

CULTURE OF MARGINALIZATION – GENDER IN KAVERI NAMBISAN'S NOVELS

A A. Vijaya Jyothi
Anil Neerukonda Institute of
Technology and Sciences,
Sangivalasa, Visakhapatnam, India
vijayajyothiakunuri@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The culture of marginalization involves gender as one of its domain of discourse in 1980 and 1990. Marginalization of women and their struggle for self-identity persists as a major theme in postcolonial works which are mostly documentary commentaries on gender discrimination and oppression. Kaveri Nambisan novels are set in domestic realm and explore the experiences within family and society by depicting in varied body of work, the firm or virtuous, demoralized and persecuted Indian woman. Kaveri Nambisan amalgamates both nation and family in her works. Marriage, home, community and religion in patriarchy are some causes for the deplorable condition of women in the postcolonial India. This paper reveals the 'body of a victimized woman', - the burning issues in social milieu in the novels, 'On wings of Butterfly', 'The Truth Almost about Bharat' and 'The Story that Must not be Told'. Firstly, the portrayal of female phase stressing on self discovery, imitation as well as protest indicates her search for self-identity. Secondly, radical Feminism blames making gender and class responsible for a woman enslavement and demand abolition of class society.

Culture as defined by Mark. J. Smith and Thorton is the exploration of the everyday experiences of the people. A recent study in social sciences focuses on the study of cultures which is a directly linked through literature as a writer is nurtured by his or her cultures. (Smith 2002:22-23) Under this discourse, the history of feminism which is documentation of historical domination and oppression based on gender is built and further elaborated at length. The history of marginalization on basis of gender began in India way back as depicted in religious texts like Dharmasatra and Rig Veda. In Mahabharatha, depiction of Draupadi who has to accept the fate of marrying five men, Gandhari deceived to marry a blind king, practice of Sati, widowhood etc. For the rulers, colonial exploitation was an incidental and regrettable byproduct of a philosophy of life that was in harmony with superior forms of political and economic organization. Marginalization of women, struggles of lower castes and economically backward communities haunted the nation even after decolonization. Therefore, postcolonial works are mostly documentary commentaries on poverty, caste, gender discrimination and oppression. Marginalization of women comprising suffering of

different sections found its way into the literary discourse through the voice of subaltern historiography all over the world. Women novelists across cultures explore women's position which moves from exaltation, victimization to self-assertion.

Gayatri Spivak in a conversation with 'The Hindu', comments that the Indian feminists addressed the gender marginalization by empowering the third world women with the right to self-representation in their attempt to liberate themselves from the bondage of patriarchy.

The focal point of women writers of twentieth century is the issue of marginalization of women and a struggle for gender equality although after Independence Indian writers focused in construction of imaginary communities and individuals. (Tharu and Lalitha 1995:79)

The creative writings of the colonial and postcolonial women like Kaveri Nambisan, portrays 'Double Colonization', which refers to the subjugation of 'native' women by both the regal and the patriarchal cultures which confine women to child bearing duties, and single out in terms of both femininity and ethnicity. The Post and hope for a better tomorrow existed. Most of the novels by the men are about indoctrination Independent India as Srinivas Iyengar perceives is a window for national identity where excitements, frustrations against colonialism or nation building but little about women and their emancipation. (Iyengar 1962) M. K. Naik believes that most of the novels from 1960s to the end of 20th century are either societal based or historical. (Naik 1982) Pramod Nayar observes that the nationalists tried to resurrect the voice of the native women but their freedom is again limited and biased because of the narrow outlook of the patriarchal society, whereas women novelists ventriloquised for the women and allowed them to introspect and discover their identity with respect to the society. (Nair 2011)

This paper focuses the 'body of a woman', where the burning issues regarding women in social milieu is discussed. The psychological explorations in Kaveri Nambisan's novels reveal that the women's body has undeniably become the site of oppression. The novelist in '*wings of Butterfly*', '*The Truth Almost about Bharat*' and '*The Story that Must not be Told*', has made deliberate attempt to reveal the body of victimized woman. The obsession and anxiety of the novelist towards women in our country is quite obvious. Women's body is a subject which is confiscated, contested and debated; this is quite evident by the crimes like molestation and abuse of a child or a woman by the male members of the family, rapes and sexual assaults, honor killings, suffering and psychological violence, dowry deaths and exploitation by fake god men. Kaveri Nambisan's novels are a portrayal of the travails of her protagonists in the family and society, whose life is disfigured and marred by violence as cited from the novels.

Molestation and abuse by fathers has become quite rampant. It is quite ridiculous that fathers instead of protecting their daughters act as demons and pawn them for money. Some fulfill their sexual desire as they feel that their indulgence will not be revealed. There are many instances where girls are molested by their fathers. A girl child is exposed to danger not only outside but also at home. Lily Kutty along with her sister is a Trapeze artist, their father makes them practice the whole day and if they do not, he chains them to the lion's cage at the

night. (WOB p 97) Panna is another such character whose father pledges her whenever he needs money, each time with a different name. She is sometimes Rehana and Meneka and then Gracy. And so Panna is forced to choose this trade as a vocation to win her livelihood. (WOB p.53)

Humiliation faced by a mother is beyond comprehension, when her son assumes her as an object of lust. It is nothing less than a mockery on humanity. A woman's position in the society is so vulnerable that she is unable to trust her own kinfolk? Panna makes her livelihood by trading her body. One day she is shocked to see her ten year old son, Shiva, watching her nakedness after the hotel cook left. Unable to bear the disgrace, she beats him black and blue. He ran away from home that night. But one late evening Panna sees Shiva sitting on the bed flings a twenty rupee note and tries to grab her. Though he grew on streets and tries many whores but the image of the first woman he sees naked is not gone. He chases her for a fifty, then a sixty, then a hundred. (WOB p.54)

Marginalization of women has no geographical barriers whether it is about our country or a distant land. Of all the rape cases in the country which has gone to court in fifty years; the punishment is a mere rap on the knuckles for being naughty. In '*The Story that Must not be Told*', a boy of 17 joins a gang from a slum. They happen to meet an American girl who does a survey on how much each family in the slum spent on their food. So basing on the reports the US will release funds for the uplifting the slum dwellers. These boys befriend her and the girl tells the youngest of them how it is to be an American girl, to drive, drink and date with men and reach home late at night. One night when her friend wasn't around, the girl is gang-raped by these boys, the 17 year old implored others to stop but they beat him up calling him a coward but this boy did not run for help instead as soon as the gang leaves, he rapes her and the girl dies. (p.141)

Dr. King is a neurosurgeon, he chooses a nurse to assist him in the dog experiments. She turns down his charms and gets herself transferred to another ward. He is infuriated and one evening when the girl was on her way to the bus stop, he drags her into a parked vehicle. She is found tied to the steering wheel with a dog chain strangling her hair, the next morning; the girl is leading a vegetable life in the hospital. No one dares smear the image of a future Padma Bhushan winner because of a minor scandal. (WOB p.95)

Though love is a two sided affair, not men but women are chastised by the society as if it is a transgression on her part. Madhusudan, a student of B.A is in love with, Radhika. When Madhusudan's parents come to know that a cow herd's daughter has guts enough to love a high caste Hindu, they are enraged. One night the village elders hang the girl to the banyan tree with her black dupatta, and the same night Madhusudan kills himself by hanging to the same tree. (WOB p.132)

Eric Gordon, a retired bank official in London, frightens old ladies by wearing olive green overcoat over his nakedness. He waylays lonely ladies and greets them saying good day. (p.200) As a result the women collapse due to fright and are rushed to the hospital.

Komal Devi, a primary school teacher is harassed by the men every day. She complains to the police, writes angry letters in the magazines takes her son or husband along

as an escort and holds an umbrella for defense, but hardly there is a day in her life, when she is not mangled in body and mind. (WOB p.140)

Mr. Titcombe, A senior political lawyer in Washington is a devout husband and a father of four. He chooses stylish hotels which supply Champaign, goodnight chocolate, satin sheets and a girl on pillow. But suddenly the lawyer's attitude changes because he is tired of sexy girls and is infatuated with the matronly women who come to clean his office. (WOB p. 99)

Girls are not safe in orphanages those who hold the moral responsibility to protect and nourish the young kids or act as guardians molest them and nip off their childhood. Women are considered by men as the objects to satisfy their lust but not as human beings. Man covets after a woman for biological want but cannot accept her as his equal. Milar is brought up in an orphanage. The warden of the orphanage develops serious grudge against Millar and always finds fault with her and hits her, the male warden intervenes and asks Milar to meet him in his room. Every Sunday morning she walks out with her hair neatly tied with ribbons and a piece of bebinca or a fruit and nut chocolate. He irons her clothes by asking her to step out of her skirt and blouse. One day after ironing her clothes, he tries to reach for her nickers and starts pulling them down her legs. Milar punches the male warden in the face, kicks, and scratches and ran away and later she walks out of the orphanage. She is adopted by an elderly couple not out of love but owing to necessity that the girl would earn livelihood for them. (WOB p.113-114)

Meena a brilliant young lawyer gets married to a dull, avaricious man with dreadful stammer. His friends poison his ears saying that the dowry is short of what he is worth of. A week later her husband along with his six friends gave her the royal treatment. They held a lighted match to the soles of her feet causing permanent contracture which folds her knees over her belly. After three years Meena appears in court 18 times both as a petitioner and an advocate and got written as the only lawyer who goes to court on her haunches the judge sentences the seven men to ten years each two of the men escape from prison. (WOB p.159)

In '*The Truth almost about Bharat*,' Bhojvi's only sister is married to the son of a sarpanch in Pawa. Six months later her husband begins to harass her for more dowries. One day he allows five of his friends to rape her after killing and bury her in the backyard of his house. Bhojvi files a case and pleads every officer in Delhi and Bhopal for justice but his every effort turns futile. Though his brother is a police officer, he could do nothing. So Bhojvi decides that instead of guarding the President and bowing to the politicians, he will avenge his sister's death. He steals an AK-47 and goes to Pawa and finishes the six men. (P.42-43)

We anticipate heavenly peace; in the abode of the Almighty but how safe are women in these places where they desire peace and tranquility in the name of God? The so called ascetics' representatives of God have malicious intentions towards women. The Indian bourgeois blindly adhere to rituals, and believe in the spiritual wisdom of a Guru, who they consider moulds the frame of mind and conduct with his doctrine. The ascetic has always been held in great reverence in India, unless one confronts with the harsh realities that are

disclosed in the mask of spirituality. These sadhus or god men are found in every religion and they do not hold accountable for the transgressions they commit.

In *'The truth almost about Bharat'*, two fat young women one Ahalya an MBBS MD and the other Radha an architect trained in California were asked to give up their careers by the swami. Women dance attendance and sit around singing bhajans. They are way back in the enclosure but manage to inch ahead and get close enough to see the corpulent, shiny-faced swami, his body wobbling inside his saffron silk robe, curls falling over his forehead like tendrils. As each woman near the swami, she bends and touches his feet. The swami places his hand on each of their heads and gives the woman a flower or fruit. The woman touches it to her eyes and walks away with a beatific expression of joy. They're barren and they believe that swami can make them fertile. When a woman bends down to touch his feet and rises, if her head touches his balls she will conceive. If not, she's doomed to being barren. One can see some women go for a second round, to be doubly sure of the holy contact. They fight to be the favorite devotees of the swami like teenagers fight over pop idols. They run to holy places to see holy men and bathe in holy rivers which have holy shit flowing in them. (P.85)

Kaveri Nambisan employs a creative expression to the multifaceted emotional states that distinguish the dilemma of women. A socialist feminist perspective is seen in her novel, making gender and class responsible for a woman being enslaved. As a Socialist feminist, she is committed to the cause of putting an end to the exploitation, Gender-inequality not by overthrowing the capitalist patriarchy but by throwing light on the predominant issues such that women could be educated and enlightened regarding this horrendous violence.

Through writing, a woman returns to the body which has been seized from her making her speechless and which brings everyone to realization that she has access to the native strength that would recover her back the immense potentialities that are sealed. She has found an occasion to speak by gaining an entry into history which has suppressed her. In a woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, national as well as world history as in Kaveri Nambisan's Novels. Thus the novels portray the reality within the Indian social framework by being mindful of the middle class perspective. The novelists depicts and explores the society with confidence and assurance by using simple language to express the local tint of the middle class focal point, anticipating change in the conditions prevailing in the society. Thus Kaveri Nambisan builds a community through imaginative connections by not only narrating the history of community but also critiques it through social annotations. Through her writings she cautions, advises and guides Indian community, for a better tomorrow. Her novels are an excellent example of magnificent picturisation of the culture of marginalization, portraying different levels of exploitation.

Works Cited:

- Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa.(1962) '*Indian Writing in English*', New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.
- Mukherjee, Meenakshi. (2004) '*The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*', Oxford University Press.
- Naik,M K. (1982) '*A History of Indian English Literature*',New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- Nair, Pramod K. (2011) '*Postcolonial Literature An Introduction*', New Delhi: Pearson.
- Nambisan, Kaveri. (2002) '*The Truth Almost about Bharat*', England: Penguin, Books.
- Nambisan, Kaveri.(2002) '*On wings of Butterfly*', England: Penguin Books.
- Nambisan,Kaveri. (2010) '*The Story that must not be Told*', England: Penguin Books.
- Smith, Mark J. (2002) '*Culture: Reinventing the Social Sciences*', London: Viva Books Private Limited.
- Tharu,Susie and Lalitha, K, (1995) '*Women Writing in India: 600 B.C to the Present*', Vol.1, Bombay : Oxford University Press.
- The Hindu. (February 5, 2005) 'In Conversation: Speaking to Spivak'.