

Sex Sirens in the Novel, Making the Minister Smile

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Abstract – Making the Minister Smile depicts a topsy-turvy picture regarding love and sex. Here Indian ladies influenced by the western culture are shown as very free and daring in fulfilling their romantic and carnal desires. They simply want to keep the affairs secret. They are shown as loving wives who feign chastity to their husbands to keep them happy and contented. But they would prefer the whole affairs in their own terms and conditions and would easily get hurt if their pride is offended. The traditional roles are subverted mainly because of western education or cultural influence.

Key-words: Sex Sirens, Pious Indian Lady, Traditional Roles, Subversion Of Stereotypes, Essentialization Of Indianans.

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INTRODUCTION

When the topic of Romance and sex are studied in the Indian English Novels, generally Indian people are shown as shy and reserved in matters of love and sex. Love, romance and sex are considered as sensual derangement by the traditional sections of people in India. Love is to follow marriage and marriage is to be solemnized after matching horoscopes as well as financial and social status of the families. Indians when they are entangled in unethical love and sex often get themselves into a lot of emotional imbroglio. Indian psyche is subtle and designing and it needs the help of logic in matters of romance and sex. But Indians born and brought up in the West seem to have a tendency to imitate the West in these matters.

The novel, *Making the Minister Smile*, contains some elements which Naik in his book, *A History of Indian English Literature*, describes as the essentials of a successful Indian English Novel. The novel tells of "sadhus", "royal families", "Indian women – either pious paragons or seductive sirens according to your mood and choice" (287). As per the statement of M.K. Naik, royal families and Indian women-either pious paragons or seductive sirens are elements of a popular Indian English Novel. Exactly the very same combination of ingredients could be seen in the novel *Making the Minister Smile* by Anurag Mathur. This study probes into the very nature of this combination of elements.

SEX SIRENS IN THE NOVEL

In the novel, *Making the Minister Smile*, the themes of love, sex and morality are depicted totally in a manner deviant from the traditional way it has been treated in usual Indian English novels. The novel portrays the ladies from another angle. Here, Chris, the young American business man is introduced to Kalpana Singh, the fiancée of Ajai Vir the son of the business man Ram Kapoor. For the royal family part, Kalpana Singh is described as "the daughter of a minor royal family that had fallen on hard times" (22). Further she is depicted as a sex siren. Chris is extremely charmed by her beauty, but he fears to express it as she is betrothed to his friend Ajai Vir and he thinks that Indian girls are virgins till their marriage. Kalpana corrects him: "That was in another century. Today almost no one is. And one or two experiences don't really count" (24). Kalpana even suggests and invites Chris telling him that he has more chances than the Indian men. She elaborates: "Because you're safe. You won't tell your friends about it and a girl won't lose her reputation. Besides you'll return home and there won't be any complications later" (24).).

Kalpana lived by herself in a small apartment nearby since her parents preferred to live in the crumbling palace somewhere in the foothills of the Himalayas" (22). Chris, bewitched by the sheer beauty of the Indian lady is "also in a dilemma, because he sensed that she reciprocated his interest" (22). He tries to broach the subject to her by way of conversation. Chris and Kalpana engage themselves in a conversation:

"I always thought Indian girls were virgins till they got married"

"That was in another century. Today almost no one is. And one or two experience don't really count."

"You mean they have their fun, get married and become good, faithful wives."

"Good yes, faithful no."

"What does that mean?"

"It means the fun really starts after they get married."

"You're joking?"

"Not really."

"You mean I have a chance with Indian girls."

"Of course. More than Indian men."

"why?"

"Because you're safe. You won't tell your friends about it and a girl won't lose her reputation. Besides you'll return home and there won't be any complication later."

"I'm shocked,"

"Don't be. It's all quite civilized."

"What if the husband finds out?"

"Usually they never do. And even if they do, so what? They're usually having affairs on the side too."

"Amazing. But it must be among the elite only."

"Well yes, but also among the poorest people. And even the middle class is catching up. The only rule is 'Don't get caught and don't cause a scandal.'"

"I think you better stop. You're giving me ideas." (24)

After the entourage, they get back to their flat:

Chris reached out for her as they stepped inside and she came into his arms. "I would like you," he said as they embraced.

Later, when they both lay back naked and exhausted, he noticed with surprise that they hadn't even made it till the bedroom. He was also surprised by her skill.

"You and Ajai Vir must be practising this quite a bit."

He checked to see if she was displeased.

"Sort of," she stretched languorously. "Though I have a strict rule for him."

"which is?"

"Only above the waist and below the knees."

Chris laughed. "Why?" he blew on a strand of wet hair across her cheek.

"Oh, good Indian girl and all that you know. Saving myself for my wedding night. And not a word about this from you."

"Ow, ow, okay. Scout's honour."

She let go and got up stretching.

'She's gorgeous' thought Chris, desire stirring again.

"Not now," she said, slapping away his outstretched hand.

"Time to get back."

"Yes, Memsahib', thought Chris. I've done my duty!' he thought with surprise. 'Its as though I've been used. She wasn't involved emotionally. I was just a useful, well, tool?'

He grinned sardonically to himself. 'But who am I to complain?' he thought complacently, remembering the last half hour. (25-26)

Later Chris is almost obsessed with Kalpana and pines for more opportunities of intimacy with her. Once again Kalpana takes Chris to see different monuments and after the trip once again they drive to their apartment and make physical love. "Afterwards, as they lay exhausted, Kalpana asked, "So what do you think of India? You've been here long enough to form an opinion. What characterizes it for you?"(39). He tells that India to a foreigner is like "a nation of disembodied hands tugging at your sleeve insistently" (39). He also adds that is what India doing globally. Kalpana disagrees and comments "Next you'll be saying I'm like that too" (39):

"Nah, nah." Laughed Chris, gathering her into his arms. "I think of you as a great lay, maybe the best in my long and chequered career." He laughed.

Instantly she tensed and drew away from him. Chris could have kicked himself.

"Is that what I am to you?" she demanded, getting out of bed and starting to get into her clothes.

"Hey come back here," protested Chris, "I was just fooling."

In answer she threw his clothes at him. "Let's go," she demanded. (39)

There ends the game of physical love between them, despite the best effort of Chris. Later at the poolside party in Mumbai, Kalpana introduces Chris to her women friends as "Our foreign collaborator" and the following conversation proves the change in the attitude of the modern educated ladies in India:

"I'm going for a swim," yelled Kalpana to her friends as she left. "Entertain Chris, okay?" She stopped for a moment. "Not too much entertainment though," she warned.

The women all giggled. "Looks like he could keep us entertained too," one yelled back at Kalpana. They giggled again.

"So," asked another, "how often do you collaborate with the Kapoors?" the women were convulsed.

"I hope," added the third, "You personally help the collaboration get off the ground." They fell about in hysterics.

Chris walked past them with his head held high, but he couldn't resist grinning. 'Women, he thought, 'get them away from men, give them a drink and they're like eagles unchained. They'll rip at anything within reach, but they also soar high,' he had to admit (127).

Chris is also amused by the men's, especially Punjabi men's social salutation by hugging and fondling to one another: "He noticed how when two men spot each other, they stopped and hurled apparently disgusting obscenities, before charging with whoops at the other, like, tectonic plates colliding. He was surprised the earth didn't quake" (181). He also notices that their greetings to their friend's wives are even strange. "They folded their hands, covered their eyes decorously and cringed with servility" (181). The men greet their friend's wives as 'bhabhi', which means 'brother's wife'. But at times, especially at parties, Chris notices how the 'bhabhi' salutation becomes meaningless as the 'bhabhi' is grabbed by her waist and both fix up a rendezvous (182).

Thus the novel shows a flirtatious traditional married lady fixing a rendezvous with a young man who calls her "bhabhi". Chris finds the young man in a party, calling a woman "bhabhi" which means brother's wife in Hindi language. As the party progresses he and Kalpana notice how the man compliments the "bhabhi" that she is looking so cute and also how tactfully he seizes her by her waist. The man's hand slips further down and coaxes her. The bhabhi's narrowed eyes scan the crowd for her husband. She also manages to titter saucily at the same time and Chris marvels at her gifts. She replies to the young man's plea for a meeting: "Yaar you're *tho* so romantic,

you're really the limit," she accedes reluctantly to his skilful seduction. "Make a phone-shone tomorrow at 11 in the morning. Let's see," she promises vaguely (183). But narrating these incidents does not tantamount to selling India in Indian English fiction.

At the poolside party a wretched middle aged woman tries to play vampire and Chris flees away under some pretension. Mr. Sunder the assistant manager who takes care of the home affairs of the Kapoor's, requests Chris for "social magazine" like Playboy, under the pretension that they are for his friends. These scattered glimpses of a craze for lust perhaps is an indication of the general social features of the people in India and Chris notices that dancers in a Hindi song "look like a Las Vegas chorus line suddenly overcome by nymphomania" (51).

Even the American youth Chris is amazed by the trends in the Indian society as against his prejudice. It is also notable that even Chris is very sensible and delicate in the matters of sex and he even takes care not to ask Ajai Vir about Kalpana's whereabouts even when he pines to meet her, thinking that it would look odd (85).

SUBVERTING STEREOTYPES

Making the Minister Smile gives a saga of sexual feats of the so called virtuous Indian ladies. -The novel shows how the traditional values are flouted in the modern Indian society even by the supposed Indian chaste women of modesty. Ajai Vir's fiancée, Kalpana takes the charge of taking Chris around the city and Chris is attracted to her beauty. He suspects that she is also interested in him. But he keeps restrain out of his fear of the aftermath. But she tells that such affairs are prevalent among elites and the poorest. Even the middle class are catching up with it. Thus they very casually go for the physical act and Chris is amazed at the expertise of the girl. To his remark that Ajai Vir and she would be practising it a lot, she answers that she does not allow Ajai because she has to keep the Indian girl's purity concept intact. Later the traditional "bhabhi" who fixes a rendezvous with a young man also shows how values are flouted in the modern Indian society.

Kalpana the fiancée of Ajai Vir tempts Chris the American youth and teaches him that "The only rule is 'Don't get caught and don't cause a scandal'" (24). It is Chris's inadvertent comment offending her pride and not any ethical dilemma that puts an end to her enjoyment. There is the picture of another Indian lady, Amita who also falls for the advances of Chris and only because of Kalpana's intrusion that Chris could not consummate the relationship (140). Another Indian lady in her late forties also tries to seduce Chris and he virtually flees away from her (129-130).

CONCLUSION

The various feats undertaken by the Indian ladies in the novel undermine the stereotypical gendered assumptions of male dominance in the Indian society. The modern ladies of India represented in the novel are not way behind the “scheming witches” (26) as Rana Kabbani puts it when he tells about the Europe’s myths of the Orient. The novel vouchsafes the disavowal of so many fundamental assumptions and values as the Indian characters are drifted away by the whirlwind of globalization and its influence on corporate and private life. Women are traditionally portrayed either as chaste or unsullied or as sex sirens as Sara Suleri points out: “Anglo-Indian narrative schematizes the Indian women into two parallel images: she is either sequestered in the unknowability of the *zenana* or all too visible in the excessive availability of the professional courtesan...” (92). But the narration in any of these novels, does not stoop to hyperbolic descriptions made into essentialization of Indianans.

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