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Patriarchal Expectation and Feminine Psychology in Manu Bhandari's *"This is the Truth"*

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Abstract:
Society has unwritten rules and expectations for women. Women are expected to follow certain rules regarding propriety, love, marriage, forming family etc. Highly educated and urban raised women are not isolated from these expectations. The protagonist of Manu Bhandari's "*This is the Truth*", Deepa, is considered highly educated, urban raised and she became financially independent. She is confronted with the choice of her life partner, she oscillates between past and the present to make her choice. This paper examines if Deepa's choices are her own; or it is the result of conforming to patriarchal expectations and a result of Deepa's feminine psychology. The question is whether financial independence influences her choice. This paper examines "This is the Truth" by Manu Bhandari through feminist framework to find the answers to my questions.

Keywords: Choice, Patriarchal Expectations, Feminine Psychology, Truth, Feminism, Justice.

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Introduction

Women's choices in love and marriage are often considered private matters of emotion and "personal preference." But according to Feminist critics, what appears personal is often shaped by social code of respectability, family honour, sexual morality, and the demand that a woman reconcile their desire with duty. In such cases, female agency does not disappear but it becomes conditional . It has to be negotiated, and shaped by self-surveillance. This paper examines this process of negotiation through the lens of "*patriarchal expectation"* and "*feminine psychology "* in Manu Bhandari's short story *"This is the Truth"* (*Yehi Sach Hai*).

Manu Bhandari's short story *"This Is the Truth"* (*Yehi Sach Hai*) follows Deepa, a research scholar living independently. She is emotionally caught between her present partner Sanjay and her former lover Nishith. A trip to Kolkata for a job interview, triggers the return of memory and desire. This trip forces Deepa to compare the "security" of her present relationship with the intensity and unresolved attachment with her past relationship with Nishith. The narrative is focused less on external events and more on Deepa's inner monologue. She attempts to convert her conflicting feelings into a single "truth"which can justify her eventual decision.

Scholarship on Bhandari and the Nayi Kahani movement often highlights the emergence of urban middle-class subjectivities and puts an emphasis on the psychological realism of women protagonists. Feminist criticism on modern Indian womanhood, romance, and respectability shows how marriage and love operate as social institutions which discipline women's agency. As Victor Ramraj states

Yet though diasporas may not want actually to return home, wherever the dispersal has left them they retain a conscious or subconscious attachment to traditions, customs, values, religions and language of ancestral home. (Ramraj 214)

This paper delves into Deepa's interior self-surveillance and sheds light on how social expectation becomes an inner voice that shapes her desire, say, and final choice. This paper also focuses on the question whether financial independence can shift or aid in removing patriarchal pressure.

R. S. Singh argues that *Yehi Sach Hai* portrays Deepa as "mentally surrendering" to her first love, Nishith yet she seeks fulfillment within marriage, which results in her being caught between emotional turmoil. Her reluctant submission to male authority results in her being constrained by "self-imposed" moral standards (135). This paper disagrees with this argument because it treats Deepa's

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crisis as primarily personal—an inward weakness or voluntary capitulation. Instead, I argue that patriarchal expectation produces the very terms in which she can understand herself. As a result, what looks like self-imposed morality can be read as internalised respectability. It also shows how patriarchal discipline operates through guilt, self-surveillance, and the promise of security.

Virginia Woolf, in her "*A Room of One's Own"*, argues that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." This saying is extremely useful for analysing Manu Bhandari's Deepa, who appears to possess all the outward markers of modern freedom. She is highly educated, urban raised and financially independent. But *"This is the Truth"* does not present this emancipation as a simple consequence of education or income. Her oscillation is not merely a romantic dilemma but a conflict between her emerging autonomy and a deeply rooted feminine psychology, which is shaped by patriarchal expectation. In this sense, this text reveals a feminist paradox: in spite of having money, mobility, and a "room of her own," a woman can still remain vulnerable to internalised norms of respectability, emotional dependence, and the desire for male validation. Deepa's experience therefore reveals that financial independence can widen the limits of choice. But it cannot give women full freedom from social control, which structures their desire, fear, and finally call "truth."

The central problem this paper addresses is the tension between choice and constraint. It focuses on if Deepa's decision is guided by internalised cultural scripts about femininity, romance, and marriage. Manu Bhandari's short story *"This Is the Truth"* (*Yehi Sach Hai*) is often read as a narrative of romantic dilemma. But this study treats it as a feminist case-study of how patriarchal norms operate not only through external prohibition but also through the internal workings of conscience, guilt, and the desire to be "acceptable." By emphasising on her interiority, the paper highlights how modernity can coexist and even intensify new forms of discipline.

This paper argues that Deepa's apparent autonomy is *real but incomplete.* Her freedom operates within a cultural framework that rewards certain kinds of feminine behaviour as stability, respectability, emotional restraint. At the same time it punishes other traits such as sexual frankness, indecision, refusal of normative marriage. Her subjectivity, therefore, emerges as a field of struggle where desire, memory, and patriarchal expectation continuously rewrite what she can call "truth."

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This study uses close textual reading such as narrative voice, temporal shifts, self-reflexive monologue supported by feminist concepts such as the social production of womanhood (de Beauvoir), the politics of sexuality and marriage (Millett), gender performativity (Butler), internalisation and divided selfhood (Gilbert & Gubar), and postcolonial attention to ideology and voice (Spivak).

This paper outlines key feminist debates on agency, respectability, and the "politics of choice," and uses these in the analysis. The core debate relies on close reading of Deepa's subjectivity—her self-questioning, moral calculations, and oscillation between past and present. It also shows how social expectations become internal rules. Finally, the paper discusses modern womanhood present in the text and comes to conclusion via analysis of Bhandari's narrative which complicates the idea of a single, stable "truth" in women's lives.

Society has unwritten rules and expectations for women—especially centered around propriety, romance, marriage, and the formation of a "respectable" family. Deepa might be highly educated, urban-raised, and financially independent. But Manu Bhandari's short story *"This is the Truth"* (*Yehi Sach Hai*) shows that these markers of modernity do not automatically translate into unconditional freedom. According to the critical framework given by Simone de Beauvoir', Deepa's womanhood is not simply "given" but socially produced. Her choices emerge within certain social norms which define limits of a woman's desire and the extent of her decision. Similarly, Judith Butler's idea of gender as a repeated performance helps in explaining why Deepa's independence still requires constant calibration. She must appear 'appropriate' in spite of her apparent freedom. As a result, patriarchal control can be misinterpreted as security. The more uncertain she feels, dependence begins to appear as comfort rather than constraint. The narrative therefore presents autonomy as partial and a result of negotiation. She can move through the city alone and pursue higher education. But her decision-making appears to be emotionally driven and remains haunted by the question of social acceptability. This shows how her "choice" is structured by patriarchal expectation even under the signs of modern independence.

Deepa's relationship with Sanjay initially appears to support her upward mobility and ambition. But this incident also reveals how love can become a site where power and expectation silently circulate. Kate Millett's insistence that intimate life is political is reflected in this text. Innocuous encouragement can carry

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assumptions about the roles of a "good" partner. It also designates what a woman should fear, and what futures should be imagined as "normal". When Deepa tells Sanjay that she has received an interview call and she has to travel to Kolkata, he encourages her to go. "Here you are, a single woman, living by yourself, writing a thesis, wandering about all over town on your own, and you're worried about an interview? Why?" (Bhandari 13). His words recognise her competence, yet they also highlight that her anxiety is not about ability alone. It is about the vulnerability a woman is unconsicously trained to anticipate while stepping into unfamiliar spaces.

Bell Hooks's work sharpens this tension by giving a reminder that "love" is never separate from social training. Women often learn to translate unease into self-doubt and to look for protection within relationships. Deepa's longing for verbal affirmation reveals another quiet economy of power in intimacy:

> "The truth is that I long to hear these kind of words from Sanjay, but he never says them. I 've been with Sanjay for the last two and a half years. We go out every evening. There were so many times I made it a point to dress well, wear make-up, but not even once has he complimented me. He just doesn't notice these things" (Bhandari 14).

In the politics of respectability, such grooming and styling is not merely "vanity" but a learned cultural labour, through which women are assessed and categorised as desirable, proper, and worthy of being chosen. In a middle-class moral economy, being "noticed" functions as a sort of social certification. It indicates that her femininity is legible, her relationship is valid, and she can be considered marriageable within approved norms. Judith Butler's idea of gender as performance, is reflected in the passage through Deepa's labour of femininity - such as dressing up, styling herself. She seeks social visibility and confirmation; when it is not acknowledged, she experiences a loss of value that is affective as well as cultural. Kate Millett's assertion that the personal is political also applies here. Sanjay's "not noticing" is not merely an individual habit, but a relational arrangement in which recognition is unevenly distributed. She is left to manage the emotional consequences of these.

Sanjay's talk of networking and even settling in Calcutta can be read as supportive. But Deepa immediately misinterprets it. She fears that he wants her to

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move away from him. This reveals how deeply the script of relational security governs her imagination. In other words, the narrative shows that the idea of a "secure" future is not neutral. It is shaped by respectability and by the social expectation that a woman's life can only be stabilised through the right partnership. Ultimately, this respectability-driven desire for stability nudges Deepa toward the safer, socially legible choice. She chooses the path which promises approval and protection even when it conflicts with her intense inner desires.This reveals how respectability and the promise of security, shape her romantic decisions and push her toward the socially safer option.

Deepa's insecurity repeatedly surfaces as her lack of self-worth. She doubts her own competence, misreads reassurance, and interprets ordinary separations as abandonment. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's idea of internalised patriarchy is helpful in analysing this as not merely individual weakness. Deepa's mind becomes a monitoring device, constantly measuring whether she is valued or chosen and whether she is safe. Patriarchal expectation in Deepa operates from within as self-surveillance. This delves deep into her resentments for Sanjay when he cannot make time or get leave. This disappointment is not only emotional but also ideological. Because it threatens the culturally promised safety of being "secured" by a man's attention and availability.

Julia Kristeva's emphasis on ambivalence and the divided self further clarifies the story's psychological texture. Deepa oscillates between confidence and panic, between independence and the craving for protection. In that oscillation, she tries to "grab on" to people who can stabilise her sense of self. She seeks help from Ira and later turns to her ex, Nishith, not simply as individuals but as emotional anchors. This self-policing logic becomes most visible when she attempts to convert inner conflict into a morally acceptable statement.

Deepa apologises to Sanjay in her mind and not in reality. She says,

> "Forgive me, Sanjay. You are going to find many Deepas who will love you the way you deserve to be loved. I know now that only first love is true love; the rest are just efforts to forget the first one" (Bhandari 24).

This appears to be a confession shaped by guilt rather than a straightforward declaration of desire. It also exposes the contradiction at the heart of her subjectivity. She is emotionally drawn toward Nishith, but she struggles to be fully honest with

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both Nishith and Sanjay. She tries to reconcile longing with the demand to appear as a coherent, loyal, and "right" person. According to Gilbert and Gubar's theory of internalised patriarchy, Deepa's self-surveillance becomes explicit. She judges herself through the eyes of others and turns a complex, conflicted experience of love into an almost tidy narrative of "true" versus "false" love.

This contradiction cannot be treated as mere "hypocrisy". A Kristevan reading suggests that Deepa is caught in ambivalence. She cannot stabilise herself as a coherent self, because her desire and her socially sanctioned identity pull her in different directions. The theories of Gilbert and Gubar illuminate how that instability is intensified by internalised judgement. Deepa monitors herself, anticipates censure, and translates her convoluted experience of attachment into a morally acceptable story. She says, "first love is true love" (Bhandari 24). Her confession becomes self-discipline. She attempts to regain respectability and emotional order. Guilt and self-surveillance steer her back toward the socially "correct"option that promises legitimacy and relief.

Deepa's memories of Nishith also reveal how desire is immediately disciplined by a respectability code that she carries within herself. Describing their intimacy, she says,

> "Our bodies would feel intoxicated even without touching; we would be silent, engrossed in each other, in a strange, dreamlike state. Even if I wanted to say something, he would put a finger on my lips and say 'Let's not spoil these intimate moments talking'" (Bhandari 21).

A Kristevan lens sheds light into the reason which makes the scene both alluring and uneasy. The "dreamlike" bodily intensity suggests a pull toward the pre-social, affective realm of experience. But the imposed silence reinscribes control. Desire is permitted only as unspoken and thus socially deniable. This also shows how patriarchal respectability is internalised as self-surveillance. Deepa tries to keep the relationship legible as "pure" by stressing that the nights were emotional rather than physical, as if her moral worth depends upon remaining within the boundary of virginity. Intimacy becomes another site where she polices herself. She converts ambivalent desire into an acceptable narrative, one more pressure that draws her back toward the socially 'correct' choice which promises legitimacy and safety. Though Deepa's financial independence expands her outward mobility, Bhandari's "*This is*

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the Truth" shows how pressure relocates inward—into constant self-monitoring, moral accounting, and the need to keep desire socially defensible. Her inner conflict as feminine psychology is formed through desire, guilt, memory, and self-surveillance.

In Bhandari's "*This is the Truth*", the movement between past and present, with Deepa's intense interior monologue, turns "truth" into a contested category rather than a final statement. Instead of presenting a simple moral lesson, the narrative dramatises how a woman's truth is produced under pressure. Memory revises desire. Desire collides with duty. Duty is justified as "common sense." Hélène Cixous's emphasis on women's voice and interior expression is relevant here, because Deepa's inner monologue becomes the primary site of meaning. Her rationalisations, fears, and sudden reversals are depicted in the text. Another realization is also significant in this context. Female children belong to their fathers until they are married, at which time "they become the property of their husbands and are expected to be of service to them". (Gangrade & Chander 2011)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's caution about ideology and voice reminds us that speaking in one's own voice does not automatically guarantee freedom. Deepa's inner monologue reproduces the very norms she struggles against. The narrative technique, therefore, becomes feminist evidence. It shows how patriarchal expectation inhabits thought itself, making truth unstable, negotiated, and socially conditioned.Narrative voice and temporal shifts reveal Deepa's self-justifications, and it also show how pressure is relocated into interior self-policing despite financial independence.This analysis shows that her decision is shaped by patriarchal expectation, lived as an inner drama of desire, guilt, memory, and self-surveillance , and only partially eased—rather than resolved—by financial independence that relocates pressure into the self. Deepa's movement between Sanjay and Nishith as "surrender" or mere romantic indecision, shows a culturally structured conflict in which desire must be justified in the language of respectability.

Virginia Woolf , in "*A Room of One's Own"*, insists that a woman needs money and a room of her own in order to write and think freely. Deepa appears, at first glance, to possess an equivalent modern freedom: she is educated, mobile, and financially independent. Yet Bhandari's story demonstrates the limit of such a model when it is transferred from material independence to lived subjectivity.

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Patriarchal power continues to work through ordinary expectations—being "settled," being "noticed," being "safe"—so that women often experience social discipline as personal feeling. Deepa's financial independence does not erase these pressures. Instead, it shifts them inward, where these appear as guilt, anxiety, emotional dependence.Bhandari's narrative offers a feminist critique of modernity. It shows that having money or even something like "a room of one's own" may widen the field of choice, but it does not by itself free a woman from the internalised social control that shapes what she can desire, fear, and finally call "truth."

This negotiated agency is depicted through the image of *rajnigandha* (tuberose) Although it blooms at night, it does not lose its brilliance in the sun. This metaphor captures how Deepa's subjectivity remains connected to the "night" of inherited norms—upbringing, era, and the desire to remain socially intelligible—yet it is not confined to that domain alone. Social conditioning shapes the conditions under which she thinks and feels, but it does not fully cancel her capacity to deliberate, reassess, and choose. The story's movement between past and present can thus be read not only as nostalgia but as a testing-ground where Deepa learns what she can keep from the past and what she must refuse in order to live with herself.

From this perspective, Deepa's final preference for Sanjay is not best understood as chasing an "illusory" adventure with Nishith or as passively submitting to a man. But it is a decision in which she clarifies what kind of recognition and stability she values. The journey to Kolkata functions as a diagnostic experience. It reveals that she does not want to court Nishith, rather she wants to be chosen by him . Her longing for "first love" is entangled with her desire to conform to the popular social notion of "first love". By contrast, Sanjay's presence repeatedly offers her encouragement, practical support, and belief in her abilities when she doubts herself. A feminist reading can hold both truths at once: choosing Sanjay can express Deepa's voice and self-knowledge. The appeal of "security" gets shaped by the wider respectability, which makes certain futures appear safer and more legitimate than others. Ultimately, she cannot escape social expectation but she makes her priorities clear. Her inner conflict and the pressure of self-policing, in spite of her apparent independence shapes "the truth."

Conclusion

Deepa's story sheds light on the process in which feminine subjectivity is produced at the intersection of personal longing and social expectations. This paper

tracks the limits of Deepa's autonomy and the politics of respectability in her relationships. It also traces how her inner guilt and self-surveillance sabotages her life. Her "truth" is less like a fixed conclusion and more like a socially conditioned negotiation. Virginia Woolf's famous saying is that a woman needs money and a room of her own in order to think and create freely. Manu Bhandari's story expands upon that insight by revealing that material independence, though necessary, is not sufficient. She has higher education, social mobility, and economic independence. But still she cannot prevent her inner self from being shaped by internalised patriarchal expectations of safety, approval, and feminine respectability. Bhandari, thus complicates the narratives and notions of modern womanhood. Financial independence can widen the limits of choice. But it can also relocate patriarchal pressure into the private interior, where it is harder to grasp. And one cannot resist, what one cannot grasp. The lasting significance of the story lies in this feminist paradox: a woman can have "a room of her own" and still be unable to separate themselves from the social control , which survives within the self and shapes the limits of her desire, refusal and her "truth."

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