

Chapter – III

The Selector of the Souls

The award winning novelist Sauna Singh Baldwin explores honestly the maltreatment of female in 1990s and in 2000s in India. In this phallogentric and patriarchal world women are considered as expendable. Sauna Singh Baldwin admits in the acknowledgement of the novel *The Selector of Souls*, “Demographers estimate that 45 million baby girls were missing in India in the nineties, and 42.4 million from 2001-2008 as a result of prenatal selection. Worldwide, 160 million girls are estimated missing since the 1970s. Those missing girls inspired this novel” (Baldwin 545). Jasbir Jain defines in his book *Women in Patriarchy* that the efforts are being done to ameliorate the bad condition of women in society but the situation is intact:

The history of Indian woman’s social status is also the story of its deterioration. The past centuries failed to become the founding stones for her social edifice, instead, they acted like thunderbolts to bring it down. Consequently, instead of becoming stronger and better, her condition became progressively weaker and despicable. Last few years did however turn a new page in the history of her life, compelling society to view the woman’s situation with a new perspective. At this point in time, although the Indian woman has not been able to acquire a new form by discarding her own values and beliefs, like the women of Turkey, Russia, and other nations (Jain 226).

The novel *The Selector of Soule* explores the true condition of Indian women in Indian ambience. The novel not only includes the prenatal gender selection because of which so many girls are killed even before they are born but the novel also deals the issue of infanticide of baby girls, domestic violence and many more. This is the hard

reality that our so called civilized society. In the novel, *The Selector of Souls*, Damini wonders at the birth of the baby girl to her daughter, Leela and says, “What terrible deeds must this soul have done in a past life, to now be punished by taking form as a girl. What will she face but suffering that lead to more suffering” (Baldwin 236).

Most of the male characters in the novel are misogynists whether it is Damini’s son-in-law Chunilal or Anu’s spouse Vikash or Amanjit, the Sardar the son of Damini’s employer. Chunilal treats his baby very badly and even refuses to name her. He deems the new born baby a hard burden to carry. Vikash, who is husband to Anu, behaves very badly with Anu and treats her like a thing. He harasses her and finally creates such a situation where she seeks divorce.

The novel mainly revolves around two women Anu and Damini. Anu is the battered wife of Vikash. Vikash uses his power and influence on Anu and mistreats her. Damini loses her job because of the death of her employer and comes to assist the safe delivery of her daughter Leela. Sauna Singh Baldwin interweaves the intimate, close and personal world of two women (Anu and Damini) whose lives are not so much different from each other. They are the doomed characters of the novel. Damini is the fifth daughter of her parents and she does not have even a brother. Her mother is killed because she was unable to produce a male baby. Without any fault, she is treated like an animal and faces the repercussion.

Above all, these female characters have the courage to face the reality. Anu, who is treated like a dumb animal in her family and mistreated every time, finally resolves to seek divorce. She starts working in a Catholic church for the betterment of the women of the area after that she opens up clinic and fulfills her life-long desire to help the needy. On the other hand, Damini, who is sacked unceremoniously from her

job after the death of her employer, comes to help the safe delivery of her daughter but when she comes to Gurukul she finds everything different here. The new born baby is considered a burden and no one is ready to adopt her just because she is a girl. Her mother refuses to feed her and her father refuses to name her. Although Leela's breasts are swollen yet she is not ready to feed the new born baby:

Leela's breasts are now swollen and painful, but she will not feed her baby. Today all persuasion failed again, so Damini sent Kamna to Vijayanthi's house to ask if there is another woman in the village who can feed it. One sweeper woman came the answer. Damini threatened to bring that sweeper-woman to feed Leela's child if Leela wouldn't. But all Leela said was, "Let the sweeper-woman feed the child and keep her- we won't take her back." What use is to feed this girl for a few days if Chunilal and Leela refuse her love and carrying thereafter? All girls need is a little love and caring, but... so many die of falling down hillsides or into wells, so many catch fevers or starve. (Baldwin243-44)

This is the situation of new born girls as they are considered the burden right from the very beginning till their marriage. Both mother and father are equal in their treatment towards the girl. Not only had the mother of the new born girl but the father also treated her very badly. As in the novel, Chunilal behaves when he says, "If it's a girl, I don't want to see her... "Let the gods find her a name, I refuse to name her." Leela is the mother of the new born baby but even being a mother she doesn't think even for a second. She herself is a woman but after all she wishes, "I wish the girl had never been born."

Finally Damini dumps that baby in front of Lord Golunath by giving tobacco in her mouth. Later on she thinks that girls are burden on this land then she starts

telling the sex of unborn babies and considers it a good service to humanity. In this enthralling, deeply imagined novel two extremely attractive, spunky and strong willed women deals with the society in a different way and tries to give a new shape and new role to our society to perform. Anu, who flees an abusive marriage, comes to Gurkotto the native village of Damini for the welfare of the women.

The Selector of the Soul begins with the most horrifying and the heart touching account in which Damini commits a crime out of love. When the girl is born then Damini observes and looks for the penis but she does not find it anywhere and then she speaks, “What a terrible deeds must this soul have done in a past life, to now be punished by taking form as a girl. What will she face but suffering that leads to more sufferings.”(Baldwin 236) When Damini tells after the birth of the girl to Kamna, the first daughter of Leela and Chunilal, he has another daughter. At that moment ‘Leela turns her face away and sobs and wails’. The family members of Damini cannot tolerate a new born girl. The baby goes on crying because of hunger. The author defines in most horrifying word when Damini says, “*He Ram* How can any of them sleep through this child’s crying? Chunilal who is the biological father of the daughter says, “She is not worth naming”. He does not make any preparation for naming her. The baby goes on wailing, it becomes crying, the crying turns to sobs. The poor baby is fed sugar water and *ghutti*. That is why ‘the creature begins to cry, as if for the suffering of all worlds’. ‘Tears are drying on the baby’s cheek. She’s asleep. But when wakes, she will need milk’ (Baldwin4). Damini then thinks that born as a baby girl is a curse in this world. She thinks that in the Chunilal will have to marry her off. It requires a lot of money that he does not have. The narrator defines the expenditure in these words:

And maroon velvet jewellery boxes spring open where the child lies. They display glittering 24- karat gold necklaces, finger-length gold earrings, gold cuff-bangles, uncut diamonds, nine-jewel necklaces. Leela and Chunilal must buy jewels like these and more for the Ganesh puja, and the sangeet, ,mehndi, chura-kalire, and saptapadi ceremonies to dress this girl as a bride.

Beyond Damini's reach, goldthread-bordered silk saris in plastic wrapping are stacked all the way to the ceiling, along with more jewellery and garlands made of hundred-rupee notes- presents Chunilal will give with this girl, to the groom's family... Chunilal will have to rent a *shamiana* as large for relatives and friends invited to this daughter's wedding (Baldwin5).

When Damini observes all this, she cannot bear and eventually takes a decision which haunts us. Because she asks herself very well, "how Chunilal and Leela afford such a wedding-and after they've already paid for Kamnas? They'll have to sell the truck, the cows, and the land, and become laborers'.

In order to lighten the burden of Chunilal and Leela, Damini fetches a shallow basket, lines it with the towel and returns to the baby girl. The child shifts, tiny lips yawn, but she does not wake as Damini lifts her into the basket and covers her with the towel. From her bedroll she takes a paper-wrapped cone of rolled *beedis* and slips it between her breasts (Baldwin7).

She takes the baby in front of the Lord *Golunath* and places the baby and 'draws the paper wrapped cone from between her breasts, takes a *beedi* in her mouth and bites down... with her forefinger, Damini pushes the tobacco into the tiny mouth. The baby's tongue emerges. She gags, then gulps but does not swallow'. Not only this when she places the baby to die there, Damini speaks a most horrendous lines which tags a question mark to the so called good society. She says, "Release the atman, girl-

body. Let it return to the place that continues long before and long after this world. Let it take shape when this world is better place for girls” (*Baldwin*9). Damini weeps the spirit of her mother joins her and says, “stop your crying, Damini. Chunilal will get better soon. They will have more children, maybe a son. He will not refuse to name a son” (*Baldwin*10). Thus the first part reveals that this world is not safe for the girls. Either they are killed in the womb even before they see the world and rest are killed in their infancy.

When the second part begins, the narrator takes us back in May 1994. Amanjit Singh, the son of Damini’s Mem-saab behaves properly with his mother. She is old and should be protected in her old age but in lieu of protecting her, he behaves with her like an enemy. He wants her to give the whole house to him and Timcu. He has come to get her signed on the paper.

Damini is sent to Mumbai when delivery of Amanjit’s wife Kiran is about to take place. Kiran gives birth to a baby girl and she was expecting a boy and that is why it hurts her when she comes to know that a girl is born. The girl is not given to her for hours after the birth. She is in a very depressed state and, “Most of the time, she just wept because she had made a daughter. Damini hushed her, saying, “Don’t let anyone see tears. Some might say your husband can’t afford this girl’s dowry. And don’t worry, next time you’ll have a boy.” (*Baldwin*59) This statement clearly proves that how boy greedy Kiran is. However it cannot be stated that Kiran and her spouse cannot afford the dowry and marry off their daughter but even after getting education they are still tradition and orthodoxy in their thinking.

Aman, who is a son to Mem-saab, files a case against his own mother because of some property reason. Aman would like to usurp the whole property and would like to corner Mem-saab. Mem-saab being a mother still hopes for the love and

affection from her own son. Although a mother gives her son everything but how much a son gives back to her mother or parent. In the novel, it is also described how desperate Mem-saab is when she is sitting in the court on the hearing of the property case. As is revealed in the novel, “Memsaab is waiting for Aman to come to her, put his arms around her, say he really will look after her, say he and Kiran will be kind... but Aman’s jungle-green turban never turns towards her.” (Baldwin100)

It is deemed by Damini that, “Widow hold their husband’s wealth in trust for their sons, that a woman’s *sbhagya* dictates if men be kind. But this is *Kalyug*, and in this eon of greed her men have forgotten their duty to be kind to their mother”(Baldwin127)After the death of Mem-saab, Damini wants to go to the cremation ground a little farther. Although she has spent her youth with her serving her but in lieu of it she just washes her, massage her with sandalwood paste. Not only she but all women of the world can do this not more than this. She says, “Mothers, daughters, sisters, daughters-in-law, friends- all these are useless at the hour of cremation. Only sons can light a funeral pyre, and lead a parent’s soul to the path of the son, that path of the gods on the way to brahman” (Baldwin133)

After the death of Mem-saab, she has no place to go but she is sent away by Amanjiwithout thinking the time period of hers with Mem-saab. If she goes to her daughter’s house, she will be considered a burden over there but she has no other place to go. When she is asked then she responds:

Everyman in this city must volunteer his opinion about where a woman is going, where she should be, where she should live...maybe she should go and ask President Shankar Dayal Sharma where can a woman like her live in old age? Maybe he can tell her how to live without an income, without begging, or selling her body (Baldwin138).

Even her own daughter is not ready to accept her. Damini says that she is paid pension and she can sustain her life with that money but her daughter is not convinced with this. She also requests, "I don't need much- just a place to sleep, a little food. To this day, I can carry heavy loads and walk up and down mountains"(Baldwin198).

In Gurkot, there is a tradition where a mother should not live with her own daughters. The same thing happens with Damini, who goes to stay with her daughter. When fifteen years ago, Chunilal goes to live in his wife's village, such sorts of comments are passed on him also. The villagers say that it is not our tradition and not the way to welcome mothers. At one time, Damini refers to a story of a man who does not have a son and his age is about seventy and even at this age he expects a son and for this purpose he brings a twenty years old wife to have a son.

Damini remembers her childhood and the words of her father used to speak. She brings gift for him in form of date and coconut and always places these on her father's chair but he never thinks about her because:

Oh, she knows- he didn't want to feel affection for a daughter who would be leaving him as soon as marriage turned her into a woman. Loving a daughter, he used to say, was like watering your neighbor's garden. Unlike other fathers, he never beat her- maybe because she never did anything that might bring shame to his name. Instead he allowed her go to school till she was fourteen, almost to the week before her wedding (Baldwin149).

This is the situation in rustic area where girls are deemed burden and parents would like to unburden this weight as early as possible. They do not want to think what the age of the girl is and what girl wants. In the novel it has been told, "Her father's widow is only twenty, as Damini was when Piara Singh died."(Baldwin 149).

Damini is considered unlucky and she is asked to leave her in-law because more accidents could happen if she stays with them.

Damini herself is a woman but in spite of all this she is doing what a woman at least should not do. She takes the women to the clinic for ultrasound as it is told, “I took women to the Jalawaaz clinic for ultrasound, and if they were having a baby girls. I would help them clean the babies out. I said the machine would be the selector of souls (Baldwin444-45).

The second woman whose story has been narrated in the novel is Anu, a Hindu-Christian woman. She is married in a prosperous family where she is given all sorts of facilities but her husband does not treat her like a woman. On the basis of myths, women are always given subordinate roles whereas men possess the power. Because of these myths women suffer. Jasbir Jain defines:

Patriarchy, at the outset, stands for power and authority. The word has a number of affiliation and goes on to symbolize possession, control and belonging. Patria can stretch its meaning to relate to nation. Moreover, women are not the only ones to be oppressed by it: all marginalized categories, whether men or women, get caught in its web of authority. And its arms extend to almost every field- philosophy, law, governance, society itself, and the more modestly constructed family. The roots of patriarchy lie in the myth of creation and the religious worlds based on them (Jain13).

The narrator says that she has too much money. “She can get a facial and have her make up done at the Taj Palace Hotel whenever she needs to cover up a swollen or purpling eye”. (Baldwin40-41) She is punished corporally by her spouse and she considers that life in the capital city is worse. At one place the narrator reveals her physical punishment by saying:

She is trembling, and has to sit down, holding her ribs. Sitting hurts. She holds her ribs, takes deep breath, and stands. A bulldozer seems to have crushed her inner space, thrust each organ into the next. Maybe a rib broken but getting a x-ray will notify the world- beyond your beautician, nothing is confidential in the capital city (Baldwin41).

Rano, who is staying in Toronto, is as lonely as Anu in Delhi. Women are to suffer in the world. When both women are talking on phone they start talking in a falsely bright tone but later on they speak about their sufferings. While talking with Rano, “She soon faltered, tears came, and she whispered to her cousin, “You know how it was, Rano. I never wanted this child.”Chetna overhears all this and asks, “If you didn’t want me, why did you have me?”(Baldwin44)Anu cannot tell her that she conceives her because of rape.

In this money-minded and patriarchal society each and everyone aspires for a boy rather than a girl to sustain the family business. The same case happens in Anu’s in-laws. When Chetna takes birth, her husband first word after seeing Chetna was, “I wanted a boy. Everyone wants a son. An heir and a spare, if your wife does her duty.Unless she is as “unnatural” as Anu” (Baldwin47).

Not only this Anu is suffering in her in-law. She is thinking to take divorce but this is also considered a taboo in Indian society. It is deemed that to take divorce is a European tradition and not Indian. Although Anu considers her in-law’s house worse than Delhi’s Tihar Jail yet she is forced to live in that house. As the narrator says:

Women from “good” Hindu families don’t divorce. Nor should Indian Catholics divorce or annul their marriages. Women staring boldly from covers of English-language magazines get divorces. It’s a European tradition.

Anu plays with the black and gold beads of her mangalsutra, the marriage necklace she has worn for nine years. Which is worse-being in this jail or in Delhi's Tihar Jail with other women? And which is lesser sin- divorce or taking a life? (Baldwin55).

Eventually she has decided to get divorce. She does not want to bear more. That is why she pays a visit to Shruti Nandkarni, the lawyer. When she is going to meet the lawyer, everyone looks at her 'brusied face, her swollen eye, her throbbing temples'. She is not only the woman who is mistreated but she also meets two more women in the lawyer's office, 'whose problems were probably worse than her own'. At this juncture she concludes that women are mistreated everywhere. The lawyer asks whether you have complained in the police station. Anu replies, "Vikash might have beaten me again if I had." She also tells, "His usual tip is higher than a constable's salary." (Baldwin64) She also tells that Vikash did not want to marry me but he was thinking to marry somewhere else but the girl's parents married off the girl somewhere else and 'Vikash's parents found him a substitute -me.' Thus marriage is not a marriage but a compromise for Vikash and his parents. No one thinks about the girl what she wants. She is made the scapegoat. Vikash again and again shouts at his mother, "No one can replace her!" When Mrs. Nandkarni tells her 'the child is the property of her father', she feels heart broken. Even after seeking divorce a woman is not allowed to have her children. She defines, "Women organizations are working very hard to change this law." She feels alone but even then she does not want to seek help from her parents because she is not willing to pester her parents and like an independent woman she says, "Yes, and I don't want my parents to look after me- they have been through enough."

Anu is so much disturbed because of her marriage with Vikash that she starts thinking about her past days when Sister Imaculata offers her to be a nun in a Church. Now she thinks that if she had given her consent to be a nun then she would not have seen this day.

She talks about her divorce with Rano, who is staying in Toronto, and finds the same situation there also. Rano starts weeping when she sees the desperate condition of Anu. Anu would like to go ahead in her life but her daughter comes in her way somehow because she has to perform her duty of being a mother. Her motherhood comes in her way. She says, "If I had never had Chetna, I wouldn't be losing her now. If Chetna had never been born, she wouldn't be faced with losing her mother. What a selfish mistake I made by not having an abortion."

Her uncle, Sharad Talwar, shows the fear of Christianity to her by saying that it is making the best use of you like innocent women. He asks, "what is all this other nonsense? You have been tricked by that Padri! Can her and his convent look after you in some way your family cannot?" Anu gives extremely befitting reply by saying, "I don't want to be taken care of. I want to contribute" (Baldwin91).

Sharad forces again and again Anu to go back to her husband because he thinks that her dharam is to be with her husband and not to be in the Church. By this time Anu becomes restless and impatient as the narrator defines:

Anu rises to her feet and lets her sari slide from her left shoulder. Sharad Uncle's eyes widen –he holds up his hand, palm outward. "*Arrey! Arrey!*" He looks around, either to flee from her immodesty or to verify no other man is looking.

Anu unbuttons the top button of her sari blouse. Comprehension and dismay chase across Sharad Uncle's face at the slight of the purpling stains on her

skin. Look, “both of you look”. Anu’s voice feels thick and strange. Is it not enough? When will it be enough?” (Baldwin93).

Anu is adamant to seek divorce at any cost. Purinma aunty and Sharad uncle say that your problem may be because of not producing a son. Kohlis want son and son to drag the business. They do not want their business to be called ‘Kohli and Daughter’. Sharad wants to make her understand, “Pregnancy will cure you of these...hysterical wishes.” Anu refutes all the options laid to her. First she does not want any baby in such situation and by the way if she thinks about this option then there is no guarantee of her betterment. She evidently reveals that if another baby is girl then what will happen. She says, “Even if I wanted one or wanted Vikash to ever touch me again, there’s no guarantee it would be a boy.” They both point out at this and that shows that both of these spouses are so son minded that they frankly and immediately give them the options that with the help of these option you can find a boy. Sharad asks to Purinma aunty, ‘there is, there is – nowadays you can check with what is it...amnio-something?’ His wife immediately responds, “That’s old. You mean ultrasound.”

Anu is a modern woman who does not differentiate between son and daughter and bluntly replies to these avaricious couples by saying, “Ultrasound should be used to prevent disease or cure it. The sex of the child is not a disease. I would not abort a girl or a boy even if I did know.”

When it comes to the matter of Chetna’s marriage, she does not want to spread her hands before anyone and would like to arrange her marriage with her own money. She knows that she will work in a Church and a ‘nun is paid for her work’. When they meet for the compromise, Vikash father is saying, “Not to worry, beta. Not your fault.” He also pats his head while saying all this. It clearly shows that how much they

are disturbed because of the separation of the spouses. Even Vikash also hold his father responsible for this because he did not choose the girl but his parents chose Anu as a daughter in law of the house and that's why he says, "Yes, you chose her-ji." When two families are quarrelling with each other for the compromise, we never see that they are sitting for the compromise. They are leveling different-different types of accusation. Sometimes they call Anu, 'Anuchit- abnormal' rather than Anupam and so on.

Mr. Kohli mistreats Mr. Lal Saab and says that none other than you and your family cheated us. He says:

I made a Himalayan blunder by marrying your daughter to my son. You should reread the vedas. Tell your daughter to do so as well... you encouraged your daughter to believe she could shrink her duties and live a man's life. If this is what convent education does, then I say your mistake lie in education her. Tell me, sir, what would happen if every daughter-in-law in every family said she does not want children? (Baldwin109).

When it appears that they cannot reach an agreement, then conversation turns to Anu's daughter, Chetna. Mr. Lal talks about the responsibilities of the girl, Chetna. Vikash clearly denies and says, "Mr. Kohali waves this away, "A daughter- very sweet girl, pretty child. I am talking about sons, Lal Saab, sons."

Injustice is done in imparting education to girl child as we here in the novel when Vikash says, "Boarding school, like his alma mater? Waste of money. A girl doesn't have the intellect. She does not need life-long membership in an old boy's association." He also says, "The girl should remain where she is. I have other properties." Money is more important to Kohalies rather than their girl child. She is a

burden. Anu cannot serve the society in Chetna's presence and Vikash considers her an unnecessary burden.

When Anu and the other nun are talking about the sufferings of women, then the nun tells Anu, "Our sisters in Bangladesh and Pakistan say they've been treating women burned and blinded by sulphuric acid flung in their faces. Mercy me, but it is a cowardly way to take revenge on women who refuse or challenge men." It clearly shows that that mistreatment is going on not only in India but also in other neighbouring countries mentioned above.

Memsaab wants that a *gurdwara* and girl's school be constructed in Gurkot but her own son Amanjit Singh does not listen to her because 'no one listens to the women's wishes.' Even when Anu sends her daughter to Toronto, the pain of separation still haunts her. She wants to remain connected with her every time. It is also confirmed that if she remains connected she will never be able to forget her and it will also give both of them pain. Here motherly love is heart touching because of the circumstances both of them will have to bear the pain of separation. When we see the heart touching letter of Rano to Anu we feel a tinge of pain, when Rano writes: I feel you did the hard work of birthing this child, and we are enjoying her. I can't thank you enough, though I know how difficult it must be for you. Don't write to her too often. I'm worried it will only confuse her and delay her adjustment to us and Canada. Okey? (Baldwin158).

Rano is extremely worried about Anu when she comes to know that Anu is thinking to be a nun because she knows that she will get bored soon in this nunhood but she does not know how hurt Anu is about her company with her husband. But Rano does not know who Anu is. She is extremely modern woman who can go to any extent to fulfill her desires of happy life. As it is shown, "Doesn't know Anu still

dreams of killing her husband. That Anu could end up in prison or hanged if she... who is the real Anu? How can she know when she is herself?"(Baldwin158).

Anu is thinking about every aspect of life. It is not so that she has sent her daughter to Toronto and now she does not want to think about her. She is too much worried about her about her adolescent period and how and what she has to teach during this period. Even in one letter she is extremely worried about her menses and writes to Rano:

I began thinking I won't be with Chetna when her time comes. Could you explain menstruation? I don't want her to pick up ideas about being polluted and untouchable during your menses. Sikhs aren't supposed to have these Hindu customs but a couple of my Sikh students say their grandmothers still don't allow them in the kitchen during their periods, just like our grandmother. So anyway, please can you make sure? (Baldwin251).

It clearly shows that how much she is worried about her daughter, Chetna and her bring up. It shows her motherly pain and she wants co-operation.

Dadu's son has been killed in anti-Sikh riots after the death of Madam 'G'. So many woman become widow in the anti-Sikh riot, when question were asked to Home Minister why army was not called at that moment to avert the riots. Home Minister appears to shoo away the questions. After the riot when Dadu dies and he does not have any son to cremate his pyre even his daughter is not allowed to fire the pyre as it has been described here:

She must have called every pandit within a radius of a hundred kilometers – none would agree to allow a daughter to be present. But then she found one who said it was just for a daughter to perform last rites. He said the gods would countenance a woman's performance of last rites, even if society will

not- provided every man and woman in the family swore never to tell a soul his name. Thanks to that pandit, Anu sent her father to his next life as her brother would have, going to the crematorium, pressing a switch to reduce Dadu's body to ashes (Baldwin264).

This is the situation in India of Indian women who can't send her near and dear ones to the next life. Even on the name of cremation politics is played. When we see the sitting arrangement in the Inauguration Day for the chapel, we see discrimination goes on. As it is delineated in the novel:

Sister Anu helps Sister Bethany sling a long red ribbon between the pillars on the clinic veranda, then takes a chair behind the children's area, to survey the platform and the now-milling crowd. Glancing over her shoulder, she can see that better dressed men and women have claimed all the seats on benches on the clinic veranda. A few dalit and tribal men and women squat at Dr. Gupta's office door (Baldwin269-270).

Purinma aunty sends an email to Anu from Beijing and tells her about the reality of status of women. She attends a Conference on the Status of Women and writes to Anu and tells about the discrimination:

Writing this email from the Indian Embassy in Beijing and the Conference on the Status of Women. The first few days were interesting. Mrs. Clinton said we need to take bold steps, and that women's rights are human rights, even as thousands of Chinese women could not gain access to the sessions. My speech wasn't blacked out like hers, I didn't stumble at all. The conference declaration is actually going to say we "take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child" (Baldwin280).

It clearly shows that the condition of women is really deplorable not only in India but also throughout the world and people from all nook and corners are trying their best to eliminate this discrimination on the basis of gender. Conferences and seminars are being held all over the world to ameliorate the condition of women in the world.

There are two clinics in the village Gurkot namely Jalawaaz Fertility Clinic and Bread of Healing Clinic. Anu works in Bread of Healing Clinic and she complains about the wrong doings of Jalawaaz Fertility Clinic which openly waves a placard that reads “Pay Rs. 5000 now or Rs. 50000 later”.(Baldwin283) It is indirectly or directly indicating towards the new born babies. It is talking about the ‘cleanings’. Anu files a complaint against that clinic which ‘is flouting the 1994 Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act’. To confirm the gender before birth to abort the baby if it is girl, it is against the Indian law. It is against ‘the anti-gender- selection law and laws against advertising gender selection. But the SDM only assures her that I’ll look into the matter. He, in spite of taking action against the clinic owner, says, “He understood that the Jalawaaz Fertility Clinic was completion for Bread of Healing Clinic.” He says that you consider both of these clinics are in completion which cannot be. One is providing free service and another is private. But mainly what hurts us is that in spite of taking action against the owner of the clinic he is beating about the bush.

Even when women suffer because of some ailment, they are rarely taken to hospitals and if they are taken to hospitals then they are accompanied by their husbands, fathers, and brothers. It only happens when the situation is extremely critical. They are not only taken to hospitals by their near and dear male ones but their diseases are told not by themselves but the persons who accompany them. As it is

told, “Women come to the clinic once problems become so bad they cannot work, often accompanied by husbands, fathers or brothers who speak for them and describe their symptoms” (Baldwin288).

Anu asks Damini to work in the clinic because she can speak and understand the Pahari, they want such woman. But the most horrible thing is that when Anu asks her to work, then without thinking even a second she asks, “For cleanings?” Damini cannot differentiate between human life and weeds and plants. She thinks that baby girls are equal to weeds and they should be rooted out as early as possible. She says, “But it is like weeding- not all seeds can take root.” But Anu who is modern woman gets angry and says, “No, rising in her seat as she steps on the clutch. “Human life is more precious than potatoes and cauliflowers” (Baldwin288).

At one place Damini is engrossed in the work of ‘cleanings’ on the other hand she is thinking to marry off her son and not only marry off but also willing to get good girl. There is contradiction in her thinking. She frankly concedes, “I have to find him a girl – it’s very difficult these days. Girls the right age, from good families, all seem to be taken. You know a good girl?”(Baldwin289).

When Anu and Damini are going in the car, then Damini tells Anu about Kamna, grand-daughter of hers. Damini is telling about her what she wants, then Damini responds as if she does not consider her anything and says, “She is a girl yet. What can she know about wanting?”(Baldwin290).

Vikash not only gives her corporal punishment but he also uses abusive language for Anu, once he says, “You little viper. You’ve mistaken all my kindness for weakness. He moves towards her. Anu begins to scream.” (Baldwin316)

Anu talks to a lady named Goldina who is the native resident of Gurkot and comes to know about the reality of the cruelty meted out to them by their men. When

she tells the reality we feel extremely hurt by listening her story how she is treated in this place. It is not the case with Goldina but each and every woman of this place face the same kind of treatment. But unlike Anu they are not bold enough to divorce their husbands. They are happy with what they are. Goldina says:

Don't give me any medicine that might make me sleepy or unable to work, or Samual might slap me. If I complain too much. How much complaining is too much? Sister Anu's experience of violence pales by comparison with women in Gurkot. They seem accustomed to being slapped, pushed, and punched, not only by men but by older women- but who can become accustomed to humiliation? Yesterday she helped Dr. Gupta wash the stomach If a woman who "mistakenly" took insecticide. To protect her children form retaliation or loss of inheritance, she would not charge her husband or in-laws with emotional cruelty. The day before, she helped Dr. Gupta put a cast on a woman whose father-in-law smashed her patella because she served him cool tea. Men of Gurkot beat the women in their families hardest when women are most vulnerable – often when pregnant. Yet the women here don't divorce their husbands or leave their children as Anu did; they laugh and joke and carry on working (Baldwin338).

After the delivery, Goldina gives birth to a male baby and she becomes extremely pleased to find the male baby which was the dire requirement of the time. When Goldina comes to know about the sex of the baby, she becomes extreme happy and Damini as well. When Damini and Goldina talk about the baby sex, the most horrendous scene comes to fore immediately when we see that Goldina has decided to name him because it is a male. "“Moses”, says Goldina, caressing the baby's cheek

with her finger. “Hein”, says Damini. Already you’re naming?” Yes, he’ll live. Daughters don’t” (Baldwin344).

In the same clinic another delivery takes place of Kiran. She gives birth to a baby girl. She was also aspiring for a baby boy. At that moment an exchange of babies takes place theatrically. Kiran who is an influential lady demands that she be given baby boy and Damini does it for some money. When Goldina comes to about this switching of babies, she gets angry and starts weeping and accuses Kiran wiping her eyes and blowing her nose:

You’re afraid to have a girl. Will you be beaten? After one or two beatings, you get used to it. But”, she leans forward, and clasping each knee, “don’t do this paap. Give me my son back. Moses needs me... is your mother-in-law telling you today, make me happy, give me grandson? What will she ask for tomorrow? What will she ask you to do?...I know, I know women like me can’t get any rest or food or a single word of praise unless we have a boy. But you ? Don’t worry, you’ll get rest, you’ll get food even if you have a girl...(Baldwin352).

Generally in Jalawaaz Clinic women go for the confirmation report whether they have a girl or a boy. It is the general practice. We know about this when Goldina asks to Kiran, “Didn’t you go to Jalawaaz clinic, Kiranji? You don’t even have to walk. You can go by car and afford all the tests that would have shown you a girl was coming (Baldwin 354).

When she fails to take her baby boy from Kiran, she speaks heart touching words to Kiran but even after this Kiran is so adamant to have the boy. Although she knows very well that she has a girl but even then she is deliberately pressurizing her to take the baby. At that moment she says:

But if I give my son to you, he'll learn to be a vee-eye-pee at three, and a vee-vee-eye-pee by ten. His friends will be the sons of your friends, and there'll always be someone below him he can shout at or squeeze or hit. He'll learn to order others, slam doors and cuff anyone in his way. I see such patterns. But I'll teach your daughter sweetness and groveling and silence to protect her. If she grows up even half as beautiful as you, she'll be raped by some caste Hindu just to teach her a lesson or show her her place. She will learn to eat from the same plate as Samual and me, instead of having her own. She will complain a little when I send her away with her husband, but not very much because by then she will know how little Samual and I can do for her(Baldwin357-58).

Thus we see that how female are treated at such places. They are raped just because they are born in lower caste family. When Damini stops Goldina who is saying everything that comes in her mind, she attacks at Damini and says, "And you, where will you stop? Will you keep taking women for the test until every woman produces a son? What kind of world are you making? A world full of men, a world with no kindness, no gentleness- no sweetness?"(Baldwin359) when the discussion is going on regarding the baby, then Sister Bethany says with tense mind, "It was because Goldina is a dalit. Everyone can be poor- it is much worse to be poor and a dalit. And much worse than that to be poor and a dalit and a woman." It is considered that females are always treated like an object and they are not given due respect in the society.

Thus we see in the novel that machines are considered the selector of souls. If they are boy they will come to this world uncontrovertibly but if it is a girl then it will be cleaned out from the womb. Girls are not safe not even in the womb or outside the

womb. But still in the society there are so many women like Anu who do not abide by the set rules of the society. They come out from the society to assert their individuality and prove their power as a modern woman. Anu like women can change the society and the thinking of the phallogocentric world that thinks that women are to suffer and to suffer and to suffer only.

Women suffer a lot because of gender, religious, caste, and class inequalities. Sometime they are given due respect and other time they are mistreated and it happens because of patriarchal set up. As Sita Anantha Raman defines:

It is not surprising that women in India are often described as having two sharply contrasting aspects. In a region famous for goddesses with multiple visages, identities, and functions the first face is of the serene, primordial mother Great Goddess (Devi), Primal Energy (Shakti), and Nature (Prakriti), a gentle boon-giver who also slays demons. The other is the clouded face of the domestic handmaiden trailing behind men in life expectancy, nutrition, health, education, pay and other rights on subcontinent. However behind this colorful essentialization of Indian women lies the complex reality of myriads of feminine personas in a sea teeming with self-sacrificing heroines like Sita in the epic Ramayana, modern feminists in guise of Shakti, and the victims of gender, religious, caste, and class inequalities (Raman 11).

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