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**IGNOMINITY AND GENDER DISPARITY IN SAGNIKDATTA'S SHORT STORY
THE DIVINE PREGNANCY IN A TWELVE-YEAR OLD WOMAN**

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Sagnik Datta's *The Divine Pregnancy in a Twelve Year Old Woman* is an award winning entry from Asia. Granta publishes the winners of the 2018 Commonwealth short story prize in partnership with the Commonwealth writers. Datta, rose from Siliguri, in West Bengal, India. Through his story reflects upon the ignominy and gender discrimination in the society. The traditional social set-up prefers sons over daughters and this attitude has been a dominant cultural factor for ages. When a girl is born, the celebrations are minimal or there are no celebrations at all but an air of disappointment is palpable.

Being a part of 21st century, in which people create awareness through protests, media, education and awareness programmes, still people have an aversion towards a girl child's birth. The reasons which prevail are the same. Sons are considered to be valuable resources while the religion makes no difference. The traditional set-up too always focuses on the sons.

The story *The Divine Pregnancy in a Twelve Year Old Woman* deals with a mother's decision not to bear the divine child. The author had set it in a village and narrates the story as one among the villagers being an observer of the events. The narration is episodic in a chronological order with simple and lucid language. Feministic approaches are high in the analysis as the incidents bring out the ugly side of the society through the plot and the characters. The author has used the story to voice against the social injustices practiced in the society. It is very clear through his story that he wants to mock at the patriarchal set-up of the society through each and every character.

The story begins with God appearing in the villager's dream in various forms and blesses a girl from the village with a divine child who is conceived out of wedlock. We come to know about god's intention of giving a child to that particular village by terming it as the '*ideal place*' and intimates that "the child could grow up safe from the useless complexities and violence that plagued the rest of the world".

The above mentioned statement would appear to be a kind of irony when the reader gets to know what happens in the climax where the villagers exhibit complexities and violent behaviour against the child as well as the mother of the divine kid. The denial of her wish to abort the child, blaming her pregnancy as illegitimate and unholy as soon as she delivers a baby girl, ignoring her as she bleeds to death and disavow the just born girl are all a proof which poses the village juxtaposes the statement made by god in the beginning of the story.

In order to understand the nature of gender inequalities citations of female characters such as Usha's mother who dies at the age of fifteen as soon as she delivers the baby. Monica, is asked to advice Usha by the villagers, as she had labored a child when she was only eleven and Nadia who had been shunned by the villagers ever since her husband died on the same day of their wedding are all examples of women being abandoned all the time. There is no doubt that people abandon another girl who will be born out of an ignored child-Usha.

The title *The Divine Pregnancy in a Twelve Year Old 'Woman'* highlights that a twelve year old kid is not a kid anymore but a woman. Women are considered to be a child bearing machine once they reach

puberty. Usha stated "Thank you everyone, but I don't want the baby." People considered it to be audacity and make the statement 'Woman do that all the time' which explains that no one considers the physical or emotional well-being of the girl but uses her just to bear the babies. Isacc according to the story is rumored to be anatheist due to his logical reasoning and bears the name of being thoughtless and immoral. This appears contrary to the readers as the readers would find the villagers to be thoughtless and immoral throughout the story and Isacc is the only one who helps Usha and takes her feelings into consideration.

The narrator provides a short glimpse of how the life of Usha is before, during and post pregnancy. Before the announcement of the supernatural spirit, no one ever cared what Usha did or where she lived. This is evident from the lines

"She lived in a thatch roofed hut", "her mother had died at the age of fifteen while giving birth to her. Her father had been village's foremost drunkard, before he disappeared around two months back. Since then she'd been living alone, eating god-knows what".

As soon as the villagers find out that she is carrying the divine child, everyone around her takes special care of her by providing healthy meals, even though she doesn't seem to be fond of those. In the end when she delivers a girl baby not a single soul took care of her but left her to bleed to death. She is ignored by the villagers in her death bed as well as the early days of her life.

The insecurity of Usha as a young mother is seen when she asks several questions like 'how giving birth actually felt, whether the pain was worse than the bite of a wood-ant, to whether she could still sleep on her stomach since she could remember'. The immaturity and playfulness is evident as she is introduced to us as an enthusiastic child who climbs trees and swims. The big responsibility of carrying a child is imposed on her and that has made her to forget all her little enjoyments forcibly in the name of 'divine pregnancy'. Everyone extended their support to raise her child yet everyone forgets the fact that Usha is also a kid who needs pampering and attention.

The people of the village benefited from her pregnancy and made money in the due course of time. People rented their lands to the visitors from all over the country. Traders made money by selling food in twofold prices and funds were collected from the visitors for the village who came to witness the divine pregnancy of Usha.

The people made money through every possible ways as the author narrates

'People from all over the district came, and the artists among us made a lot of money selling poorly drawn portraits of Usha. We also sold many items of questionable authenticity, like Usha's half eaten guavas, strands of her hair, and one person even sold her milk teeth".

The day of the birth of the holy infant arrives and to everyone's horror the doctor announces that it is a girl. The air of disappointment can be sensed through the lines of the narration:

'All of this, and at the end, we had a girl! Surely God's child could not have been a girl. This was completely irrational!"

Suddenly everyone suspects that it must be an illegitimate child as Usha was living alone. The people started to blame her own father who left her; Issac, the science teacher who helped her. They guessed that the entity must be a devil and not the god himself. Gender discrimination is practiced here. Referring the historical literature/belief despite culture and religion birth of male children such as Jesus and Karna who were conceived in the womb of mothers Mary and Kunti through the Holy Spirit or by invoking a deity is celebrated till now and they are considered to be divine. In this story, when a girl is born they remain unsung.

Through all these analysis it is evident that females always face discrimination. According to Hinduism, Lord Shiva had three sons (Ganesha, Karthikeya, Ayyapa) and three daughters (Ashok Sundari, Jyothi, Manasa). The male children are popular and worshipped all over the country but the female children are not as popular as their siblings nor are they worshipped and celebrated. This is the same case presented in this short story where the baby girl faces gender disparity as soon as she jumps on the earth. From the ancient beliefs to contemporary writings woman experiences discrimination from the moment they are born and there is still a long way to go before women enjoy equity with men.

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