful in having children are uncommon since happily ever after stories are always given greater weight. In the majority of the stories, the woman's painful reality of infertility is contrasted with the miraculous baby that appears at the end. For generations, parenting has been closely associated with female identity. Due to this role classification, women who are not mothers are often perceived incorrectly. It implies that the woman's life lacks substance in some way. This role classification has resulted in a very sad mischaracterization of women who are not mothers. It implies that something is missing in the woman's life. The phrase 'childless' suggests a lack of something essential—something that is the norm. Such ideas can be traced back to mythology and folklore from ancient times. Kunti's existence in the *Mahabharata* presents a striking image of childlessness and the terrible anguish and mental conflict that she must endure. Women who are infertile are generally pitied since they are childless. These ladies are sometimes considered to be malevolent and self-serving. This ideological prejudice remained throughout the twentieth century. It was considered that if a woman did

not have children, she was either infertile or unfit to reproduce. With the changing of gender roles and increased knowledge of female rights, women's suffrage, and abortion rights, women's state of childlessness was no longer assumed to be a health condition. Nonetheless, the voluntary state of childlessness was always met with harsh censure in society. It is worth noting that throughout the two World Wars, women were encouraged to work and contribute, but once the need had passed, women were expected to return to their true station, which was their house, and care for the children. Even during India's freedom struggle, one of the responsibilities of women was to bear children, especially patriotic males (Loomba, p. 215).

Images of childless women who are marginalized and traumatized by society abound throughout literature. Childlessness causes conflict between a woman and her family. The literature on childlessness deals with the ambiguities, stigmatization, discrimination, and intolerable pains those women face in a societal context that frequently blames women for infertility in marriage, despite the reality that infertility is a non-discriminatory medical illness. The authority of evolutionary biology is used to describe women as basically reproductive beings in 19th century English literature, and their entire bodily and intellectual organization is portrayed as directed towards child bearing and child rearing. As an outcome, we encounter a large number of childless women in the stories of English novels from the 19th century, such as Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* (1847), Estella in *Great Expectations* (1861), Dorothea in *Middlemarch* (1871), etc. Bertha Mason, the insane woman in Mr. Rochester's palatial attic, is unproductive. She is compared to an animal's ferocity. Her figure is purposefully and consistently shown as taxonomically ambiguous, and it appears as though she lives on the thin line separating human and animal existence. Estella is depicted in *Great Expectations* as being cold because she is childless. In reality, her violent first marriage reveals her biological failures. The childless couples in George Eliot's novels make her novels excellent psychological examinations of marriage. In *Silas Marner* (1861), Godfrey and Nancy are still childless and are only just coming to grips with it. In fact, Nancy convinces herself that women are better able to cope with childlessness than men. This lack of reproductive success may imply a general lack of health and, hence, indicate a fundamental incompatibility between the spouses. The marriage between Dorothea and Casaubon in *Middlemarch* is clearly counterproductive to Dorothea's intellectual and emotional goals. A childless couple named Mary Turner and Dick Turner are also featured in Dorris Lessing's novel *The Grass is Singing* (1950), which is set against the backdrop of racial persecution and economic hardship. The novel *One Part Woman* (2013) by Tamil writer Perumal Murugan also addresses the topic of childlessness. Kali and Ponna have been married for 12 years and have been unable to produce a child. Their childlessness is often mocked by family members and fellow villagers, who attribute it to family curses, God's vengeance, or their ancestor's bad behaviour.

From folktales to novels and short stories, Assamese literature contains a plethora of childless female characters. These accounts demonstrate how patriarchal society treats childless women. In the folktale *Tejimola*, the eponymous protagonist has a stepmother who shows severe harshness towards her. *Tejimola* is brutally murdered by her stepmother out of rage and jealousy. The stepmother's terrible treatment of her stepchild is retold in Mridul Sarma's novel *Tejimalar Makar Sadhu* (2011). In this novel, the stepmother is depicted dealing with mental health concerns and loneliness as a result of her miserable marriage and the lack of her own child. In fact, Sarma depicts *Tejimola*'s stepmother as a woman capable of loving her stepdaughter. The protagonist of *Borduwani* (2014) by Manikuntala Bhattacharya is presented as dealing with the psychological pain of infertility and getting her husband married to another woman in the hope of having a child. In the story *Miss Havisham Aabeli*, Arupa Patangia Kalita portrays the protagonist, Borma, who is childless and suffers from an obsessive fixation with cleanliness. She stays away from her family and friends and is so reliant on her spouse that, in the event of his passing, she is left feeling utterly alone. This childless woman who is lonely and being questioned by society is a theme that Saurabh Kumar Chaliha explores in his story *Duporiya* (Midday). A closer look at all of the aforementioned works indicates that childlessness has not been the primary theme in any of them. We don't talk about childlessness as a health issue for women here. Instead, the way society views the female is made clear. But in Chaliha's *Duporiya*, the central character's health issue of infertility gains dominance from the beginning until the end of the story. In this story, we find the absence of contemporary city life and its anxious existence. The subtle household life of the third lady is revealed through the private conversation between two women. After meeting the third woman a few days ago, one of these two women is now sharing her story with the other woman, who is eager to hear it. They discuss the third childless woman and the responses she receives from her family. But what makes this story worth considering is its narrative style. The treatment of the theme of female infertility is not presented directly through the third-person narrative; instead, it is presented with the inner narrative of a conversation in which the third woman is the centre. The way Chaliha presents two narratives to give focus to the issue of childlessness is quite

interesting. For the present study, the researcher has chosen the tool of focalization to look into how the childless status has been presented in the story.

Objectives:

The following are the goals of the research paper-

- i. To examine how female infertility has been posed as a health problem in the story
- ii. To ascertain and evaluate society's response to this problem,
- iii. To find out how the narrator focalizes this subject of infertility in the story.

Materials and Methodology Used:

In this research, Saurabh Kumar Chaliha's stories will be enumerated with the literary tool of focalization. Interpretive and analytical methods have been used to focus on the study. The study of the selected story will be carried out through close reading, analysis, and textual references. There are two sources of information that are used here- primary and secondary. Primary sources are in the form of the texts of the selected fictional works, while secondary sources are taken from journals, articles, and reference books.

Findings of the Research:

The following are the paper's findings-

- i. Both the narratives in the story focus on the issue of childlessness.
- ii. The framed narrative shows how childlessness can bring distance between husband and wife and also between families.
- iii. The inner narrative reveals the reaction of family members and society to the victim of the problem of childlessness.

Discussion:

Focalization is a crucial term in narratology that was first used by Gerard Genette in his *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1972). It serves as a substitute for "point of view" and helps to distinguish between the narration and the reader's interpretation of the events in a story. In Genette's opinion, "who sees" and "who talks" are two different things. A selection or limitation of narrative material with respect to the narrator's experience and knowledge, that of the characters, or that of other more fictitious entities in the story world is known as focalization. "Point of view" and "perspective" were replaced by Genette's term "focalization." We frequently discuss the narrator or narrative voice, but we sometimes forget that the narrator sees as well. In fact, even if the narrator is the one who is "speaking," it's likely that what we "see" through the narration may not be of the narrator. Focalization is 'internal' when the narrative is presented through the perspective of one character, and 'external' when the events are told by a detached narrator. A narrative can have zero focalization, internal focalization, or external focalization, depending on the narrator's perceptual or conceptual stance. Mieke Bal introduced several new concepts and definitions and provided a critical analysis of Genette's paradigm, which had a significant impact on post-Genettean focalization theory. In particular, Bal draws attention to the ambiguity in Genette's external focalization regarding who sees, what is seen, and how it is viewed. Because even ordinary "non-focalized" passages are rarely completely free of point of view, attitude, restriction of perceptual field, or emotional position she presents a similar issue to the idea of zero focalization. Because the narrator, who is external to the story, sees things in an imagined manner rather than because they are observed from the outside, Bal suggests that Genette's external and zero focalizations be included in the same category as external focalization. In the present study, Saurabh Kumar Chaliha's story *Duporiya* (Midday) will be analyzed as a case of external focalization and how it focalizes the topic of female infertility in the story.

The World Health Organization states that millions of people who are of reproductive age are affected by infertility, which is a global health concern. According to its health assessment, one in six people worldwide suffer from infertility at some point in their lives. Infertility in women affects 48 million people globally. The countries of Central Europe and Asia, North Africa, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa have the greatest rates of female infertility. Numerous studies have been conducted to demonstrate the profound psychological effects of unintentional childlessness. The symptoms

that are most commonly described include somatic issues, elevated levels of anxiety and sadness, diminished self-esteem, feelings of guilt and blame, and anguish. It's notable that these papers hardly ever address social and cultural ramifications. For this reason, it is necessary to examine how society views these childless women and how it treats them. That is why we require literature to examine how society understands and treats these childless women.

Chaliha's story of *Duporiya* differs from his depictions of the anxious lives of those living in contemporary cities. His writings, which emphasized the portrayal of the complex human mind against the backdrop of a society that was progressively changing, represented an unsentimental approach to life. Chaliha used a narrative style that disregarded linearity and was fragmentary in order to depict this complex reality. However, we notice that the narrative of the selected story, *Duporiya*, is quite fluid and straightforward. The story is actually set in a semi-urban location outside of the city, far from the bustle of the metropolis. The storyline of the narrative is conversational in nature. The quiet background of midday appears to be a metaphor for life's contentment and tranquilly. However, the story's private conversation between the two ladies reveals a complex picture of their relationships, psychological domains, and family lives. This exchange functions as a framework within which the story of another woman is revealed. The dialogue between the two women in a rural environment introduces the third woman, the character in the inner narrative. A few days ago, one of these two women had a chance encounter with the third woman; now, she is sharing her story with the other woman, who is listening with interest. The midday sun creates the ideal setting for a private discussion between the two women, during which the young woman discloses the presence of a baby inside her. The woman shares the news with the other woman, or the story's narrator, in the frame narrative. The narrative portrays the common people's basic values and customs, along with their different responses to the third woman's childless situation. This narrative addresses the difficulties, stigma, discrimination, and excruciating suffering that an infertile woman must endure in traditional Assamese society. This society frequently holds women responsible for infertility in marriage, despite the fact that infertility is a medical condition that does not discriminate. There are two narratives in this story: the first can be interpreted as the frame narrative, and the second is the inner narrative. A writer can employ a frame narrative style in which a narrator in one location relates a story that takes place in a different time and place. It gives crucial background information and instructions on how to understand it. However, the inner narrative frequently has psychological and symbolic meaning for the characters. The two narratives frequently have some similarities, and the inner narrative exposes the frame narrative's truth. The narrator, a woman, assumes an external role in Chaliha's *Duporiya* in the frame narrative to introduce the readers to the subject of the second narrative, Majoni, and her struggle with infertility. The narrator and her listener discuss Majoni's childlessness and her husband Ramesh's increasing distance from her. They actually demonstrate how far Ramesh has distanced himself from his wife's family. He keeps himself busy, leaving early in the morning and coming home late at night. Even after all these years, both women question if Ramesh would have been pleased to see the narrator at his house. He doesn't seem to be concerned about Majoni's sluggish recuperation from paratyphoid, and she appears to be preoccupied with daily household tasks without any assistance from domestic help. The main focus of this story's frame narrative is Majoni's poor health and childlessness. A childless couple whose mental isolation from one another is steadily growing is shown to us by the narrator. The wife without children is experiencing depression and loneliness. Like Borma in Arupa Patangia Kalita's *Miss Havisham* Abeli Majoni also seems to suffer from compulsive obsessive disorder, for which the narrator of the story notices her compulsive cleaning and re-cleaning of things. The writer Chaliha is trying to interpret the psychological consequences of infertility on the part of both men and women.

In the inner narrative, there is also an intimate conversation between two women—the narrator of the first narrative and the focal subject of both narratives. Here, the external focalization shows us the different reactions of the family members of Majoni's in-laws and her neighbour. The empathetic listener is informed by the narrator about Majoni's unique relationship with the young neighbour girl, Lakhimi. Since Majoni has no experience of raising children, the girl's mother disapproves of Majoni's habit of constantly filling Lakhimi's mouth full, despite the fact that Majoni loves her and even helps her get ready for school. Lakhimi has the habit of offering rice to the crows to know from their pecking of the rice which direction a guest would come from. She would lay out five small portions of rice for the crow to come and peck. One portion would be in the middle, and all around it to the North-South and East-West would be four other portions. And the portion pecked by the crow would show the direction from which a guest would come that day. It is a wonderful Assamese tradition to display love and affection for the guests. However, it merely highlights Majoni's isolation and her fervent desire to connect with someone with whom she can discuss her ideas and emotions. She can't contain her joy, nevertheless, when the narrator and her son arrive at her house. In the narrative, Lakhimi receives visits

from four distinct family members, each of whom serves as a reminder of her terminal sterility. Majoni's mother-in-law often travels from the East and asserts that she is the only one who believes Ramesh's wife is not a cursed woman; rather, she has an auspicious quality about her, even if she has never been able to conceive. With a sense of finality, she continues by saying that Majoni's karma dictates that there is nothing that can be done about it. Suren Thakur is the guest from the West. His lovely wife, Rupali, goes to Guwahati to the Radio Centre to record her songs. Their perfect family with a three-year-old kid definitely brings joy to Majoni, but when they leave, she feels "a little sad, a little hollow inside her somewhere" (Goswami, p. 202). Even the severe comparison between Majoni and Rupali on the basis of their particular beauty and status as moms is hinted to by the narrator. From the North sometimes comes Akshay, Ramesh's brother; while en route home, he stops by. He never seems to change his gloomy, sour demeanour, and it's obvious that resentment is building within him, growling and rumbling like thunder. Majoni knows her brother-in-law blames her for his brother Ramesh's financial collapse. He thinks, "Ramesh could have easily married a nice girl; he could have so easily obtained a bride with the combined qualities of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and Saraswati, the goddess of learning, and with oodles of talent and money, but all he got was her, as a perpetual burden over his head" (Goswami,P204). Only Kangsa's uncle from the South does not admonish her. He advises her to give up the talismans and charms that are commonly used in the Assamese community in order to treat the health problem of infertility. He assures her that her case of strange infertility is not rare and that any problem may be cured with time. Majoni can't keep talking about her various guests and their reactions to her situation. The two women attempt to enjoy the solitude of midday, but a crow pecks at the rice in the middle, signaling that the family's return visitor will be the next. It's interesting that she says at the end of the story that she can feel something moving inside of her. We notice how in both narratives, the single narrator, with her external focalization, analyses the problem of Majoni's childlessness. Both narratives suggest a special female bond, which disapproves of society's treatment of a childless woman. In Assamese society, noontime is often said to be the time of the woman, as they find this little time after completing their duties at home. In the story, both the women in both narratives unfold their feelings at this time against the backdrop of silence.

Conclusion:

In Saurabh Kumar Chaliha's story *Duporiya*, we find two women talking about a familiar third woman who is childless. To speak about Majoni's problem, the writer has taken advantage of an intimate conversation between two women whose conditions are different from Majoni's as both have children, yet their empathy for the childless is beautiful. The external narrator looks at the issue of female infertility from the outside in the first frame of the narrative of the story. It exposes the rift between the husband and the wife over the issue as well as the growing distance between two families. But it is the internal narrative where the victim herself informs the narrator about the harsh treatment she has to bear with her mother-in-law, brother-in-law, or even her neighbour. Women in childless marriages are generally viewed as ill-fated and accused of transferring their misfortune to their husbands as well. These mistreatments, coupled with unmet societal expectations, affect Majoni's mental health. The silent midday in the frame narrative sets the tone of the intimate conversation between two women. But in the second, its silence represents the lifeless, soundless life of Majoni when she stays alone at her house. The crow being an ugly bird is not tolerated by all, though it always cleans our surroundings, in the same way Majoni's act of taking care of household chores never gets any appreciation from others only because she is childless. Nevertheless, Chaliha wonderfully shows how the crow pecks at the rice from the middle, giving the hint that a family member will return. It may indicate that with the arrival of her baby, her relationship with her husband, Ramesh, will be revived. In conclusion, we can say that Chaliha has dealt with the issue of female infertility in all its physical and psychological aspects. His portrayal of Majoni's weakness due to her recent recovery from paratyphoid, her mental distress, and the hint at her suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder of cleaning is very authentic to that of a childless woman in our society. Equally genuine is her family member's and immediate society's reaction to her problem.

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