

Debating Cultural Identity: Krishna Sobti's *Mitro* (to hell with you)

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Abstract: Mitro is a representative woman of the contemporary society and she sees her satisfaction lying somewhere else but not in the given matrix. She looks ahead of the time. She faces 'her husband's violent wrath and mother-in-law's awed remonstrations' (The Hindu). She realizes her subjectivity and personhood through her senses and emotive expressions. In social conditioning, a woman has to be meek, silent and dependable upon her husband. She has not to be vocal as she is not the active articulator in the public domain. She does not need space to speak for herself. In contemporary society, women are creating space for themselves through their active articulation in public domain. Mitro has set an example for the society through her traits and she changes the views of a male dominated society that a woman also has her personhood and she lives for. She is not made for role player only she has also her subjectivity. Gradually, women are shifting their dimensions.

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Mitro is a representative woman of the contemporary society and she sees her satisfaction lying somewhere else but not in the given matrix. She looks ahead of the time. She faces 'her husband's violent wrath and mother-in-law's awed remonstrations' (The Hindu). She realizes her subjectivity and personhood through her senses and emotive expressions. In social conditioning, a woman has to be meek, silent and dependable upon her husband. She has not to be vocal as she is not the active articulator in the public domain. She does not need space to speak for herself. In contemporary society, women are creating space for themselves through their active articulation in public domain. Mitro has set an example for the society through her traits and she changes the views of a male dominated society that a woman also has her personhood and she lives for. She is not made for role player only she has also her subjectivity. Gradually, women are shifting their dimensions. Sobti has touched the spirit of a woman through her narratives and she has made every effort to establish the concept of change. She has developed the characters against the traditional outlook. Here Mitro's says:

Mitro's kohl-lined eyes gleamed. "Maaji, don't brood so over your son. His own deeds will fling him across the

black seas.” “I will send you on that pilgrimage before that happens!” and Sardarilal pounced on Mitro and grabbed her by the wrist again. Dhanvanti shoved her son aside and dragged Mitro out by her arm. “You will see your mother dead, Sardarilal, if you dare cross this threshold!” Then she called out to her elder son, “Banwari, come out for a moment.” (Mitro 11-12)

Sardari finds him unable to control the body of Mitro and he complains to his mother that Mitro has put our name down. Hence, we should control her. In social conditioning, it is presumed that the body of a woman must be controlled by husband and a woman does not have her control over that. Sardari says:

Sardari fixed his beady eyes on his mother. “Amma. Mark my words. This beauty will take the name and honor of this house down with her. Or she'll have me exiled across the black waters.” The veins on Banwari's brow grew taut. He turned to his mother and said, “Ma, why don't you go and sit with Bapu?” Dhanvanti got up like an obedient daughter. At the door, she turned around and pleaded, “Give your younger brother some good advice, beta.” (13)

On the issue of honor Suhag is also standing with the family she negotiates her identity in the social norms made by the social conditioning as well as political agency. Suhag says:

Suhag led the old people out of the room. When she returned, the two brothers were still standing there, silent and glum. She went into the room and said, “Bahen, Mitro, why do you push things so far? Just listen to what your husband says.” Mitro looked at Sardari. Then training her gleaming eyes at Banwari, She sighed, “Ah, my wise Jethani, what would you know of the sweet tales and trials of love!” (16)

I quote here Arindam Chaudhuri and his book *Count Your Chickens Before They Hatch* where he submits his views that self-motivated group of the people do not wish to against the current of water howsoever they are exploited by the system. They do not wish to have change in their circle. This is the method of the emotionally meaningful discourse of affective investment and further he says:

People with passion for work generally have the courage to whistle while they work. These people enjoy their work thoroughly. They laugh while at work... they like to take personal responsibility ... they do not blame their subordinates or the government. (26)

Similarly, we find that the Mitro's family members are also self-motivated emotionally under the rubric of cultural fabric therefore they do not need the change like factory workers in the family. On return, Mitro needs space to recognize her own self. The family members like jethani (elder one daughter-in-law) and Majhali (Younger one daughter-in-law) articulate their expressions in favor of their mother-in-law and they also wish to get the support of Mitro as well through their emotional discourse. Arindam Chaudhury further clarifies that the workers voluntarily work hard and enjoy the circle wherever they live. On other hand, cultural and social norms create their policies in this manner that they should get the maximum benefit through their policies and management. Krishna Sobti also develops her narratives through the man-woman's relationships. Her characters are very common. Mitro's says that we women do not have control over our body and face to be gazed by the male. Appearance and purity are created and not made. There is no ultimate modal of beauty, one can say white is beautiful while on reverse people can recognize black is beautiful. Thus Mitro speaks:

Mitro fidgeted. She had a good mind to ask Suhag-What control do you have on the face and form etched on my mind? But then she thought – My Jethani is surely pure and chaste. How else would she have guessed that I was talking to Niyamat? (21)

There is a tradition to validate the personality of woman to some other women and create discourse on the life and develops meanings thereafter. Hence, we can say that the position of woman is always a matter of investigation and justification. In the family of Mitro, she has been compared to some other women for their silence and meek behavior as they are not vocal in the public as well as private domain. People need such type of women. They are not recognized in the social foray. They do not have their personhood and they do not ask for their rights. They are silent. They do not articulate their words in the society. They are appreciated for having such specialization. People call them *devi*. Mitro asks for her independent identity and do not wish to be part of the group. She needs her own space to look into. Therefore, she speaks for herself:

Mitro was about to retort but held back seeing Bawarilal's shadow at the door. Recalling last night's exchange, she lowered her veil a little and teased, "Jethji, what am I compared to my Jethani Suhagwanti, but spare me a glance too!" (23)

Mitro's sister-in-law is not given proper care by her husband for whom she requests him to provide her proper medicine as she suffers from palpitation. But, her husband does not give her proper attention. Her

problems are heedless/unimportant for him. Mitro asks about her ailments:

Devrani, what ails you at such a tender age? These damn fainting fits suck all the blood from the body!" Phoola looked reproachfully at Gulzari and limply stretched her arm. "Who cares for me, bahen? Who listens? I have tired of telling them. I have no more strength left, but they think that I'm faking it all. Who will convince them that I suffer from palpitation?" "Palpitation? What are you saying, Devrani? That is the direst of ailments! Mitro looked sternly at her brother-in-law. "Gulzarilal, drop everything else and look after my Devrani. Or you'll surely lose a beautiful woman!"(25)

Sardarilal abuses her wife whore of whores and does not accept her loving wife. The wife complains to her father-in-law that your son has no capacity to satisfy her feelings. She justifies her wishes and she wants to fulfill them. Sardari hissed: "You whore of whores! Babu may not agree today. But one day, all your friends and paramours will..."(38) Mitro also have her rejoinder and says that every woman has her self-respect and one cannot allow to tarnish that very image. "Hand on waist, Mitro cut in, "You heard him Babu. Which woman will stay quiet after such abuses?"(39) Woman has to speak for herself and she should also learn how to control her body and mind that is the real gist of this paper. Sobti has also made her attempts to realize these lines in every woman. Mitro speaks for her self therefore she is not easily accepted in the social arena. She says to Suhag about her identity that she has formed in the social set up: "You resent me because I am beautiful and desirable, because I speak my mind, don't you?"(61)

Sobti's words are still relevant what she said in later twentieth century about the safety and security of women. Today, half of our time and energy waste for safety of girls in their life. This is the problem of our society. Krishna has raised this issue through her narratives how a woman gets satisfied when the daughter reaches home safe. Mayawanti says that she does not ask for money or anything I just need safety of her child: "Don't talk about the gold, bahu. Isn't it enough that the girl's back home safe and alive? If her Brothers hadn't reached in time, god knows what those hungry monsters would have done to her."(70) Dhanwanti wants to play with her grandsons therefore she requests the great almighty of the world to shower the blessings on her bahu. She also asks her bahu to go for fast for having the blessings of God. In social discourse, it is presumed that the completeness of the life is possible only after having sons and daughters otherwise life is not complete. Consequently, mother-in-law also needs such issues in her home. Hence,

Mitro submits her views before her mother-in-law and says that it is fault of your son that I am not producing the child so you should make an effort to put your son in proper form that is more needed than putting question on me. She says:

Mitro stared incredulously at her mother-in-law. Then she squatted cross-legged on the floor. Shaking her head, she said, "Go on, wet the whip and lash me some more, Amma! Why only seven, I shall bear fifty, or even hundred!" Then a crooked smile spread on her lips. "If I could, I would indeed have raise a hundred from my womb. But Amma, first get your darling son in shape. Make my statue of stone come alive!" (84)

In discourse analysis, it happens to us that women are silent or being silenced through the cultural scripts or socialization, but, it is Krishna Sobti who has changed the discourse from subaltern to mainstream and changed the question. Sobti has raised those issues which have not been answered over the period of time. She puts a new discourse in the societal space. When Mitro raised questions on the manliness of her husband Sardarilal she was asked to go and live a few months in her parents' home for a change. She asks, how you could say that the things will be changed within three months. How it is possible. Her mother-in-law enacts her views and says that we will go for fast and requests the almighty to put the things in right place. We will do whatever we could do for the benefit of Sardarilal. Dhanvanti speaks:

Seeing Mitro's eyes fixed on her expectantly, Dhanvanti threw her dice. "Beti, listen to me. Spend a month or two at your mother's, keep all the necessary fasts and rituals. And I'll take care of things here. When my bahurani returns, all her wishes will come true.".... Mitro joins her words, "I shall do whatever you say. Why just a month or two, to earn pleasure from my man, I shall fast twenty four fortnights!" (85)

Mitro's mother also have wishes for her son-in-law to have bright youth ahead therefore she blesses him : "Sardarilal bent down to touch his mother-in-law's feet and Balo showered blessings on him, "May your youth flower a hundred times, Sardarilal!" (103) Mitro also joins her words in order to prove herself and she says that one should not control one's life as everyone knows that life is like a free bird so let her free to roam: "How will you lock up your heart free as a pigeon, dear Bibo? It demands fresh feed every day." (103) Balo looked at Mitro's breasts appearing heavy under her muslin cloth, to see this, she observed about her pregnancy and promises her daughter to sweeten the mouth if she gives a good news. Balo says: "I'd been craving for this sugar from your tongue, my Mitro!" (103)

Balo shares her feelings with daughter and says that every wife has to finish her food with husband's plate so that they could maintain long lasting relationships. Balo says: "Ari Mitro, since when have you been abstinent? If you don't eat from the same plate as your man, will eat..."(104) Mitro is also very clever so she responds in an immaculate manner and she says: "Bibo, I have a lifetime's right to share pleasure and pain with your Jamai. But come, you be happy for today!" (104) Krishna Sobti has given a new concept in the social as well as literary ambit that women are not a subject of passive articulators yet they are also contributing their ideas through active participation and they recognize their subjectivity as well as personhood. She has created a new space for women through her narratives. She has also changed the concept of earlier critics that women are made for private space and they do not have space in public domain. Now, they are articulating words and expressions to change their space from being silenced to vocal.

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