

VOICE OF THE UNWANTED GIRL

Sujata Bhatt

SUJATA BHATT, a graduate of the Writer's Workshop University of Iowa, has been acclaimed as 'one of the finest poets alive today'. 'Voice of the Unwanted Girl' taken from her anthology of poems My Mother's Way of Wearing a Sari, exhibits her rare sensitivity and social concern. The inhumanity and horror of female foeticide is wonderfully articulated through a victim girl child. It is really a stroke of genius to make an unborn victim, here a girl child, question patriarchy and demand for a world in which gender discriminations are done away with. It lends pathos to the poem and makes reader ponder over the prevalent social bias against a girl child.



A. Work in small groups and discuss these questions:

1. How many brothers or sisters do you have? Does the girl child in your family receive same kind of love and attention as the boy in the family? If not, why? Is it proper?
2. You might have heard several cases of female foeticide? Who, in your opinion, is responsible for this?

VOICE OF THE UNWANTED GIRL

Mother, I am the one
You sent away
When the doctor told you
I would be
a girl – In the end they had to
give me an injection to kill me.
Before I died I heard
the **traffic rushing** outside, the monsoon

slush, the wind sulking through
your beloved Mumbai – 10
I could have clutched the neon blue
no one wanted –

No one wanted
To touch me – except later in the autopsy room
when they knew my mouth would not search 15
for anything – and my head could be measured
and bent cut apart.

I looked like a sliced pomegranate.
The fruit you never touched.
Mother, I am the one you sent away
When the doctor told you
I would be a girl – your second girl.
Afterwards, as soon as you could
you put on your grass-green sari –
the orange stems of the parijatak blossoms 20
glistened in your hair – 25

**B.1.1. Write T for true and F for false statement :**

- Mother was taken to the autopsy room by force.
- The doctor was solely responsible for the heinous crime.
- The female foeticide took place in Bombay.
- Everybody loved the speaker.
- Mother loved Pomegranate very much.

B.1.2. Answer the following questions briefly:

- Who is 'I' in the opening line?
- Who does the speaker address to?
- What did the mother do to the speaker?
- What happened to the speaker?
- What did the doctor tell the mother? How did it affect her?
- How did the mother dress up when she knew about her second girl child?
- Do you find any evidence in the poem that shows the mother's lack of concern for her girl child?

Afterwards

everyone smiled.

But now I ask you

to look for me, mother,

look for me because

I won't come to you in your dreams.

Look for me, mother, look

because I won't become a flower

I won't turn into a butterfly

And I am not a part of anyone's song.

Look, mother,

look for the place where you have sent me.

Look for the **unspeakable**.

for the place that can never be described.

Look for me, mother, because

this is what you have done.

Look, for me, mother, because

This is not 'God's will'.

Look for me, mother

because I smell of **formaldehyde**—

I smell of formaldehyde

and still, I wish you would look

for me, mother.

30



35

40

45

B.2. Answer the following question briefly:

1. Who does 'everyone' refer to in line 28? Why did everyone smile?
2. How does the 'unwanted girl' question her mother's conscience?
3. What does the killed infant smell of?
4. How many times has the verb 'look' been repeated in the poem? What effect does it have on you?
5. What does 'God's will' mean in line 44?
6. What does the speaker wish in the last two lines?

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

traffic (n): vehicles plying on road

rushing (v): speeding up

slush (n): snow that is starting to melt and become dirty

sulking (v): blowing away angrily

clutched (v): grasped

autopsy room (n): room where a medical examination of a dead person is carried out to find out the cause of death

sliced (participle as adj): carved, cut in pieces

pomegranate (n): round fruit with hard skin and thick seeds

stems (n): shaft, trunk

parijatak (n) a flower plant

glistened (v): shine due to wetness

unspeakable (adj): disgusting, used for emphasizing how bad something is and how much it upsets one

will (n): wish, desire

formaldehyde (n): a gas with no colour and a strong smell, used mixed with water to preserve things in a laboratory.

C. 1. LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Who, in your opinion, is responsible for the killing of the unborn female child – mother, doctor, society or all of them?
2. How will you react if you find that female foeticide is being committed before you? Would you try to stop it or remain indifferent to it?
3. Describe the scene of autopsy room with all minute details. Have you ever been to an autopsy room?
4. Attempt a critical estimate of the poem.

C. 2. GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following in **groups** or **pairs**:

- How far is it proper to say "Blessed with a son and cursed with a daughter"?
- True progress can hardly be achieved without abolishing gender bias in the society.

C. 3. COMPOSITION

Write a paragraph in about 100 words on the following:

- Female foeticide
- A visit to an autopsy room

D. WORD STUDY**D.1. Dictionary Use**

Ex. 1. Correct the spelling of the following words:

insection

trafic

cluched

blosoms

glisened

formaldehyde

D.2. Word-meaning

Find from the poem words the meanings of which have been given in column

A. The last part of each word is given in **column B**:

Column A

rushing

slush

sulking

clutched

autopsy room

glisened

will

formaldehyde:

Column B

a gas with no colour and a strong smell

wish, desire

grasped

blowing away angrily

speeding up

snow that is starting to melt and become dirty

shine due to wetness

room for medical examination of a dead person

D.3. Word -formation

Read the following line carefully:

Look for the **unspeakable**

Ex. Note how prefix 'un-' is added to 'speakable'. Add a prefix to each of the following words and use the new words in sentences of your own. The first one is done for you:

- told – untold. This is an untold story.
- heard
- clutched
- wanted
- touch
- send
- smiling
- turn
- speakable
- described

D.4. Registers

Ex.1. Find out from the poem words which are used in the medical field, e.g. *autopsy*

