The 'Scholar Wife'
Examining the 'Gender Paradox'

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Abstract

This paper explores perceptions, expressions and negotiations of gender in the complicated context of the 'scholar wife'. The assertion about 'complicated context' positions draws upon scholar wives constituting a 'unique duality', wherein their existential positions simultaneously situate them in the realm of traditional masculinities and femininities. The theoretical-epistemological lexicon for this undertaking is borrowed from the postcolonial feminist perspectives because of their denial of metanarratives and the critical scrutiny of the colonisation of gender discourse. The analysis draws upon theoretical postulations as well as primary data obtained through in-depth case studies of two 'Scholar wife'(ves). The paper seeks to understand whether scholarship has been emancipatory for the 'scholar wife'(ves), whether they are able to scrutinise the knowledge or power relations and whether they do critically analyse engendering.

Introduction

This paper explores expressions of gender in the complicated context of the 'scholar wife.' The theoretical-epistemological lexicon for this undertaking is borrowed from the postcolonial feminist perspectives; noticeably that of Chandra Mohanty.

The assertion about 'complicated context' has precedence in a similar engagement by Pillay (2007) with 'Academic Mothers'. She positions them as constituting a 'unique duality' because:

"Thinking... has been described by Western Philosophers as rational, unemotional and logical... mothering is traditionally associated with nurturing, loving, emotion and sensitivity." (p.1).

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The duality is accentuated by Ruddick's (1989) pointing out of the historical co-optation of mind, objectivity, reason and logic by masculinity.

Extending the above argument to the case of 'Scholar Wife', in this essay I seek to investigate how women perceive and negotiate existential positions, which simultaneously situate them in the realm of traditional masculinities and femininities. The write-up focusses on women from third-world contexts held emblematic of traditional gender-roles in Eurocentric analyses. (Amos and Parmar, 2005).

To do so, I draw upon the postcolonial feminist frameworks because of their denial of metanarratives and the critical scrutiny of the colonisation of gender discourse. The second question I ask is whether the 'Scholar wife' plays along the discourse of Third World femininities or does she negotiate or redefine the boundaries of gender protocols presumed monolithic by it (Mohanty, 1997, pp.91–92). The answers to these questions will in turn allow an evaluation of the suitability of a postcolonial framework for similar analyses in the future.

For operationalisation, I define a 'Scholar Wife' as a married woman of established academic credentials engaged in a willed pursuit of higher education post-marriage. The cultural-geographical context of the Indian Hindu woman delimits the expanse of inquiry. The analysis draws upon theoretical postulations as well as primary data. The rationale for the selection of methodology and research subjects will be addressed in subsequent sections.

The next section attempts to problematise the colonial discourse on the Third World women with respect to the nature of theorisations and research it produces. It also makes a case for adopting a postcolonial framework and an epistemic position of researching the 'non-other'.

The Colonised 'Other': Theoretical and Methodological Casualties

Feminists routinely foreground the 'other'; social feminists foregrounded the 'reproducing other' missing from the masculinist Marxist analysis, feminists of colour foregrounded the racialised, others put the heteronormative under scrutiny and foregrounded alternative sexualities (Mohanty, 2003). These shifts embodied what Hooks (1984) refers to as the transformatory potential of feminism.

The resultant theorisations, often labelled as feminist postcolonial perspectives, are characterised by an acceptance of the politics of everyday life and the resultant enmeshing of feminist agenda with politics of subversion and anticipated transformation. Accordingly, the Postcolonial feminists seek to unearth, articulate and redress the effects of colonisation on theorisation and researching of gender.

The colonisation agenda establishes the white-western Eurocentric feminism as the only legitimate version. In symbolic retaliation, the postcolonial feminists have objected to the hegemonisation of their experiences by 'imperial feminism' characterised by race blindness. It is contended that 'imperial feminism' is fuelled by theories of racial superiority and in case of Third World women, by the Empire thus rendering the experiences and existences of the postcolonial 'other' as a 'feudal residue'(Amos and Parmar, 2005). To counter this, postcolonial feminist theorising has adopted a decolonising agenda that foregrounds the 'other' woman who is of colour and /or hails from the Third World (Hooks, 1984; Mohanty, 1991).

The decolonising agenda focuses on both the 'invisibility' and 'distorted visibility' of the 'other'. In doing so, theorists have sufficiently stressed the inherent diversity of perspectives within white feminist theorisation recognising those western women's gender-related struggles and concerns are by no means monolithic and replicable.

They argue that nonetheless, there has been a tendency to create and reinforce a binary of the western and the non-Western women in attempts to theorise black and Third World women. (Amos and Parmar, 2005, Hooks, 1982). The white feminist movement prioritises goals and experiences appealing to a minority of women, thereby rendering its referents of empowerment and vision for political transformation, exclusionary (Hooks, 1982). Simultaneously, it synonymises pre-capitalist societies with a cultural and ideological backwardness (Amos et al., 2005 pp.48–49).

Mohanty observes that the sharp divide in priorities of the Western and non-Western woman has further accentuated owing to the macro-phenomena of recolonisation of the globe by capitalism. This has resulted in 'Protocapitalist Feminism'; a neo-liberal, capitalist engendering agenda, wherein the model of empowerment is based on the American corporate women (2005). Ironically, this forecloses the possibility of recognising the gender-related struggles and subjugation experienced by successful corporate women themselves. It also renders collectivist cultural identities as subaltern by co-opting an essentially individualistic cultural dynamic.

The decolonisation project has also been cognizant of the implications of the above for researching gender. Pillay (2007) recalls 'the practice of white people doing research on black people was becoming tiresome' (p.10). Amos and Parmar (2005) present another seething observation:

"Often we have appeared in cross-cultural studies which under the guise of feminist and progressive anthropology, renders us as 'subjects' for 'interesting' and 'exotic' comparison." (p. 47)

The tone of such research enterprises is condescending and the knowledge so created is 'naïve and perverse' because those steeped in Western feminist traditions operate from an ontological and epistemological position, which renders any alternative ways of organising experiences, relations and existential struggles—irrelevant and invalid (Mohanty, 2003).

The recognition of the above theoretical and methodological lacunae have increasingly paved way for postcolonial theorisations, made robust by adoption of a culture commensurate ontological position. This has necessitated the audibility of 'shared voices' between researchers and researched.

Aligning with the ontological and epistemological critique developed above, the subsequent section explicates the choice of methodology and subjects.

Methodological Delineation

An exploration into the lived realities of subjects is a qualitative enterprise; so is an inquiry into naturalised and contested gender discourses and the power or knowledge symmetries. The present qualitative inquiry aim to 'reflect women's voices rather than be occupied with statistics that mask the reality of how processes and structures influence the daily lives'. (Purkayastha, Subramaniam, Desai and Bose, 2003, p.510).

In line with qualitative tradition, researching the 'non-other' requires a threadbare explication of researcher's own positionalities and subjectivity (Narayan 1997 cited in Pillay, 2007, p.21).Given that a key step in negotiating the alleged messiness of qualitative researches is to reflexively articulate the positionalities of the researcher and researched, the same is undertaken hereafter.

I am an Indian upper-middle class Hindu woman academic married for over 11 years and had shifted to the UK without my family on a year-long international scholarship award. Whereas, during this stint my academic and professional engagements situated me as a 'scholar', I simultaneously subscribed to the primacy of marriage as a key defining attribute of who I was and am. The subscription, however, is not utterly unproblematic, nor perennially effortless. The scholar and the wife do not seamlessly merge into one another; the ironies are palpable within and from without.

I problematised this predicament with regard to its typicality vis-à-vis other scholar wives from similar socio-economic, religious-cultural context and failed to find relevant literature and by extension; answers to my question. The absence of research evidence necessitated engagement with primary data, which I reckoned would emanate in all richness from case studies of other scholar wives.

In choosing subjects who shared my socio-cultural, educational-linguistic context, I hoped that the power dynamics characterising the

researcher-researched interactions will be less acute (Purkayastha, et. al).

I further hoped that researching 'non-others' will reasonably limit 'external' appropriation and the normative analytic which characterises most colonial scholarship (Mohanty, 1997).

Thus, the two subjects chosen for case studies were both Indian Hindu married women with established academic credentials studying in the UK on a reputed scholarship award[1].A description of each follows:

Subject 1: RB

A 31 year old from an upper-middle class background, married to an academic of her choice for over seven years. Her husband and a child accompanied her to the UK. She was an M.Phil. at the time of her marriage; her husband was pursuing a Ph.D. Since then, her husband had completed his doctorate and she had enrolled for it at the Cambridge University.

Subject 2: NS

A 27 year old from an upper-middle class background, married to a non-academic of her choice for four years. She did not have children, and had travelled to the UK alone. She was pursuing M.Sc. at the time of her marriage. Since then she has enrolled for doctorate at the University of Reading. Her husband was an MBA at the time of marriage and is presently an entrepreneur in India.

The collection of data was preceded by—(i) an ethics review and (ii) steps to obtain informed consent. Subsequently, subjects were asked to fill up a bio-sheet comprising an array of factual-objective type questions on academic, professional and personal demographics. These questions facilitated subsequent customising of interview schedule to any differential life circumstances[2], and provided a reference point for analysing subsequent responses.

The primary tool of investigation was a semi-structured interview schedule and a follow-up questionnaire. The responses were framed against the backdrop of colonial as well as contemporary discourses of femininity in India.

The subsequent section presents these discourses. The penultimate section would use these as an evaluative undergirding for the narratives of the two scholar wives.

The Indian Women: Colonial and Contemporary Discourses

Western portrayal of Indian woman is determinedly essentialist in that it establishes her as a mere relational entity and victim of patriarchy (Mohanty, 1991; Sunder Rajan, 1993). It is homogenising as it posits a representational discourse which denies the heterogeneity of real subjects, and is discursive in that epistemologically it repeatedly calls upon certain analytic categories and modes of appropriation (Mohanty, 2003).

Eurocentric referencing leads to a projection of Indian women as being socialised towards interdependence rather than independence and personal autonomy (Seymour cited in George, 2001), wherein interdependence is modelled on the weak western woman and autonomy or independence signifies empowerment. The following findings[3] typify the western researcher's reading of Indian women:

'Women are still expected to place their interests second to that of the other household members. In this sense, the higher education of women was seen as enhancing their marriageability… when career women met with resistance from family members for their new-found independence, marital and family strife resulted' (Emphasis added).

The quote reiterates Mohanty's earlier assertions (2003) about the methodological casualties of a colonised analysis of the 'other'. It is therefore imperative to concentrate on the native theorisations and assessments on engendering in India. I do this next:

The concern with gender in India is not a recent phenomenon[4]. For centuries and up until the early twentieth century the socio-cultural protocol on femininity in India emanated primarily from intersections of religion and caste. Sarvar (1994) argues that the strictest injunctionary codes of femininity and sexuality were placed on the highest caste Brahmin woman and so forth. At the same time, all women including *Brahmin* woman were positioned at par with the lowest caste *Shudra* male; the hierarchy was thus doubly oppressive for women.

Subsequently, a forced interaction with western modernity under British Imperialist regime led to a (pseudo) reformist agenda, wherein the household and family was rationalised as the emancipatory space for the educated middle-class 'new woman'. The private was sanctified by the woman of the house against corrupting influences of the western modernity by agentic and selective co-optation of modernity while actively responding to the call for being a good wife [Kalpagam, 2000, Chatterjee 1993, cited in Trivedi, 2010]. The domination of the reformist agenda gave way to nationalist agenda, which invoked the image of motherhood and pushed gender scripts of sacrifice and endurance on one hand and power and protection on the other. (Kumar, 1993).

The pre-independence allusions to gender were essentially relational. However, a parallel engagement with a critique of patriarchy and an articulation of the need for emancipation of women could be heard in voices of Jyotirba Phule, Tarabai Shinde, Pandita Ramabai and Mukta Sathe. Phule, for instance, critiqued the enslavement of women in domesticity and highlighted the societal origins of cultural derogation of women (Omvedt, 2015).

In this sense then the construct of womanhood as comprising an identity independent of relationality is a product of nineteenth and twentieth century characterised by colonialism and nationalist struggles (Trivedi, 2010).

A major change in perspective characterised decolonised India. Discussions and debates on gender gained ground on the Indian turf and gender became a matter of sustained academic articulation and scrutiny (Omvedt, 2015; Kumar, 1993). Since 1980s, the analytics of gender-based oppression witnessed an upsurge in deconstruction of knowledge or power relations, on intersectionality of gender and class, as well as on the colonial appropriation of the Indian femininities as backward and willingly accepting patrilineal subjugation. It is interesting to note that whereas the discussion on Indian women has gained immense momentum and newer forms since then, the Eurocentric portrayal of Indian femininities continues to identify with the pre-independence tying down of woman to private spaces and a relational existence (Kalpagam).

An explanation of this preoccupation can be traced back to Said's explication of the timeless orient and stabilities of status quo perpetuated by Orientalism (1978). The 'direct experiences' of the Imperialists and colonisers with the Indian woman were through the socio-cultural-religious images of a woman defined relationally and subordinated through patriarchy. Given the archival imagery that the West has access to, it is not startling that these imageries of wife and mother typify much western exposition till date. The metanarrative of 'Indian Woman' so generated has displayed the astonishing persistence typical of Orientalist representations.

The foregoing section has traced the imagery of Indian women in some native and Eurocentric discourses. The following section focusses on relatively recent theorisations. At the outset, it is noteworthy that the Indian constitution 'explicitly provides for a progressive and pro-women structure' (Trivedi 2010, p.183). Yet, participation of women in public life and political activity has been low. A conspicuous effort to promote women's rights notwithstanding, the context of such struggles has been bourgeois democracy and not civil society. As a result the gains in political equality have been severely undermined and rendered superficial (Omvedt, 2015).

Going beyond legislature demands a caveat! In abject denial of the colonial homogenisation of Indian womanhood, I reiterate that the intersectionality of religions, regions, castes and class forecloses the possibility of a generalisable notion of Indian Womanhood (Trivedi 2010). However, one can attempt to profile Indian womanhood as an intersectional product of these multiple axis of identifications.

Womanhood in present day India evokes a mixed picture. Seen in relation to men, it is disadvantaged and continues its struggle against patriarchal institutions like patrilineal inheritance, patrilocal residence, restrictive remarriage norms, disenfranchising widowhood (Dreze and Sen, 2002, pp. 262–266). However the oppression cannot be systematised to imply universality of abject patriarchy (Mohanty, 1997). Significant intersectional variations are evidenced by research literature, too.

To illustrate, India has one of the poorest female to male ratio (FMR) globally. The FMR is consistent with the 'character of gender relations in different parts of the country' (Dreze and Sen, p.231). A noticeable trend is the thriving gender inequality indicators in the Northern and Western states and encouraging gains in gender equality in the Southern and Eastern states. Similarly, whereas woman fare badly in relative terms to men in the same family on grounds, such as education, nutrition, healthcare, etc. (Bose, 2012), yet the absolute gain in women's education and well-being have been encouraging (Trivedi, 2010).

India presents an interesting antithesis to colonial-capitalist theorisation which equates upward mobility with empowerment. Dreze and Sen argue that economic growth across various castes seems to be accompanied by an intensification of gender bias with upward economic mobility often leading to an emulation of patriarchal norms of higher caste by the lower castes. Given that traditionally the higher castes have enforced the most constraining gender scripts on women (Sarvar); sanskritisation is perilous to the women involved.

On the positive side, studies have revealed that variables directly related to women's agency and voice, such as female literacy and labour force participation, earning independent income, etc., do redress inequalities to some extent. Further, an increase in educational opportunities for women has been accompanied by an exercise of agency resulting in significant reduction in fertility rates thereby allowing them to escape or minimise the 'drudgery of domesticity and child rearing.' (Dreze and Sen, 2002).

This change, however limited in coverage, is significant as it allows redefining women beyond their reproductive role and relational status.

Alongside the macro-picture, the discussion on 'Scholar Wife' also necessitates an explication of the specificities of experiences related to education and households. The same is attempted hereafter:

In India, as in much of the world, the division of home and the world is largely a gendered one. Yet, whereas the domestic realm is maintained as the normative space for women's self-definition, the public realm opened to her on account of education allows, in some measures, explorations

and enactments of non-domestic non-normative gender scripts (Rajagopal, 1999).

The fluidity of demarcation between the private and public domains for Indian women is highlighted by Mogford (2011) in a study on domestic abuse in Uttar Pradesh; one of the most gender inequitable Indian states (Dreze and Sen, 2002). The findings suggest an ambivalence of agency. To illustrate — for the women who simultaneously operate in public and private settings, dimensions of status that overlap with the traditional male domain (i.e., the public-paid labour, financial decisions, etc.) are associated with higher levels of abuse, while dimensions of status that operate in women's traditional spaces (i.e., the household) appear to be protective against abuse.

Recognising these shifts, Basu (1999) calls the Indian woman a 'fractured colonial subject' who is the 'last bulwark of Indian history and tradition'; she lives the contradictions of modernity and tradition. To illustrate some contradictions — firstly, irrespective of the educational and financial standing of a woman, the absolute importance of marriage in determining the social status of women does prepare ground for patriarchal oppression. Also, whereas the nuclear household is increasingly becoming a reality for married working women on grounds of geographies of work commitments, they are expected; to calibrate to demands of socio-economic and cultural subordination demanded by joint family setups (Basu, p.256). Then again, whereas there has been a sustained case made for enhancing agency of women in the name of modernity and development, the rationale for it invariably derives from the relational definition of women (Dreze and Sen, 2002: pp.17–20). The contestations between tradition and modernity are also visible in the requirement of a wife who looks younger than the husband, the relative legitimacy and rights of a woman who has borne sons rather than daughters, the continuing importance of the family of the husband, the norm of patrilineal dislocation, and the contentions of a sacrificing wife along with the voice of an educated, employed woman (Mitra, 2013, p.1285).

The attitude towards education of women have been found to be ambivalent by researchers. As pointed out earlier, the attitudes vary with the cultural variances with northern India being particularly inequitable in all respects when compared to south (Bose, 2012). Specifically, researches relate education with an increased control over material and financial resources, greater say in decision-making and higher probability of 'erosion of traditional sex-based attitudes and development of more egalitarian views' (Amin 1996, cited in Bose, p. 71).

On the other hand, researches also suggest that 'education is

socially valued because it makes girls better wives and mothers' (Bose). Also higher education is often seen as irrelevant for women and premium is placed instead on acquiring household skills for impending and inevitable domesticity.

Whereas, the above analysis is largely representative of the ambivalent realities of Indian women, a non-stereotypical shift in urban women's self-definitions has also been observed. In a study of 90 urban, young and middle-aged working women, Singh and Agrawal (2007) found a reduced tendency to identify with traditionally feminine characteristics and an increased identification with traditionally masculine and/or androgynous characteristics.

Given the conflicting nature of evidences thrown up by researches with regard to the status of women in contemporary India, a conclusive signalling of the subversion of gender-based subjugation is a distant reality, yet the colonial imagery of women as uneducated, tradition–bound, victimised too does not hold universal ground.

If education and its essentialities prepare a bed for agency to take roots, then it is worth investigating the case of 'Scholar Wife' to ascertain whether for them scholarship has been emancipatory, if knowledge or power relations have been scrutinised and engendering critically analysed. The subsequent section attempts a deconstruction of the Scholar wives' narratives to answer the questions raised at the outset.

The Scholar Wife: An Analytic Account

The subsequent discussion draws upon the respondent's narratives and theoretical undergirding made conspicuous in the preceding discussions.

To begin with, Mohanty repeatedly cautions against considering women as 'a category of analysis' and constituting a homogenous group prior to the analysis (1991, p.56). Interestingly, the respondents' narratives too reinforce the need for mindfulness against homogenisation of 'Scholar wives' and resultant epistemic hegemonisation and a denial of their material histories.

To illustrate, RB and NS' identification with the label 'Scholar wife' differs considerably. This further resulted in them evaluating and explaining the dichotomies of being a 'Scholar wife' differently.

For RB the dichotomies are extraneous to herself; she never experienced these because she always prioritised her individuality over the societal expectations, '*For me it was clear, it (the priority) is me. I don't think there is something called a scholar wife. There is only a scholar, but it is for the others that you are a wife. When I think about myself, I am only a scholar. For me being a scholar wife is secondary*'.

RB is convinced that being a wife could be a secondary priority

provided the women so chooses; "*If I start becoming a wife, (*laughs*) my scholar will automatically disappear... when you compete as a scholar, does it say you will get extra weightage because you are married...you can be wife only for your marital status, but scholar... you ARE a scholar*'. She traces the dichotomies experienced by other women to the fact that they have meekly internalised social expectations and have rendered themselves un-agentic. '*You succumb to... many a times not being you... because if you are not able to muster that courage to break free from it, then it is not a matter of your choice, then it is somebody else's choice.*"

Interestingly, whereas for NS too the dichotomies are not profound, her reason is in stark contrast to RB's emphasis on individuality. NS is driven by love and acknowledges marriage as her primary axis of identification, '*The wife is more profound...because of my husband I could continue to do what I wanted to do.*'

Their responses also highlight the distinction between the material and discursive. Whereas both women accepted themselves as 'Scholar wives', they subscribe to different ideas about what it means to be a scholar, a wife, and both. In line with the post-colonial framework, the differences result from them being material subjects of their lived history. RB echoes this at the very outset as, '*to answer that, I will start with my past first....*' The respondents' different life events, spaces and lived trajectories and their self-iterative referencing of these further necessitate what Mohanty refers to as the need for 'uncovering the material, ideological specificities that constitute a particular group of women as powerless (or powerful) in particular context' (1991, p. 57, parenthesis added).

While on powerlessness, the narratives also bring under scrutiny the colonial assumptions about Indian women being powerless victims of oppressive socio-economic systems. Both respondents accepted the presence of societal discourses of femininity and wifehood, yet they approach them with a criticality and knowledge or power uncharacteristic of the archetypical colonial image.

RB critically reflects, '*When you become a mother or wife, individual success goes down, you are always scaled as family.'* She questions the discourse as, '*being at home from nine to five to receive my child from school, these are some romanticism of society, these really do not matter.*'

NS too cognizes gender discourses and exercises power as she reflectively weighs the losses and gains in playing according to these scripts. She accepts the social protocols on grounds of reciprocation of love and not as ordained duties, '*I am not repaying him, this is purely emotional.*' Her awareness of societal protocols is also evident as she comments on the oppressive discourse of gender and its crippling effects on some other women, '*socialisation forces a women to act passively in the*

society, which makes her less confident and dependent.'

RB too displays criticality as she argues against the homogenisation of all women as relational entities and the resultant loss of self, '*Is it right to be an individual or should I take a break and be an individual later?*'

Again, contrary to the colonial discourse of Indian familial systems as oppressive, both women deny conscious patriarchal and oppressive structures. For NS, '*When you are working, your family does not put you under pressure.*' RS re-appropriates the oppression discourse as unintended and non-malicious, "*It is not an individual clash, it is a clash of value systems… it is not easy for them at 75, it was not easy for me at 25.*"

The respondents' narratives also contradict assumptions about marriage being oppressive and women as victimised. RB asserts, "*I never thought about what I would be like in marriage but I was always sure about how I want my partner to be in marriage.*" For her marriage has not resulted in a change of priorities, "*I still value myself as a person more dearly. I cherish my individual attainments."*

Both women also demand equality in marriage as a 'Scholar Wife'. To quote NS, '*If I am playing two roles, then even he too has to play two roles, otherwise directly or indirectly he is asking me to leave one of the options.*'

In contrast to the victimisation premise, both women accept relationality as a matter of choice and not coercion. They value their families and yet are neither constricted nor haplessly dependent on them. RB is the archetypical independent person when she says, "*No matter he is my husband… whoever my partner is, whoever my husband is, I want that person to be free.*"

As Scholar Wives habituating presumably dichotomous gender arenas, these women are aware of the balancing that is required of them. Yet, they are not women succumbing to external scripts but a person actively choosing to be a 'Scholar Wife' through creative negotiations. NS typifies this as *"The scholar and wife in me always fight and when you fight within, you always come out with a solution."* RB assesses the constraints practically as, "*Earlier it was only your convenience, but now you have to share your time, everything is a negotiation for you, but it is manageable if you work like a horse (with blinkers).* She typifies the balancing of emotions and ambitions as, "*having individualistic goals are not denial of family goals… it is never that! If individual goals become family denials, then it is a check factor.*"

As an ode to creative re-appropriation of gender scripts, the limits of individualism too are carefully curated. Neither disengages wifehood with either mothering or homemaking. They willingly extended the ambit of their responsibilities and yet are agents who actively re-negotiate the societal protocols.

RB narrates the arduous journey such re-negotiation demands:

"*There is a phase where everything is violent, everything is falling one upon the other, clashing, but I think that is a very healthy thing... You just have to keep pushing yourself. The last seven years have been traumatic... but you start giving each other space.*"

NS illustrates this by recalling her carefully planned interventions with her in-laws, "*We gradually changed their mind-sets, we started at the roots, things changes as they realised I loved them.*'

Further, unlike the western portrayal of 'other' women as politically immature (Amos and Parmar, 2005), both women are acutely aware of the politics of gender. Recalling an academic panel asking her to defend her choice of leaving her family and enrolling in a Ph.D. in a different city. RB recognises the hegemonising discourse of gender in the academy and the costs it entailed "*In an interview, it takes me an extra answer to explain why I am an individual!'* She also specifically comments on the effects of oppressive gender discourse on educated women as, '*after a certain level of education, after a certain notion of how to lead your life if you are asked to compromise, it is killing that person… it is not going to do good to anybody*!'

As reflexive-agentic women both RB and NS are aware of the ways to work around or through gender constraints. For NS, her husband is a valued ally in this struggle, '*In the initial days of my marriage he always used to speak up for me* (to the in-laws). *I have some targets, aims and ambitions, and I am very clear about that. He dreams about my dreams.*' RB demonstrates a different approach by stressing the need to be oneself, '*I cherish my individual success and I never mix it with anything else.*' She cautions against being pushed by external discourses, '*If 'that' is not the person you are please don't try to pursue that…* (switches to Hindi) *Woh hoga nahin*! ('That' will never happen). Unlike NS, RB who labels herself an *outlier* observes that being a Scholar wife has led her to realise that marriage is not sacrosanct. She reminiscences , "*as a student at IIT,I wondered how and why a professor was divorced thrice and is still single… now I can fairly understand why that happens*!"

For NS being a scholar wife has positioned her as an empowered woman with potential of harbingering global change. Her husband's faith has been a catalyst in this realisation. As an agricultural engineer NS is fighting against global hunger through her research. For her, the pursuit of excellence is two-fold; she believes in marriage as an institution and cherishes it fully, "*I was a part of a very big job as a wife in India. I know I have responsibilities that I want to discharge.*"

Interestingly, shifting cultural-geographical positionalities have not altered their experiential realities. Unlike Mohanty who

autobiographically reminiscences, 'my life in the United States has exposed some new fault-lines—those of race and sexuality in particular' (2003, pp.2). For both RB and NS the shift to UK has strengthened their existing views about balancing marriage and scholarship; in their characteristically distinct styles, resulting from their own material histories in India.

Conclusion: Evaluating the Applicability of Postcolonial Analytics.

The above findings decidedly put the colonial image of Indian women under scrutiny.

The narratives of RB and NS about their re-appropriation of 'Scholar Wife', the creative redefinition of their relational yet independent existences, the variances in their experiences and beliefs, the bursting of the myth of Indian familial structures as purposively oppressive and the counter-evidence for political naiveté of women recurrently resonate with the postcolonial-feminist themes and question colonial representations.

In line with post-colonial assertions, the respondents acknowledge that the discussion has had a transformatory potential; it helped unearth hitherto unarticulated complexities and left them reflecting on the negotiation of the 'Scholar wife' as attempted by both of them.

Both of them also consider education to be emancipatory and criticality-inducing. For RB, "*The education system has helped me think independently and rationalise better... (it has) helped me from drowning in the emotional tantrums*"

The decolonising and politicising of knowledge by rethinking self is acknowledged as resulting from their material-experiential histories with people, events and spaces embodying emancipatory discourses on gender; for RB it was her working mother, for NS it is her husband's gender-defying support. This further reaffirms the postcolonial emphasis on individuals as material subjects.

As different material subjects both women, chart different paths to negotiate the dichotomies of 'Scholar wife'; RB takes the outlier position of being an individual and a scholar first, NS by prioritising love and common shared dreams of success with her husband, appears to be the inlier to those around her.

Finally, in contradiction to the colonial discourse on Universalist patriarchy, both women acknowledge that they could not be 'scholar wives' without their husband's support. The shared narratives on the husband's role have implications for further investigation into the calibration of Indian masculinities vis-a-vis their 'Scholar wives'.

The research evidence has affirmed the inadequacy of colonial discourses in explaining the present day lived realities of the 'Indian Hindu Scholar Wife'. At the same time, the multitude of differences between RB and NS' narratives caution against

treating women as a category of analysis (Mohanty, 1991, p.56). This caution is accentuated when read in conjunction with the multiplicity of axis of identification emanating from the socio-cultural–religious diversity of contexts and subjects.

RB's and NS's narratives reaffirm the need to question epistemic aprioris and explanatory metanarratives, alike.

Endnotes

1. The Scholarship details have not been shared on grounds of data protection. However, it goes to prove the assertion about the academic credentials of the scholar wives that the scholarships are merit-based. The awardees have to qualify a rigorous and competitive process of selection.
2. Some examples of differential life circumstances relevant to the study are having or not having children, or being accompanied or unaccompanied by family to the UK, etc.
3. Findings of a longitudinal study (1960–1990) conducted by Susan C. Seymour investigating the effects of urbanisation and modernisation on women from Bhubaneshwar— one of the major capital cities in India
4. Gail Omvedt (2015) traces the struggle for equal rights for women to as early as the Buddhist period.

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