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A WOMAN'S JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF PURPOSE OF LIFE THROUGH THE SHORT STORY  
*CHOCOLATE*

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One's journey is determined through their gender. In Indian society, men are given more importance than women. Society treats men as superior and also say that they have a purpose in getting education and job. But they treat women inferior to men as they are only meant to take care of their households and family. This situation though changed, still exists in present days. Society and family setup are occupied with the idea of education which is needed for both men and women but education would help men only who will take care of the financial needs of the family. The short story *Chocolate* by Manju Kapur shows this scenario of the society and family which treats men superior to women in terms of education, family and life.

Manju Kapur is an Indian novelist who won 1999 Commonwealth Writer's Prize for her first novel *Difficult Daughters*. Her themes are based on women in Indian modern society and their struggles. She also writes about alienation and isolation in her works. She gives more importance to marriage, family relationships between men and women and their bonding with the traces of culture and tradition. Kapur's short story *Chocolate*, is about Tara and Abhay. Manju Kapur tries to show the typical mentality of men in the Indian society and how women and their education is considered in the society.

The short story can be divided into four parts following the life of Tara. They are about Tara's childhood and education, marital stage, her barrenness and her revenge. Tara undergoes the struggle of being a typical homemaker and also the woman meant to be in the Indian society. Tara marries Abhay with all expectations but without knowing her real purpose of life. She also gets education without knowing the purpose as she was taught by her parents. She grows up with the instructions of her parents as they mean women are meant to take care of the households and men take authority of family and society.

Tara, while studying her Bachelors in English Honours, did not realise her purpose in studying. She joins English because she thought it would be easy to study but finds out that more than stories there are history, ideas and creativeness that are needed to study English. She complains to her mother about her difficulty in studying and her mother consoles her. Tara's mother also talks about her marriage which they have planned during her study leave. Though her parents know her difficulty to study for her exams, they console her and also tell her that, "Well, the boy is good. And the family is very keen. Some things cannot be put off." (Kapur) Tara manages to score third division and is surprised to see that she passed in all subjects. By the time her result is out she just returned from her honeymoon and Abhay consoles her that "Never mind, darling," he says clutching her in his strong, manly arms, "You have me." (Kapur) It symbolically means whatever score she received does not matter to her husband and family as she will not continue her studies but is enough to take care of the family.

Tara and Abhay were happy in the beginning of their marital life. The problem arises when Tara was not able to bear a child. She had a choice to decide on divine or medical intervention. Tara decides to take a medical check-up and says, "Maybe we should go and see a doctor?" (Kapur) she suggested to her husband. "You go if you want to," replied Abhay. "There is nothing wrong with me." (Kapur) Though this reply upsets Tara, she goes and finds that nothing is wrong with her. Then the doctor suggests to her that Abhay too

must undergo tests. ““But he doesn’t think so,” said Tara mournfully.“What rubbish!” exclaimed the doctor, who was sick and tired of encountering such attitudes in her practice. “You tell him it is not only the woman who is responsible for bearing a child. The sperm has to be healthy. It may be that he is infertile, it may be that his sperm count is low, it may be that he has been drinking too much, or that he has some kind of latent infection. It may be any number of things.””(Kapur)

After a struggle Tara convinces Abhay to visit the doctor once and though Abhay accepted to go he does not want Tara to accompany her. Abhay tries to prove Tara wrong but after the visit he does not tell her what had happened in the hospital. He tells Tara that the doctor is a fool and commands her to go for divine intervention to Vaishno Devi, crawling on her hands and knees. Tara’s husband and her mother in law believes blindly that only Tara has the problem in conceiving. So, both supports and superstitiously convinces Tara to do divine intervention by hurting herself. Here divine intervention is not questioned but the query is aroused about the question involving the superstition and the values of society which believe men blindly.

Tara, though obeys her husband and family, Abhay tries to cheat her by having an affair. Abhay buys peppermint chocolates to Tara and which Tara gets addicted to. She gains weight because of eating more chocolates which he gets her from the airport. When Tara asks him to get flavours, he complains that ““I don’t get the time,” he said. “All I can do is pick up these things from the airport, and peppermint is what airports happen to have.””(Kapur)The chocolates in the box contains Edwardian Mints, Crème de Menthe Mints, Bitter Chocolate Mints, Wafer Mints, After Eight Mints, After Dinner Mints, Mints in White Chocolate. “She felt sick at the idea of this much mint. But her craving for chocolate was so strong that she ate them all anyway.”(Kapur) Abhay did this to distract Tara from his affair and he refuses to take Tara with him as he tells her she does not match him because of her gained weight.

Tara feels the change in Abhay’s behaviour as he rarely comes home. This made Tara to spy on her husband and she predicts the truth of her husband’s affair with another woman.Tara was shocked and the emotions of anger, despair, confusion and resentment made her more stressed. She could not tell the truth about her husband so she eats a bit of chocolate but it creates a nauseating feeling. Tara stopped eating chocolates and became slim more than ever and started to wear salwar-kameez. She also joined cooking class to burn out her anger towards Abhay. Tara learned to cook new dishes and was appreciated by her teacher. She learns cooking as a strategy to win over her husband. She succeeds by cooking tasty food which made Abhay to gain weight. Once Abhay has called Tara as ‘You waddle’, and it hurt her much. But now Tara wanted him to waddle and rub his nose like he did to her.

Tara takes revenge on her husband by having an affair with his best friend. She conceives because of the affair and she get rid of the affair immediately. Abhay doubts Tara’s pregnancy and spies on her but he could not find anything as Tara had terminated the affair without any evidences. Though Abhay could not believe that he is the father of the child, he has to accept the child as he does not have any other option left to find the paternity. This suspicion by Abhay shows that there is a problem in his health and also that he accepts the child because he knows the truth about his health as no one knows what had happened in the hospital except Abhay. Tara sings lullabies of brave women to her child, as she wanted her daughter to be independent and free from the norms of being a woman like her.

Tara’s life shows the condition of married women and how they are suppressed by their husbands. Liberal Feminism focuses on women’s ability to maintain their equality through their own actions and choices and it is an individualistic form of feminist theory. Liberal feminists say that women are equal to men and tries to argue against the society’s false belief that women are inferior to men physically and intellectually. Through the character Tara it is proved that women are equal to men when it came to child bearing. Both men and women share equal responsibility in child bearing. Abhay and his mother could not accept his inability but blames Tara as infertile woman. This shows the mentality of people who thinks bearing child is only women’s work. Tara changes this mentality and alsorealises her mistake. She convinces Abhay that the child born because of his improved health.Liberal feminism also predicts that both men and women hold equal responsibility in education and society. She focuses on her daughter’s development and she could succeed as a woman by the way she brings up her child as an independent girl. Tara as a feminist, herself assumes equal rights with husband and also through her lullabies teaches her daughter independence and equality.

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