



ISSN 2455-7544  
www.daathvoyagejournal.com

# Daath Voyage : An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English

A UGC Refereed Open Access Journal

Vol. 3 No.3, September, 2018

Editor : Saikat Banerjee

**Editor:** Dr. Saikat Banerjee  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
St. Theresa International College, Thailand.



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
A UGC Refereed e- Journal no 45349

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.3, No.3, September, 2018

## A Study of Domestic Violence in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Rajmohan's Wife*

**Dr. Abhisarika Prajapati**  
Asst. Professor (English)  
School of Arts & Humanities  
REVA University  
Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

*Received 24 July 2018*  
*Revised 8 August 2018*  
*Accepted 4 September 2018*

**Abstract:** Indian society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was caught in the web of superstitions and dogmas. The priest exercised unhealthy influence on the mind of the people and religious belief became blind. The condition of women was very bad: birth of a girl was unwelcomed, her marriage a burden, widowhood inauspicious and no question at all for her education or rights. This was an era where caste system, unhealthy attitude to see the people and social division hampered social mobility and no unity at all. Amid this picture of the age one can identify Bankim Chandra as a visionist who was able to address not only these issues and social evils prevalent in his society but was capable of addressing the issue of domestic violence which he found more hazardous than any other thing. Domestic violence is a violence against one person to another in a domestic setting. It may be of distinct forms as verbal, physical, mental and emotional as well. In fact, violence itself can be defined best as violation of personality. Why a person is so powerful or becomes powerful to suppress one's identity. My paper is an attempt to study domestic violence in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Rajmohan's Wife*, the first Indian novel written in English with the theoretical understanding of Michael Hardt, Giorgio Agamben, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser and Frantz Fanon's views about violence and the related ideologies.

**Keywords:** Domestic, Violence, Matangini, Indian, Bankim Chandra.

"You need Power, only when you want to do something Harmful, Otherwise, Love is Enough to get everything done."

----Charlie Chaplin

Human beings are beautiful creation of God with adorable attributes of kindness, love, care and understanding. Man and woman are the finest creatures of the world, fertile enough to sprout



and spread love everywhere. Human history has been the history of passions, power, affection and uncompromising will and desire. Literature is nothing but the document of human history with all its shades and flavours. Violence is not at all human, it is animal in nature; and domestic violence, the most devouring hazard to end all possibility to harmonize man woman relationship.

Domestic violence is a violence against one person to another in a domestic setting. It may be of distinct forms as verbal, physical, mental and emotional as well. In fact, violence itself can be defined best as violation of personality. Why a person is so powerful or becomes powerful to suppress one's identity. Astonishingly, women and children are mostly the victim of domestic violence not only in India but across the globe. Sometimes domestic violence leads the victims to complete psychological disturbance and trauma as well. Domestic violence is condemnable in its every form. Kelly defined,

Domestic violence occurs when the abuser believes that abuse is an entitlement, acceptable, justified, or unlikely to be reported. It may produce an intergenerational cycle of abuse in children and other family members, who may feel that such violence is acceptable or condoned. Very few people recognize themselves as abusers or victims because they may consider their experiences as family conflicts that got out of control. In abusive relationships, there may be a cycle of abuse during which tensions rise and an act of violence is committed, followed by a period of reconciliation and calm. Victims of domestic violence may be trapped in domestic violent situations through isolation, power and control, cultural acceptance, lack of financial resources, fear, shame, or to protect children. (Leonard 236)

By the above-mentioned lines one thing is very clear that women and children become easy victims in the hands of domestic violence. Woman and her voice has been muted since ages; her story untold; her deeds unsung and her identity predefined by prerequisite rules of male dominated society. Human achievements have never shared their contribution with women in building the castle of human triumph over hurdles. It is deplorable though whenever she tries to reclaim her position and power in patriarchal society her identity has been misrepresented or distorted or



Daath Voyage

: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
A UGC Refereed e- Journal no 45349

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.3, No.3, September, 2018

misinterpreted by society. Her roles have been edited and her voice on mute. Feminine gender has been considered as weak, feeble, fickle and inferior. Power politics orients the male centric society towards sexual politics to decide her space and place in society as well. In fact, women themselves are taught in the process of being socialized to internalize the reigning patriarchal authority and cooperate in their own subjugation and suppression.

Indian writing in English has a long history of growth and development. English started spreading in India with the expansion of colonialism. The creative talents of India started writing in English as a medium to articulate their feelings, stories, tradition and culture keeping in view a larger readership. Indian writing in English is not different from Indian literature but a very much continuation of the knowledge which flourished in the Vedas and the Puranas; rich in cultural talks and traits, tradition and spiritualism. When the men of letters started writing in English, undoubtedly, a foreign language, imitation was natural but pulse of their writings was sheer Indian in its ethos and pathos which gradually started acquiring a character of their own.

Babu Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay was a great personality and a strong signature in the realm of Indian writing in English who wrote the first Indian novel in English entitled *Rajmohan's Wife* which was his debut novel too. He was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century of India in the West Bengal in a wealthy, educated and orthodox Brahmin family. He was one of the two students who obtained Bachelor of Arts from the University of Calcutta. He was indeed a prolific writer, poet and journalist. He was the writer who gave mother image to India and wrote "Vande matram" (originally in Sanskrit) which was taken from his book *Anandmath*. The song Vandematarm was the source of inspiration for a lot of Indians and it was treated as National anthem. Ironically, *Rajmohan's Wife* is the only novel written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in English after that he abandoned writing in English. He wrote thirteen novels and various prose which established him as a major figure of his time in Bengali literature and a key figure of literary renaissance of India. He was the founder of a journal *Bangadarshan* in 1872 which became the major source of emergence of nationalist feeling. His remarkable literary works written in Bangali are *Durgeshnandini*, *Kapalkundala*, *Vishbriksha*, *Anandmath* and ,many more. The people around him



looked down upon him when he started his literary career in a foreign language, they called it a false start. They used to say that writing in a foreign language is like speaking with a stone in one's mouth or walking with stilts.

*Rajmohan's Wife* was first serialized in 1864 but it did not appear as a book until 1935. The revival of the novel in book form and its chapters have their own story. It can be a novella in itself, discovery of its chapters by his brother, then some of its chapters he could not find originally, so he himself translated them from Bengali to English. The novel is basically a story telling in prose which aligned him as curator of modern school of Indian fiction. It has thematic worth, linguistic maturity and human values. The narrative style is realism and emphasis is on people's joys and sorrows. It is a story of human values and human relationships.

Indian society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was caught in the web of superstitions and dogmas. The priest exercised unhealthy influence on the mind of the people and religious belief became blind. The condition of women was very bad: birth of a girl was unwelcomed, her marriage a burden, widowhood inauspicious and no question at all for her education or rights. This was an era where caste system, unhealthy attitude to see the people and social division hampered social mobility and no unity at all. Amid this picture of the age one can identify Bankim Chandra as a visionary who was able to address not only these issues and social evils prevalent in his society but was capable of addressing the issue of domestic violence which he found more hazardous than any other thing.

Ironically, the wife of Rajmohan is the protagonist of the novel though she is addressed as Rajmohan's wife by the novelist. Her name Matangini is as beautiful as she herself is. She is married to Rajmohan who is the image of brutality and death in the narrative. Madhav and Mathur are cousins and Matangini is in love with Madhav. The novel opens with the description of woman as an ideal picture of this time holding and balancing pitchers upon pitchers. Kanak is Matangini's friend who forces her to accompany her to fetch water from the well but she is so terrified by the behavior of her husband that she is hesitant though she agrees. When she was coming back both Madhav and Mathur see her and their eyes got fixed on her unmatched beauty. At that moment they ridicule the institution of marriage and call it a 'lottery' where a clown gets such a beautiful woman.



The third chapter of the novel is named “**The Truant’s Return Home**” which throws light specifically on Rajmohan’s brutal behavior and his relationship with Matangini. She is a daring woman; she has spark of modern woman’s identity though first she bears his ill treatment. Rajmohan reaches home before Matangini reaches and starts scolding her at not finding her at home who is supposed to be at home to serve her husband. Rajmohan standing at the gate of the house itself has been projected through a death like image and she feels uncomfortable and embarrassed. Even though when Kanak asks she says that she is used to it. The recurrent treatment of a human being with spells of threatening and menace always lead a person towards depression and agony and subdues one’s identity and entity as well and this is what happens exactly with Matangini too. When Rajmohan interrogates her why she had gone out she chose to be silent first to be indifferent and that ignites the fury of Rajmohan. He pours down the water and starts screaming on her. Is this not violence to disturb the peace of mind and to provoke someone to respond the same way. Her silence indeed can be questioned here to give a mute signal to proceed. To think that woman is biologically feeble or emotionally weak or tender to be used in any way is the core cause of the mechanism of patriarchy who set the rules that women are supposed to dependent on their male custodian: after birth father is the curator; after marriage husband and after she gives birth to a son he becomes her care taker and every other identity of her own was predefined by prerequisite notions and no space is allotted as her personal domain to reign. Rajmohan had an old aunt who used to do his cooking. When Matangini comes back after fetching water and keeps the pot at its place, Rajmohan pours down all the water and she chides him but he reverts in verbal violence: “Shut up, you old hag,’cried out Rajmohan and flung away the empty pitcher.” (12) He continues later like this, “Have I not forbidden you a thousand times? He shouted, and jumping on his wife who was standing stock still, gripped her by the wrist, raising his other hand to strike her. The helpless woman seemed to understand nothing. She did not move away one step from her assailant, but only looked at him with such pathetic eyes that his hand remained motionless as if spellbound. After a moment’s silence Rajmohan dropped his wife’s hand, but immediately shouted out, ‘I’ll kick you to death” ( Chattopadhyay13).



In the above lines Rajmohan's brutal disposition is evident but at the same time one may easily question Matangini's response towards this violent behaviour as well. Why does she not react or act or resist? Is this appropriate to tolerate this kind of non-human behaviour? Why does she not react? Just to maintain the tranquility of the marital life or to pretend a dutiful docile wife or what? The course of narrative unfolds the answers of these questions.

In the following chapter we come to know that Mathur wants to kill Madhav to get all the property since they are cousins. To control, to obtain power Mathur also jumps to adopt violent means to get all the property which revolves around domestic settings. Matangini overhears the plot of murder to end Madhav's life with whom she is secretly in love with. Love gives strength to her and she decides to go against her husband and inform Madhav about the plotting. Madhav is her sister's husband also. In the dead of night, she reaches his place overcoming all the hurdles and saves Madhav's life. But love plays an important role to ignite her to dare to do. At this point we feel that she as a woman in that era was moreover dependent on her husband. Hence forth the question of Virginia Woolf's a room of one's room starts popping out. She has to return to her husband's house and from there her miseries start multiplying. Here when she encounters Rajmohan he abuses her with the word "woman" as if woman is synonymous to deceive or wicked. We see here the verbal violence which was evident in the previous chapter has taken the shape of physical violence. He tries to stab Matangini, meanwhile two people enter with noise and she manages to escape. How dangerous domestic violence can be it is very clear here in this scene. Probably, Matangini's silence, her tears and her indifference have given signal to Rajmohan to advance in his brutal act.

My mother, O mother! And you father! Where are you now? 'were the only sounds that escaped the lips of the doomed girl, as she sunk about lifeless on the floor. The ruthless weapon gleamed high, as it was about to descend on the lovely bosom of the trembling victim, when the purpose was suddenly arrested by a violent noise at the window. (62)



Definition of violence may vary from person to person but if we try to define violence it can be described as violation of personality. If we move little more it is in fact very true in connection with domestic violence. Violence is not only limited to physical arena but it has its footprints in emotional, verbal and interpersonal sphere too. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri focus on the violent operations of bio-power that target to not only control the population but produce and reproduce all aspects of social life. On the other hand, Giorgio Agamben remarks the essential “fiction” that underlies the link between the ruling government and the legal order. The present legal order is more involved in making sure that the repressive mechanism of power established in society operates smoothly than executing justice. He indicates towards violation of human rights and human values and condemns legitimizing violence in any form.

One of the most popular systems is to of course communicate better. People are taught to improve communication in their household, and through improved communication they can avoid fights that would have otherwise led to violence. However, this particular system is quite ineffective at stopping violence especially when one member of the group does not want to talk. If a spouse is refusing to speak and instead using violence, then continually talking to them may not amount to anything. If one spouse is prone to violence after heavy drinking or drug use, an intervention system might be to kick that habit. But these will only be effective if the person truly wants to change their habits. If they change for anyone but themselves, it will cultivate resentment toward the person for whom they changed and may in fact fuel the fire at times. (Giorgio)

Pankaj Chhikara, Jitender Jakhar, Anil Malik, Kamal Singla, S. K. Dhatarwal in their paper refer, “The American Psychiatric Association planning and research committees for the forthcoming DSM-5 (2013) have canvassed a series of new Relational disorders which include Marital Conflict Disorder without Violence or Marital Abuse Disorder (Marital Conflict Disorder with Violence). There is current considerable controversy over whether male-to-female marital violence is best regarded as a reflection of male psychopathology and control or whether there is an empirical base





and clinical utility for conceptualizing these patterns as relational" (Chhikara et al)

The chapter which is entitled "The Protectress" is more interesting where the images of Durga and Kali are described, these are the images from Hinduism where they are considered as incarnation of fearlessness and bold image of womanhood contrary to the conventional one. Matangini is given shelter in the abode where Mathur also lives. He has two wives Champak and Tara whose sole purpose of life is to establish grip on Mathur and to make him happy. What a pathetic condition of woman! Mathur tries to molest Matangini but somehow intervened by some other happenings. Why always a woman becomes a poor victim in the hands of patriarchy and in male dominated society why she is considered as an object of consumption? Is this not a hidden face of domestic violence? To escape such circumstances, she has to go back with her husband to his house where she was already menaced and was attempted to kill by her husband. Later on, when we meet as the reader to Matangini in the course of narrative we find her in a small cabin as a prisoner. This is the projection of the state of the victim of domestic violence that shows that if a victim tries to speak again she has to undergo a series of cruelty, her voice is suppressed and prisoned. When she is free she is unable to get the answer where to go as her husband's house is a place for her which is not safe, her sister's house she cannot stay, her parents' house too she is reluctant to go as the society has trained her mind and conditioned her that after her marriage she cannot go back to them.

In the novel after the analysis of the domestic violence one can say that the issue of domestic violence has not been projected strongly by the author though the poor condition of women and womanhood have been depicted prominently. Domestic violence is a social evil which is a tool to dominate and subjugate women, it is an instrument which is used frequently by the mechanism of patriarchy to tame women. A question arises here that a woman should wait for the mercy of men. No. This is what Bankim Chandra tried to showcase that to empower women it is also important to waken women's consciousness to face and resist against everything and anything which interrogate her identity and dwarfs her entity. Though the large scale psychological probing is not given vent yet the way the novelist has articulated his vision in pointing his finger at the



Daath Voyage

: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
A UGC Refereed e- Journal no 45349

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.3, No.3, September, 2018

demonic face of domestic violence in the era when India was still grappling to get its freedom from the foreign rule, when the world was quaking under the shadow of violence and imperialism. It addresses the power politics in domestic setting and violence in conjugal life. Though amid all women characters Matangini has to suffer most yet she remains strong. Though she became the protagonist of the novel yet her name is hidden behind her husband's name. Can we call, it an injustice done by the novelist; a violation against Matangini's identity. Someone has rightly stated that the world suffers a lot. Not because of the violence of bad people, but because of the silence of good people.

### Works Cited

- Chaplin, Charlie. Wikiquotes- [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Talk:Charlie\\_Chaplin](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Talk:Charlie_Chaplin) accessed on 23.7.18
- Chattopadhyay, Bankim Chandra. *Rajmohan's Wife*. Penguin India, 2009.
- Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality*. Volume I, Vintage, 1978.
- Giorgio, Agamben. "The Man Without Content." *Theory Out of Bounds*. Trans. Georgia Albert, Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *Multitude*. Penguin, 2004.
- Leonard, K. "Domestic violence and alcohol: what is known and what do we need to know to encourage environmental interventions?" *Journal of Substance Use*. Vol. 6. no. 4, 2001. pp 235-257.
- Pankaj Chhikara, Jitender Jakhar, Anil Malik, Kamal Singla, S. K. Dhattarwal. "Domestic Violence: The Dark Truth of Our Society" <http://medind.nic.in/jal/t13/i1/jalt13i1p71.pdf>