
EMPOWERING WOMEN AND THE ISSUE OF MARGINALITY: AN OVERVIEW

DR.KONDANAGESWARARAO

Abstract: The present paper aims at discussing the various issues of women writers in order to understand and examine the important questions raised in their writings and how they put the contemporary society by questioning the identity of women and how they entered into the mainstream literary arena. Identity constitutes an understanding of one's own position in society. The question of women identity is problematic and that has been dealt with by philosophers, thinkers and writers through the ages.

Introduction: The proposed paper also examines that the women writings are the medium of expression of experiences of the women that have been humiliated and exploited for the ages in Indian caste based society and in African American society. It is also observed that women identity is a universal issue and it becomes especially pertinent for African-Americans. When we talk about the Empowerment of women, we also should have the discussion on the issue of Marginally, It is not just confined to caste, race, region and class but also understanding of the human mind. This paper also intends to probe how Indian women or African – American women want to get the liberation from the fatal chains of patriarchal or class biased society.

Women constitute equal share with men in total population of our country. At the time the women, in the name of *samskar* were tied up with the bondage of superstitions, which they had to carry till the last breath of their lives. She was, according to Hindu *sastra*, the bonded slave of her father when she was young, to her husband when she was middle aged and to her son when a mother. There has been a long tradition of social reforms by our saints and social reformers which includes Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra vidyaSagar, MahadevgovindRanade, and JyothibaPhule to name of a few who tried their best to bring changes in the life of women. Dr.Ambedkar tried to break down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. He codified Hindu Law in respect of marriage, divorce and succession rationalized and restored the dignity of women.

Within the frame work of a democratic polity our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres'. From the fifth five year plan onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women.

Women at present contribute in the promotion of economic development of a country in various capacities. They perform not only non-market activities through .which, they produce 'human' goods having greater values' but also various market activities in fields, farming and elsewhere outside the limited confines of their homes. The dual role of women as a contributor to production in a country and as a reproducer of human race has been emphasized in our literature. This article attempts to discuss a few aspects

of women's role in economic parlance through rural development.

The need for building up women power is being more strongly felt today than ever before. But government agendas for women upliftment are bound to remain inadequate unless women themselves become more aware of their rights and corresponding responsibilities. Despite their numerical strength, women occupy a marginalized position in society and their role is restricted to the periphery of the political process. Education is the key to the development of self-awareness. Education can play a decisive role in empowering women by making them aware of their aspirations, their real potential and their rights. It is one of the most vital factors in promoting women's full participation in political, economic and cultural life.

The Indian Diaspora speaks about the overseas Indians who today constitute more than 25 million spread over hundred countries around the world. Its study encapsulates the historical context of the Indian Diaspora, civilization heritage of diasporic communities, continuities and transformation in culture, economy and political life, besides promoting communication and linkages between India and the Indian Diaspora. The diasporic writing addresses the issues like emigration, settlement and identity formation in host societies.

The word Diaspora comes from the Greek *dia* meaning 'through' or 'over' and *speiro* meaning 'dispersal' or 'to sow.' Diaspora traditionally referred to a very specific situation: the exile of the Jews from the Holy Land and their dispersal throughout the globe. In recent years, the notion of Diaspora has moved from religious, migration and cultural, studies to the policy realm as well. Diasporas have come to be seen as central in relation to a range of issues, from struggles for political recognition of nation states over identity politics to transnational mobilization of development and reconstruction projects. Migrants' contributions to development in terms of remittances, investment and. democratization are also receiving growing attention.

Writers of the Indian diaspora have produced a wide range of literature that entails the process of self exploration and bridges the gap between the past and the present. Though the majority of diasporic text consists of fictional writing, yet we do have some very significant poetic compositions too. B. Rajan, H.O. Nazareth, A.K. Ramanujan, Shiv K. Kumar, Agha Shahid Ali, G.S.Sharat Chandra, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Meena Alexander etc., are some notable figures about

whom Bruce King remarks in the following manner:

Indian expatriate poets do not write from the position of a distinct foreign community, such as the exiled black or West Indian novelists, but their writing reflects the perspective of someone between two cultures. They may look back on India with nostalgia satirically celebrating their liberation or asserting their biculturalism, but they also look skeptically and wryly on their new homeland as outsiders, with a feeling of something having been lost in the process of growth. The ability to tolerate, accommodate and absorb other cultures without losing the consciousness of being Indian marks the expatriate poets (King 209-210).

Meena Alexander, born in India, is widely known for her distinct caliber to express the diasporic and feminist consciousness both in the genre of prose and poetry. She speculatively explores the subjects of immigrant identity formation, impact of globalization, gendered experience of American life and the possible negotiations with racism in a highly crafted manner.

Women in diaspora face double jeopardy for their dual status as an immigrant and a woman. Alexander understands the painful experiences of women like her and therefore puts that "the woman poet who faces the borders, is forced to invent a form that springs out without canonical support" ("Unquiet Borders" House of a Thousand Doors 2). Through her poems she builds up that the development of a woman poet requires overt reflections on these issues and this is inevitable for a woman poet within the pressure of a gendered history.

Today there is fictional and non-fictional material available on the Partition trauma. Many new stories and historical accounts on this event are still pouring in. Notable among the fictional work is Alok Bhalla's *Stories about the Partition of India*, which is eminently edited, with an insightful it is true that the book contains stories translated from several Indian languages such as Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Malayalam.

The fact is that at least half a million, who were killed, uprooted and dislocated during the partition, were women. In addition thousands of women on both sides (estimate range from twenty nine to fifty thousand Muslim women and fifteen to thirty five thousand Hindu and Sikh women) were abducted, raped, forced into religious conversion or marriage or repatriated to what the two states dubbed as 'their proper homes.' These hapless victims were torn apart from their families once during the Partition by those who abducted them, and again, after Partition by the state which tried to 'recover' and rehabilitate' them. Untold number of women, particularly from Sikh families, was killed by their kinsmen so that they could be saved from being "dishonored/Then there are others, less obvious traumas for many women such as the dislocation and permanently living as singles. Many who were widowed were ill equipped to rebuild their lives. Several had to spend their lives in Women's Home as destitutes. Some of them are still alive with their stories still untold.

It is true that the significance of women's role in the

development process and women's participation in the task of nation building has brought women's issues to the forefront of government, academic, and activist concerns in India. But much needs to be done. The gender gap and inequalities still exist as great hindrance in the progress of our nation. If India lives in villages and we refuse to acknowledge the contribution and potential of a major segment of that population, there is little hope for development. So, let us change mindsets and empower women and utilize their potential to the full by bringing them out of their passive and pathetic situation to visualize a better world that exists outside the veil.

Contribution of Chalam (Well known Telugu Poet) to the women empowerment:

Woman too has a body; it needs exercise.

Woman too has a mind; it needs to think.

Woman too has a heart. it needs to feel.- Chalam

Gudipati Venkata Chalam, popularly known as Chalam, was a 'major literary phenomenon in Telugu during the three decades preceding Independence. He gave a violent jolt to the complacency of the Telugu literary world, and by extension to the Telugu society itself, by writing one controversial novel after another. Though born into a rich and conservative Brahmin family, he chose to become a rebel and rejected all the Brahmanical and patriarchal values governing people's lives in those days. Chalam used the novel as a powerful medium to propagate the liberalist or feminist values he cherished.

Women's Issues in Chalam's *Maidanam* (A Plain) - *Maidanam* as *Portrait of Women's Sexual Freedom* *Maidanam*, the most famous and most controversial of Chalam's novels dramatises his ideas on marriage, freedom and the moral issues involved in them from what now appears to be a radical feminist perspective. Although there is an unmistakable attempt on Chalam's part to reduce his characters, especially the heroine Rajeswari, to personified ideas, he takes care to breathe enough life into them so that they assume distinct identities of their own. *Maidanam* is first and foremost the story of Rajeswari, a young, frustrated house-wife. She narrates her story in the first person although it is not clear whom she addresses. It all starts with her thorough disillusionment with her tradition-bound, unfeeling, emotionally sterile lawyer-husband who is given to treating her as a piece of property, as one who fulfils his sexual and social needs.

Maidanam is basically the story of Rajeswari and her 'honeymoon' with free life, but most of the time she is still at the receiving end of one form of maltreatment or the other. For all his love for Rajeswari, Ameer turns out to be an aggressive and jealous person and a narrow-minded bigot on top of it. It is precisely because of these shortcomings of her husband that she has come away with him. But having come away with him, she becomes defensive and goes out of her way to justify Ameer's every act including his boorishness and irresponsibility in deserting her when she needed his support most. She

is driven by a romantic notion of herself and the world in doing what she does so irrationally.

While Rajeswari fetches the Muslim girl for his gratification, reminding one of the Puranic figure Sumati, and witnesses their physical union almost stoically, Ameer cannot bear even the thought of sharing her love with Meera. The double standard of morality, which is a bane of contemporary society, is nonchalantly practiced by Ameer. Ameer and Meera are never viewed from inside. Their motives and feelings are never documented. It is clear however that they have no pretensions to a romantic attitude towards life. In their own separate ways, they try to "own" Rajeswari and invariably fail because there is no room for the exertion of compulsion or obligation in free love.

Woman in African American Writings: Social movements of the 1960s caused a spurt in the ethnic literatures of America. With such movements as Women's Liberation and Civil Rights Movement, ethnicity, multiplicity, diversity and hybridity characterized the American Psyche under the rubric of liberalism and Post modernism. All this loosened the conservative American society and opened up the closed American mind to other cultures, races and religions both within and outside America. The various ethnic groups, which had hitherto kept silent, found it timely to speak for themselves, their rights and their rueful situation in the White dominated America. The easy resort they all found was to write as a volatile but viable manifestation of their intellectual might. Writers after writers from Jewish, African American, American Indian,

Chicanos, Asian American communities enriched the meager wealth of the American ethnic literatures. In the last four decades to the extent that today it is the most representative creative endeavor of the American people. In their treatment, they underscored the valiant fight of the African American Women against social persecution, gender discrimination, cruelty, poverty, and random violence. Their efforts to valorize the pain and suffering of these ordinary women in their every day struggle to keep their body and soul together imparted an extraordinary integrity to the hitherto neglected ethnic American literatures,

At the same time, the Asian American women writers such as Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bapsy Sidhwa, Shirley Lim, Maxine Hong Kingston, etc. have dealt with more crucial issues concerning gender, race, marriage, cross-cultural encounters, immigration, heterogeneity, mobility, hybridity, and multiplicity in the global context.

Conclusion: Empowerment of women needs to begin with her participation in different spheres of life. Education is a great determinant in this regard to achieve empowerment women have to be educated to be aware of their rights and privileges in a modern society. The architect of Indian constitution was of the opinion that unless and until women are empowered, nothing was going to bring about any change in their destiny. Economic independence is a major factor which can contribute in empowering women.

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Asst Prof, Dept of English,
Nizam College, Osmania University, Hyd, A.P.