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**The Matrix of Marriage for Women from an Indian Perspective -
In relevance to 'Saat Pagla Aakash ma'**

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The novel, 'Seven Steps in The Sky the Seven Steps' correlates with Saptapadi, an essential marriage ceremony that is considered to be a heavenly bond in Hindu society, according to the Hindu religion. It basically deals with the matrix of marriage for women, from an Indian perspective, something that develops in a cultural, social, or political environment.

Kundnika Kapadia, the author portrays the matrix of marriage and shows that ladies have forever been viewed as an auxiliary to men. By depicting the conjugal homegrown existence of Vasudha–Vyomesh, Anavipul, Sumitra-Animesh, and Satish-Vasanti, Kundanika Kapadia shows that after marriage, there is no change for a male in home or society, but it changes drastically for a woman, considering her look, home, family, work, and her religion also at times is modified. Nonetheless, the author portrays an ideal matrix of marriage based on equity and sexual orientation through an optimal couple Isha–Swaroop. So she doesn't uphold estrangement from society since a portion of her characters, as Isha and Swarup really do accomplish satisfaction through marriage.

'Seven Steps in The Sky' isn't just the narrative of Vasudha, as an individual but it is written on account of the Indian women who have endured because of a male-dominated society. Accordingly, in 'Seven Steps in The Sky' the sky is presented as the confined image of a hitched life as well as an image of opportunity and space for Indian women.

Seminar Paper

Seven Steps in The Sky by Kundnika Kapadiya portrays Gujarati culture and the psyche of Gujarati personages. Specifically, herein the matrix of marriage is depicted so intensely and the gender inequality, where womanhood suffers from the issues of self-respect and self-identity crisis is minutely presented. The novel addresses the sufferings and struggles of women which belong to all the layers of societies. It is beyond doubt that the novel sets a milestone in delineating a gamut of experiences of Gujarati womanhood and it seems to set a trend for feminist literature in Gujarati language. Seven Steps in The Sky evolves as the principal women's activist novel of its kind, depicting the Matrix of marriage, and the role of women in society at large. During the twentieth century, women were not used to breaking the barriers of the patriarchal norms set up for women from time immemorial, and during this time zone, this novel was a stimulating literary masterpiece for one and all.



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‘Seven Steps in the Sky’ has received many honors, including the lofty National Sahitya Academy Award. It is translated into numerous Indian dialects, as well as telecasted as a daily soap serial on National television. The main distribution of the novel was in Gujarat as it was written in Gujarati language and the reaction to the book was overpowering all over India and especially in Gujarat. Later, numerous gatherings and conversations, discussions, and debates were organized on the novel which were held in towns all over Gujarat. The gatherings and conversations about the novel were organized by women's associations, artistic circles, literature clubs, libraries, universities, and schools. Some favored the book and the concept of the matrix of marriage presented in the novel while some severely criticized the concept of the author. They considered the novel as a threat to the institution of marriage which is the pillar of society.

The History of Gujarati Literature lets us know that previous Gujarati novels were written generally for a clear purpose. The authors wrote the characters and the episodes to expand and clarify their social worries and to provide a certain assorted way out. Govardhan Ram Tripathi had obviously said in Saraswatachandra that he needed to write to impart his own perspectives to individuals. Kundnika Kapadiya, author of three novels and four collections of short stories, won the Sahitya Akademi Award for this novel, originally published in Gujarati in 1985. This novel ‘Saat Paglaan Akashma’ is full of varied characters with a wide emotional range reflecting the various aspects of the human condition, specifically women.

Muliebrity, the feminine energy is portrayed as gentle, caring and nurturing life force which is taken as creation of nature itself. Further, the uncritical affection, fine food, homely services, docile, and meek, are the qualities attached to the base and life formation of women. Novel is protagonist Vasudha’s journey who is the mouthpiece to such feminine qualities. When a serial was featured on the basis of the novel, it was telecasted on regional television, where the characters were found full of grandeur, set in different age groups, just as in the novel. The emotions and characters of those stories are ones the audience can relate to and love to watch in serial, especially of the protagonist- Vasudha, a little birdie, whose seven steps towards the sky, are found noteworthy. Moreover, one also can analyze about the novel’s expediency of translation from the regional language to the English language which is titled ‘Seven Steps in the Sky’. The novel, ‘Seven Steps in The Sky’ correlates the Seven Steps' with Saptapadi, an essential marriage ceremony that is considered to be a heavenly bond in Hindu society, according to the Hindu religion. It basically deals with the matrix of marriage for women, from an Indian perspective, something that develops in a cultural, social, or political environment. However, Seven Steps in the Sky is very capricious, in light of the fact that the



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different topics under homegrown circumstances have all the earmarks of being proposed to introduce uneven views, that too with outrage and misery.

In the Preface of the *Seven Steps in The Sky*, Kundnika Kapadiya appropriately says, “Some sociologists and intellectuals, even feminists, feel that total equality is impossible, but I am an optimist. Not many years ago it was believed by eminent persons that slavery would never be abolished, apartheid was there to stay, and totalitarian governments like that of the erstwhile Soviet Union would dominate the whole world. But none of these systems have survived. There is an inherent instinct in the human soul to seek freedom and it will not rest until it has achieved it.

The novel is already in its sixth edition in Gujarat! And that supports my feeling that there is always a long cause, never a lost one.”

(Kundnika Kapadiya, At Nandigram, June 1994)

Numerous pundits are of the assessment that *Seven Steps in the Sky* is a significant misdirecting statement regarding women's rights. The novel ‘Seven Steps in the Sky’ signifies the importance of Saptapadi, a basic custom of traditional Hindu Marriage Ceremony. “Saptapadi” in Hindu marriage is a custom since a long time ago in which, the groom and the woman make seven strides around the sacred fire and make a vow to carry on with an amicable wedded life. Anyway, in actuality, the seven stages secure an inflexible and super durable chain around the female's feet. As indicated by her, the very second a Hindu girl weds her opportunities to live life with freedom dissolves and she finds herself into tight constraints and issues of mundane marital life.

According to Osho Half of Humanity Is Deprived of Raising its Consciousness and if women had been respected in the past, humanity would not have been in such a mess as it is today- because women are half of humanity.

“I am all in favor of women’s liberation – but not the way the women’s liberation movement is going. It is taking a reactionary attitude; it is not a real revolution. It is trying to imitate man. And remember, imitation never makes you equal; imitation at the most will make you a carbon copy – but the original is original.” Osho, Socrates Poisoned Again After 25 Centuries, Talk #7



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In *Saat Paglaan Akashma*, marital canopy is the recurring and relevant to most of the characters. It is important to analyze marriage as an institution because it is an essential element of any culture or society which is related to the basic necessity of men and women in general. Women specifically in Gujarati culture were meant to work in home and live domestic life. They were limited to their reproductive functioning as per their physical structure, for ages, and further carried on further household duties and raised the kids. By and large, she was nurturing future generations, the saplings that are going to bear fruits for the future society. And men were supposed to earn for women-kids, provide them their basic necessities of food and shelter. In ancient times, the outer world, where life was full of danger and required muscle power, at that time these duty assignments might have turned up fruitful and could have worked for both men and women. Patriarchal family systems of letting women stay in home for safety, later turned up as a rule and care became control. The one who owns the money, spends the money as per the choice and that becomes the rule. So the head of the family gains the power of taking the decisions which leads to kingship, and this reason treated the rest of the people as slaves and this turned up as a seed to the revolt and the process was coined as a movement for equality which relates with the term- Feminism.

Women's liberal life in marriage, the space, the freedom to be actually existing in marital matrix will also be men's peaceful existence and his way towards his liberal life. From the origin the basic fundamental scenario to be liberal can be considered as one cannot make anybody a slave unless one is ready to become enslaved by the slave. Slavery is a two-sided phenomenon, and maybe the master is a bigger slave than the slave itself. A slave is not going to feel equal in anyways and that will never give freewill to slavery. Man the superior and woman an inferior, leads to owner-slave relationship in marriages. Propagating the same brand of militant feminism, Germaine Greer feels that marriage as an institution must be abolished because, if women are to influence a significant amelioration in their condition it seems obvious that they must refuse to marry.

The epoch in which the novel 'Saat Paglaan Akashma' was written and till today, in any case of male guardians with virility, women are found subordinates or slaves with muliebrity. From the feminist point of view, a period of transition is an ongoing process and only a part of the societal layer womanhood finds liberation in life. The majority of women are engaged in production and then nurturing the next generation of humanity. Western culture have women who are becoming free minded and living life on their own terms, but still marriage matrix is the area we need to work and where still feminism is needed between



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those four walls. Even those who belong to today's society and want to understand marriage as an institute one needs to understand various matrices in which ancient forms survived. Modern marriage matrix can be understood the best in the light of a past that tends to perpetuate itself passing through the various generations. And 'Saat Paglaan Aakashma' was ripple generating epitome written by Kundnika Kapadiya. Her insightful observations are portrayed as chapters and in a way colours of various facets of womanhood in conjugal relationship. Many of her sufferings are painted verbally, who face various struggles and dilemmas.

As Osho says, "Man has been beating women, repressing women, condemning women. And not knowing that condemning women, repressing women is making them inferior, half of humanity is deprived of raising its consciousness. And you are deprived, because you could also have learned the art of moving upwards from half of the universe. You could also have moved on the same way, on the same path; hence I always say, the liberation of women is also the liberation of man. It is more the liberation of man than the liberation of women."-Osho, Socrates Poisoned Again After 25 Centuries, Talk #21

Man wants the woman to observe the local population, the general rules and regulations, the way women should look and act but she refuses to go with him. One can't have a clear vision through a veil, whether it is a 'Purdah' or a 'Burkha'. women can't see through a veil... and it covers a lot of her vision though her mind works, her confidence and assertiveness, gets covered and it is significant point in the life progress itself. Education and economic evolution has made women stand for themselves as Vasudha who gathers courage to step out of homeworld rather a world of Vyomesh.

As Simon de Beauvoir says, "Economic evolution in woman's situation is in a process of upsetting the institution of marriage: it is becoming a union freely entered upon by the consent of two independent persons; the obligations of the two contracting parties are personal and reciprocal; adultery is for both a breach of contract; divorce is obtainable by the one or the other on the same conditions. Woman is no longer limited to the reproductive function, which has lost in large part its character as natural servitude and has come to be regarded as a function to be voluntarily assumed and it is compatible with productive labour, since, in many cases, the time off required by a pregnancy is taken by the mother at the expense of the State or the employer."



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Every woman at the core of the mind understands the barriers of freedom, feels averse to a society which dislikes liberal upbringing, puts restrictions on her deep down desires, controls her growth, but somehow or the other she is not interested in challenging the system. Today, many versions of feminism as liberal, radical, socialist, post-colonial have cropped up, making a body of literature worthy of research and enquiry. A feminist ideology stems from 'individualism which stormed the west, but in India its impact was silent but steady. Sahgal points out: "Feminism in India is making a tremendous impact with less noise and drama than in the West. In the future, in any society or culture, marriage would turn into a contract between individuals based upon the complete liberty of the husband and wife; how it would seem in the upcoming decades; how institute marriage will prevail in the world of tomorrow will depend upon the general structure of society.

Judith Butler, in Gender Trouble, points out "The Woman in marriage qualifies not as an identity, but only as a relational term that both distinguishes and binds the various clans to a common but internally differentiated matrilineal identity." Ironically, women do help in creating ethnic and racial boundaries by giving them names and identities, but their own identities remain suspect, anonymous and insignificant to men.

The matrix of marriage is delineated adequately and aptly presents that ladies have forever been taken as auxiliaries to men. By depicting the conjugal homegrown existence of Vasudha–Vyomesh, Ana-Vipul, Sumitra-Animesh, and Satish-Vasanti, Kundnika Kapadiya shows that after marriage, there is no change for a male in home or society, but it changes drastically for a woman, considering her look, home, family, work, and her religion also at times is modified. Accordingly, in 'Seven Steps in The Sky' the sky is presented as the confined image of a hitched life as well as an image of opportunity and space for Indian women. 'Seven Steps in The Sky' isn't just the narrative of Vasudha, as an individual but it is written on account of the Indian women who have endured because of a male-dominated society. As indicated by Kundnika Kapadiya, a marriage institution specifically implies a territory of constraints for women.

Nonetheless, the author portrays an ideal matrix of marriage based on equity and sexual orientation through an optimal couple-conjugal relationship of Isha–Swaroop. So she doesn't uphold estrangement from society since a portion of her characters, as Isha and Swarup really do accomplish satisfaction through marriage.



Kundnika wrote a diary for years about her observations regarding societal injustice done to women; she herself felt like raising her voice for the silence among the women she saw around. As a keen observer, and with empathetic insight and with scholarly verbosity she wrote this novel. The novel is like a tale of superficial feminism, as it does not have any objective analysis of the gender equation, and is more of like a diatribe regarding the oppression of the female voice and womanhood by itself. Male characters are more like in shadows, losing all claims to be life-like characters. They are flat and maligned figures. The gender issue or discrimination issue is not fairly justified by understating manhood and making some overstatements or presenting a one-sided view from women's perspective only. Hereby the novel presents a reality of humankind: one of the greatest illusions is that one could be free of illusions.

As a woman Krystle writes on web, "The most wonderful moment in a woman's life is when she realizes she can do whatever she wants, and she doesn't owe anyone an explanation, and she doesn't need anyone's permission. She's just living. And it's beautiful."

Traditionally, marriage is offered to any culture as a fate to womanhood. In modern times, however successful a woman is, she needs to get married as an ultimate success, goal, or a mindset of being settled finally as per the norms of culture- society. Women in the society are to be married, remarried, or suffer from not being married. For the celibate woman there is no other way out from this institute of marriage as the matrix of it is so profoundly intricate that it turns up as a matter of survival. Marriage has always been a very different thing for man and for a woman. Love, or without love, love after marriage, marriage without love, in almost all the conditions the term 'love' can be replaced by the term 'sex' for a man but it cannot be vice versa for a woman. There cannot be a peaceful life beyond love, sex or marriage especially for a woman as a sentimental being. As Friedrich depicts, "It is not a lack of love, but a lack of friendship that makes unhappy marriages." — Friedrich Nietzsche in his Book : The Gay Science

The writer in the prologue explicitly depicts that Seven Steps in the Sky has the majority of the episodes based on the genuine happenings of womanhood. The author presents the confined image of married women and the psychological state of a married woman which turns out to be more awful for women. The conflict, the struggle married women confront consistently is so minutely depicted in the novel. Kundanika's women need opportunity, a space of their own, in the local area, to prevail with respect there is a need for a self satisfying existence. The Indian marital arrangement is in the center of the novel which is tinted with the application of feminist perceptions. Kapadia delineates some female characters – Vasudha and some other



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women in plenty Ana, Alope, Sumitra, Lata, Leena, Lalita, Ranjana, Vasanti, Urmila, Nalini etc, are portrayed to weave web of stories arising questions about the slavery inequality, liberation, discrimination, suppression, subordination, and domestic violence as well as domestic abuse. Here one tends to forget which story is of which women, specifically, Leena, Lalita, Ranjana, Vasanti and likewise attempt to show that women are taken advantage of, and the relative men in their life controls over them and that urge that a man needs to hold the grip over women is so very minutely presented and in this manner the man needs to stifle women mercilessly, someway or the other. Vasudha's interactions with Leena, Urmila, Nalini, Lata, Lalita and Vasanti revealed the plethora of stories about subservience, discrimination, unequal property rights, the double burden of working women, domestic violence, extra-marital affairs, and the stifling of their creative genius: "Women have had a low status for centuries. They have been victims of injustice and violence, their intelligence and talents made subsidiary to beauty and appearance; they have been made prisoners under the guise of 'protection', and to make them accept all this without rebelling, they have been given false ideals. They have been told that to be epitomes of endurance and sacrifice is the realization of their womanhood, that not maintaining a separate identity but submerging it into their husband's is their ultimate goal." (Kapadia 1994: 26) Notwithstanding, this novel can't be dealt with just as a novel with feminist aspects.

Seven Steps in The Sky is not just the tale of a married woman, Vasudha, the protagonist, nonetheless it is a narrative of the women around the world who have endured the system on account of a patriarchal society. There are customs, norms, traditions that are to be observed by women after marriage, while as for men after marriage, almost nothing changes except he gets a wonderful wife to take care of him. The life of a woman gets restricted by lots of boundaries after marriage, while for man sky is the limit as usual. Kundika Kapadiya herself says that these societal norms are usually set by men and tend to become women's way of life. Seven steps in the sky is anything, but an account of various individuals and in a way, it is the story of the entire womankind. It is the story of achieving equality, self respect and a right to live with dignity, after marriage.



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