

## Exploitation of Woman through the character of Radha in Aju Mukhopadhyay's *In Train*

Shaleen Kumar Singh  
Assistant Professor  
Dept of English  
Swami Shukdevanand College  
Shahjahanpur  
Email: [shaleen999@gmail.com](mailto:shaleen999@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

Aju Mukhopadhyay is versatile writer and has authored in almost all the major genres of literature. His maiden novel *In Train* is “Fortunately is a readable novel that helps us to recapture the now forgotten pleasure of fiction-readings”. Aju Mukhopadhyay, with the portrayal of Radha, has tried to expose the multiple throes pinned by society when she (a woman) is helpless, torn, desolate, dejected and above all, not married (or without the shade of a man). However, the portrayal of Aju Mukhopadhyay is not entirely dismissive and dark, he projects Radha as the icon of rebel and protest who defies fake social norms and customs. This novel is more in the style of a Bildungsroman as it depicts the growth and maturity of a rebel woman who always defied social norms and constraints. The protagonist Radha was kidnapped in the prime of her youth by a gang of miscreants who forced her into a life of slavery. Her rise from that level of subhuman existence to one of peace and spiritual growth forms the subject- matter of this novel.

**Keywords:** *Exploitation, male-dominated, desolate, spiritual, protagonist.*

In past few years most of creative writers of Indian English Literature have tried to portray a new image of woman. Some portray woman as ‘Culturally Advanced’, ‘Morally free,’ ‘Self-Confident,’ ‘Self- oriented’ and negatively against male- dominated society. However, most of them just projected the woman as protester against male-dominated world and could not provide another idealist image of her in parallel while a few of them have successfully sketched the image of an ideal woman of her protective tendencies in their creative works. Aju Mukhopadhyay’s *In Train* is one of such novels in which he has mixed both idealism and realism in a commendable way.

Aju Mukhopadhyay is versatile writer and has authored in almost all the major genres of literature. His maiden novel *In Train* is “Fortunately is a readable novel that helps us to recapture the now forgotten pleasure of fiction- readings” (Keshri 109). Aju Mukhopadhyay, with the portrayal of Radha, has tried to expose the multiple throes pinned by society when she (a woman) is helpless, torn, desolate, dejected and above all, not married (or without the shade of a man). However, the portrayal of Aju Mukhopadhyay is not entirely dismissive and dark,

he projects Radha as the icon of rebel and protest who defies fake social norms and customs. Rita Nath Keshri supports it and says:

This novel is more in the style of a Bildungsroman as it depicts the growth and maturity of a rebel woman who always defied social norms and constraints. The protagonist Radha was kidnapped in the prime of her youth by a gang of miscreants who forced her into a life of slavery. Her rise from that level of subhuman existence to one of peace and spiritual growth forms the subject-matter of this novel. (Keshri 109)

In *Train* is actually the story of a strong woman Radha who declines to surrender herself to the male-dominated society. In her *Aju* sketches his 'sympathies', 'anger' and a peculiar type of stubbornness against the exploiters called man. Radha who flees away from her parental house at the age of 35 is introduced typically by the novelist, when she boards the train at critical juncture. Mixing pathos and picturesque delineated, *Aju* writes:

The Train stopped soon. No one was around. She was past her prime youth, 35 or more, Alok surmised. She remains standing by the side of the open door. A strong breeze entered the compartment and awakened a few drowsy passengers. But none cared to notice it. The air was, after all, comfortable. (11)

*Aju* draws the realistic image of Radha who has now left her house and the miserable situation/condition of woman who is now a wanderer. *Aju* adds:

The woman was in a fettered sari. It revealed some of her body parts. Her face seemed wan out of weariness Black marks showed beneath her eye sockets. The flutter of her sari in the air displayed a luscious body to those who had been intently staring at her. Her bosom was heaving heavily with deep sighs from time to time. (11)

Or at another place when *Aju* mirrors the sad plight of Radha, he writes vividly: Tears were rolling down her cheeks. Alok got an opportunity to observe her from her close quarters. Her crimson face had deep bruises. Black patches were under her eyes. It seemed that she had not slept for many nights. (13)

Seeing Radha, Alok, another male character and a sympathizer feels nostalgic and recalls the days of yore when Radha both were 'the residents of Badatmala, Bardhaman, a town 100 kilometers away from Kolkata had been his neighbour for a quite a few years'. When he was 'loving there on account of the official posting of his father'. Both Radha and he were almost of the same age. And had a affectionate relationship between them. In her early years, the novelist relates the somewhat odd and habits of Radha who was not only an example of beauty, excellence, highly intelligent and tomboyish, but also she was frank with males and fond of 'smoking in an open four near the town, against the prevailing custom particularly in a mofussil town was much resented'. But Radha is not a common and traditional woman who succumbs to the age-old traditions and constraints binding her freedom. Radha has to bear the burat of

her imprudence her parents even. She admits it and finds herself non-plussed when she finds other women surrounding the falsity of customs. She says Alok:

You know, I was not liked by my parents and many others. But I was determined to snatch my rights. I overdid certain things to establish myself but little did I understand that women themselves were responsible to good extent, for their own misery. (15-16)

In the same bold manner she states elsewhere:

I didn't drink nor did I succumb to any manly impudence, though sometimes I felt very much attracted, almost dazzled by them. Sometimes my emoting was willful, to show my equal rights. I didn't enjoy it. This was my youthful pride, not to succumb but to drive them mad. (16)

And after many years Radha is never changed and says: I have remained the scene Radha with the same .....and force, in spite of having a polluted body now. (17)

The story of her endless suffering commences when she elopes away with a man named Kartik an actor of Suhasini Yatra Party. Kartik and his people continuously torture Radha. She is kidnapped and exploited very rudely. She relates her ..... to Alok as follows: For few days, I was repeatedly beaten, abused, raped and kept locked in a room. All my efforts to escape were futile. One after the other painfully, days, months and years passed by. (18)

Radha goes on to narrate her story and says:

I was compelled to sleep with more than one man with in their group. Always drunk, they were beastly devil. They had women also in their team. Their dramatic performance were as ..... as they were.

I was taken. I was compelled to do cooking and menial jobs in the company of other women. It was a living hell, I tell you. How they live their lives! How many crawl, how many swim and roll below the water! (18)

Radha suffers for more than three years and beating scolding and other physical harassment continue incessantly. She says pathetically, "Beating was his wont, a hobby. You can guess, how tamed I might be ! A free spirited chained!"

Thus, Radha exclaims herself as 'A free-spirited..... as she was considered by the group that she 'had been domesticated so they started thinking of roping' her in for their yatra performances. They were alluring her to take up the entire management of their affairs. But they were not kind at all as she says further, 'but the brutes were brutes still'. Therefore, one day she tries to break the shackles of slavery and runs away after injuring Kartik and his friend

Gupi by hitting ‘him forcefully with a chopper’. Here Radha starts leading another life with the man Ganen who supplied her the chopper assisted her in running away with him. She compares Ganen ‘like an Oasis in her ‘deserted life’. Ganen accompanies her to his ‘ancestral house, after so many long years. With many doubts and hesitations joining in his mind, he had not yet decided about it. (25) and later, after taking her to his ancestral home where he expects everyone to get surprised so he had been out for a long time. He introduces Radha to his family member as wife. Here Radha meets other characters like Shashikala, Kanaklata, Biren, Ramenand, Barudha, their son Raghunathy his Pratima and daughter barnali, Hemlata and lastly a boy servant who remained standing at a distance. Radha learns much in Ganen’s house so she says: Ganenda, a lot more than before, in this short space of a day, I have learnt from your family. (42)

In few days Radha becomes part and parcel of family. She intermingles with each member of family freely and when Gagen’s house is sold to promoters, he gets money as his share. By while he helps Radha to run the family. Now Radha gets ‘conscious about her position, about the need to earn and stand on her own feet’ and starts equipping ‘herself with the latest information, general knowledge and a newspapers’, looks into employment opportunities, moves here and there and writes applications to employers. Like a modern herself ..... And struggling women she fights the circumstances and society. The author elucidates this as-

.... Radha went to the local library where she used to read the papers, not only to keep herself abreast of news- local, national and international- but also to note the job opportunities advertised. This had been her parson, though rarely she ..... Vacancies suitable to her needs. (54)

Meanwhile she meets Alok who had thrown her visiting card in the train and who arranges house and job to Radha. She starts living in the flat alone. She develops died, Alok proposes Radha to marry him. Here, we notice a sudden full bloom of Radha’s maturity. Though Radha had always been derailed from the normal course and traditions of life, yet, here in the chapter titled ‘An idealism born out of ground reality’ of the novel Radha turns to the path of spirituality to which the novelist has termed as ‘idealism’.

Radha refuses the proposal of Alok and puts forth the following arguments:

Alok please, I know what you wanted. I’ve drifted away from the normal path of life. I don’t actually repent what had happened in my life. Rather I wan’t to use them, the experiences, the happenings, as a spring-board. You know that I’m not a lover of traditional norms, she said and continued, ‘And why a woman should always go to live in the man’s house as a wife, why not the opposite should happen, if the situation demands? (161)

In this chapter we notice Radha bending towards the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. She expresses her ideas towards social, political and spiritual issues very candidly. Radha starts her conversation quoting some lines from the discourse of the Mother which deserves mention here:

You who weep, who suffer and tremble, who dare not expect an end to your ills, an issue to your pangs, behold: there is no night without dawn and the day is about to break when darkness is thickest; there is no mist that sun does not dispel, no cloud that it does not gild, no tear that it will not dry one day, no storm that is not followed by its shining triumphant bow; there is no snow it does not melt, nor winter that it does not change into radiant spring. (161)

Radha tells Alok that she ‘read them (The Life Divine) but didn’t understand. And she admits that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have written something very great with a zeal for the well being of the people. She also makes it clear on the question whether she is their follower that she is not the same and says:

No Alok, I’m not going to their follower for if I do so, I’ll add one more devotee statistic, maximum one more centre of the Ashram and some devotees may join us later. (162)

However, she acknowledges the importance of the writings of the both as ‘they have written and said many penetrating things about social problems, philosophy, yoga, spiritualism, the lot’. She is also willing to use their works for application in our lives by establishing centers without declaring herself as the follower of any particular system. We notice her Aurobindonian consciousness in her following statement:

It’s true that most of the problems arise due to ignorance and disharmony among men, disharmony in their own selves. So our aim will be to try to establish a true consciousness among people, to educate them. Not in the way Governments achieve literacy targets; many times people forget how to sign their names in their mother tongues, which constitutes literacy, after the target is reached. (162)

Besides, she expresses her views on woman transparently to forces on woman education.

The problem of women, as I’ve understood, is not only their problem, it’s a general problem. The difference between man and women are basically physically, biological, not otherwise. A true education will make them aware of their respective strength and weakness. They would accordingly grow up, prepare themselves and contribute to the society according to their ability. (163)

The regular practice of meditation is the panacea of all the ills as it can develop awareness and consciousness among the mankind through which man will naturally detest cruelty, anger, hatred and violence. Radha answers Alok on the question as to how she can get rid of the present social evils and solve the problems of woman. She says:

So many groups, particularly political parties come to solve these problems but they create more by trying to get benefit out of the present situation. Politics has a pernicious effect upon men and society. In fact, no outside

agency, no rule imposed on others can really solve any problems. They will create some illusion, some temporary solutions. (163)

He again narrates it by giving an example:

For example, by fixing quotas for passing examinations, for getting services under relaxed norms, by giving privileges in favour of some groups of people they further weaken the society. In the name of creating a classless society the so-called progressive groups create heterogeneous communities, who perpetually clash among themselves. Jealousy and hatred become their watchword. (164)

Radha makes it clear again that she will 'have no connection with any political group' rather she and other like-minded people will educate at the preliminary and higher level. She thus opens new gates of knowledge and emerges before us as a perfect new woman advocating new education. The following statement testifies it:

We shall have no connection with any political group. We shall educate people at the preliminary and higher level, as suitable to a particular group. There will be meditation centres for self-development and books will be made available in each centre for studies. Talks may be arranged by proficient people but that must be on a basis of interaction. Not in the traditional way of class-room lecture..... we'll not have any system of examination, not will any certificated be issued. Every one of us will grow up for lower to higher realms of thought and consciousness, which must one day control our outer activities. (164)

Radha also firmly holds that 'a really developed person cannot be corrupt and selfish and she wish ardently to produce new man and new woman. She knows that hers is a not time bound programme and 'the actual functioning will depend on people's participation and their willingness to progress.' (165)

However, her programme will be without the support of politics or religion, she will open her gates for all the religion and all the ideologies. Radha here seems a symbol of Ganga who flows from the Himalayas down to the Dakshineswar carrying the dirt and filth of the whole nation purifying and sanctifying both the body and soul of man and earth. Likewise Radha suffering the buffets of time and circumstances, and wearing with the pains and pangs of poverty, exploitation and corruption, ultimately turns spiritual and thus washes all her previous moral sins and adheres to the path of spirituality where she is and purified. Therefore we may call it as the point of culmination or the eternal goal of her journey.

Mr. Rituparna Dutta Roy summarizes the character of Radha as follows:

In Radha, we meet a girl, who, escaping her exploitation and humiliation, gradually tries to trace her identity, to regain her self-respect, and goes on trying to achieve something ever higher- the satisfaction gained from helping people in distress. (Roy 11)

Here, it is to be noted that all the efforts or actions made in the mundane or temporal world terminate in Mr. Dutta Roy's 'something even higher' so all the critics, authors theorists,

academics and scholars should bear in mind that we all are in the cycle of evolution and evolution of consciousness which gradually develops and reaches to its full bloom during the journey of life.

In fact, this chapter mirrors the flowering of the lotus of Radha's knowledge which is born out of her constant pricks and throes that she bore with lifelong. Aju has sketched a perfect image of 'new woman' who is not 'Abla' (a weak woman) but the one more robust than the so-called idealist and moralist males. The chapter throws light on the message that all the streams of good or bad, virtues or vice, pleasant or unpleasant, morality or immorality, honesty and dishonesty, truth or lies etc conglomerate into the eternal ocean of divinity or spirituality. The novelist may little it as idealism, yet the readers should try to translate this idealism into reality.

#### **Works Cited:**

Keshri, Rita Nath. "Book Review InTrain." Poetcrit July 2004.

Mukhopadhyaya, Aju. In Train. Kolkata: Writers Workshop, 2005.

Roy, Rituparno Dutta. "A Train to A Bold and Unfortunate Woman's Self Respect." Indian Book Chronicle March 2009.