

Impression of Women in Literature and Life

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Abstract— *The impression of women in literature and life has historically been intertwined, with literature frequently acting as a mirror that reflects, shapes, or reinforces societal, patriarchal views. History of Literature has noticed and observed the role of women being evolved through centuries. The Journey of Women of yesterday has been very crucial, scornful, censures which they have handled with poise and patience. Women have endured all the criticism and persisted with their perilous journey. Today Women have come a long way emerging as the strong fraternity. The discourse around women in literature highlights recurring archetypes, including the temptress, the pure virgin, and the mother, which have shaped societal expectations and literary narratives. As time progressed, particularly in the twentieth century, there was a notable shift toward the inclusion of diverse female voices, with women authors increasingly gaining recognition and focusing on a wider range of female experiences. This evolution of literature not only reflects changing societal attitudes towards gender but also challenges traditional stereotypes, paving the way for a more nuanced understanding of women in both fiction and real life. Prominent female writers, such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, have contributed significantly to this rich literary landscape, emphasizing the importance of varied perspectives in the portrayal of women's identities.*



Keywords— *Women, evolution, archetypes, gender*

In Indian culture and heritage women occupy a unique place. They played many roles for the smooth progress of the family- as daughter, daughter-in-law, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother and so on. When considered by literacy scales, most of the Indian women are uneducated. Yet they play an important role at home and at work places. Almost all of their chores are not only non-remunerative but also neglected. Society and men prescribe the dress code, the behavioral code, the roles to play, the dos and don'ts of women in general. They run womanhood without seeking, imagining or dreaming for a holiday. Even when the rest of the humanity cheers holidays, they work very hard on those days. They have to keep the house, maintain the kitchen, farm and the fields throughout their life. Then women thought of education and felt it will transform them to fairies in this world. Later they felt that jobs will mould them to fairy queens in this world. They even felt that economic independence would open new vistas to all the women in this male dominant society. All these changes proved their ideas and fancies a 'fairy tale'.

At last we have come to a stage where no one dares to think of the consequences a future woman shall face. Virginia Woolf long ago expressed her anguish of woman's freedom, in 'A Room of one's own'. In a similar manner Abburi Chaya Devi, the 'Grand young' feminist writer in Telugu, opined that by educating girls we can free them from their 'Bonsai life'. Her short story "Bonsai Life" is about Ammulu, an educated lady, who works in Delhi in contrast to her illiterate sister, Akkayya, who settles in their native village. In this sequence I will take up the short story of Ram Kumar's "The Cherry Trees" and "My Dream 'N' After" by U. Surya Kumari.

In the 'Bonsai Life' the two sisters exchanged their inner goings on, compare and comprehend their lives, realizing the truth in saying that "The grass is always greener on the other side". Before her visit to Ammulu, Akkayya longs for the city life and financial independence.

Akkayya is an illiterate woman. Her father didn't permit her to study after fifth class. In those days people believed that girls education should make her keep washer

man's accounts. When Ammulu was born after a decade things, beliefs and perspective of people underwent a remarkable change. So Ammulu could enter college to complete her education. This education contributed to sea change in the lives of two sisters. Their ideas, opinions, beliefs and way of looking at life showed remarkable change. Akkayya married a man who held good ideas and choose agriculture as his profession. So they settle down in village. Ammulu married a man from town and settled in town. Whenever Akkayya visits Ammulu she would bring gongura, drumsticks, appadams and wadiams. Which were all handmade. Very sensibly and sensitively Ammulu remarks "With my office work, I am unable to make appadams and wadiams. Even if I've some free time I'm too lazy to do such works you know me. Don't you?" (Mosaic, 2006, 35).

People assume that women, who work at offices are liberated and free. "Are they really"? They have a dual responsibility of working at two places, at home and in office. The expression 'exhausted of office work' may not tell us that this exhaustion is peculiar to a woman, but entering the kitchen muttering: "oh! No, oh! God-which is what I usually do when I come back tired – I feel like singing a song, humming a tune, making a nice cup of coffee and savouring each sip - - -" (33).

It hits and targets the very root of the problem, the working woman faces. Her desires, pleasures and longings are simple but exhaustion makes them as fantasy. She is dually exploited – as a working woman (earning money) and a household maker. There are lots of expectations from her of all the house members. She is expected of the entire kitchen niceties and proper maintenance of the house. They don't realize that she has to spare her extra energies for this and it would be very taxing. Ammulu from her point feels that Akkayya is fortunate because she can keep her home well and can satisfy the members in her family. Akkayya feels that Ammulu is very fortunate. "You have studied well, have job like a man and are earning well. You don't have to beg anyone for anything. You are able to lead a dignified life unlike us who have to depend on our husband even for a paisa worth of Karivepaku" (36).

In cities many common things are rare and even if they are available they appear peculiar. In villages one can have fresh vegetables and fruits from their backyards where they are grown in plenty. In cities these things grow in flowerpots placed in dooryards and terraces. Bonsai plant have become ornamental and decorative pieces in modern houses. Cutting down the branches and roots stunts their growth. They do not yield much flower or fruits. From the utilization point of view also they are of little use. In the way they are weak. The bonsai plant is equated to a woman.

The woman is aware of her own stunted growth. The author Chhaya Devi brings home the point well by bringing the comparison of a turayi tree and the bonsai plant, both caught in a sandstorm. Akkayya points to the tree and says: "Look how tall that turayi has grown. Out in the open, see how freely it has grown. However powerful the sandstorm, it hasn't bowed a bit. Moreover, it has provided shelter to so many people and is protecting them. Imagine how many would respite from the hot Sun under the shade" (38).

In contrast she points the bonsai and says: "See how tender and delicate it is- like a housewife. You have to tend it very carefully. It can't even withstand a small dust storm or squall" (38). Children should be brought up as individuals irrespective of their gender. When Ammulu wants to free the bonsai plant, she indirectly suggested that a woman must have the freedom to grow. An uneducated woman, Akkayya had great natural wisdom, which she gained with her exposure to nature and experience in life. She taught a life truth to educated Ammulu and enlightens her with a live example.

The second story which I have taken for discussion is Ram Kumar's "The Cherry Trees". Ram Kumar, a well-known painter and short story writer in Hindi, was awarded the prestigious Kalidas Samman in 1985 and Padamshree in 1972 for his contribution to Art and Literature. His short story "The cherry trees" deal with different issues like contrast between city life and country life, early marriages of girls and children inclination towards fruits and flowers. The girl in the story wants to continue her education. But her parents, after a series of discussions and rumination decide to get her married. This upsets the girl very much. During the summer vacation, all the children visit their ancestral home to spend their time joyously and gaily. The house has a sprawling ground with many cheery trees loaded with unripe fruits. The freedom of the children to climb the trees and pluck the fruits was curtailed on account of the trees being given to a contractor on lease for the season. So the children were unhappy and upset. When they discovered that the trees are loaded with cherry fruit, they were excited. The branches were heavy with the fruit and were bending low so they were within their reach. It was tantalizing. Thus, they requested her to get them some cherries which she refused. The next day the boys climbing on each other plucked some unripe fruits. At that moment their elder sister came out and sacked them: "I'll punish if you eat them. It is a sin to pluck unripe fruit". (Mosaic, Alok, Bhalla 56).

On the surface their belief may be foolish but is a great principle of Eco balance. People without a second thought throw away unripe fruit or by using chemicals ripen it which is very unnatural. This belief in a way guards

nature. On the first day of their stay, one of the boy's couldn't sleep and the conversation between the boy and his sister is remarkable. She is disturbed because her marriage is fixed. So she is sleepless. Both of them peep out of the window and stare at the stars in the sky. The little boy expressed his disappointment- "I had hoped that she has spotted a wild animal, one can see stars everywhere" (55). She pointed at the stars and said "The stars are within our reach" (55). The boy shot back with an answer that: "In the mountains the stars seem nearer". (55) The girl coolly said: "They didn't seem to be so close when we were in Mussori or in Nainital". (55)

When we are depressed or dejected we linger or look at nature which consoles, solaces and soothes us. It provides food for our thoughts. Nature guides and directs us. In this story simple wishes and desires like plucking cherries from the trees or continuing higher education are compared to stars in the sky. They appear to be near but in reality they are far far away from us. Knowing the truth and realizing the truth are two different matters. The next day there appeared a sea change in the backyard of the house. A small tent was pitched for the chowkidar and a box full of stones was kept to drive away the birds. Though the boy's heart sank for their curtailed freedom, they were delighted when they saw the birds sitting on the trees and eating cherries unnoticed by the Old man. "If it had been within our power, we would have let the birds eat all cherries". (59)

This shows the interest of the boys in natural objects and the freedom to enjoy things prevalent in nature. The next day the contractor came with his men to get the cherries from the trees. When the activity was being processed, the boys wandered around the trees and found a bird with blood stains on its neck. They cursed the contractor and made plans for his revenge. They dug a hole and buried a bird which shows their concern and love for natural objects. Their care and concern for the tiny things in nature is an eye opener for educated and the elders. The contractor carried the fruit and left the tree branches bare. Even that day the boy and the girl couldn't sleep. They wandered under the trees. The boy remarked: "The stars seem to be very close tonight". (59)

The writer makes an interesting comparison of the marriage of a young girl against her wishes to the plucking of unripe fruit. The killing of the bird symbolizes the freedom of the girl which is likely to be curbed after marriage. The varied moods and the inner goings on the girl are brilliantly equated to the orchard and in the sighting or not sighting of the stars. The story comes to a full circle bringing out important factors like loss of freedom, crash of wishes, appeal of nature and the objects dwelling in nature from times immemorial.

In the third story "My Dream 'N' After" by U. Surya Kamari we come across a girl who clearly sees the modern world and the older generation. The protagonist perceives agony and yearnings of a female heart in this story. In contrast to the aimless minds of the women of older generation the protagonist either mainly due to education or may be because of transformed educated advanced modern society, had a clear vision and specific aims to achieve before she attains certain age. "I always had a dream - - - to get married before 28, have a baby by around 30, and own company by 35. These numbers may sound crazy. But, unless I get married before 28, I can't be mother before 30. I can't imagine myself working for someone after 35 years. After 35, we should settle down in life". ("My Dream 'N' After")

For a man to dream of having a beautiful girl as his wife is normal. Even for a woman belonging to older generation who fancies to have a handsome boy as her husband is quite normal. But in modern times many of the educated women are troubled by the question: "can I even have a family of my own?" (My Dream - - -).

Most of us rate certain activities of a woman very highly and regard them as successful person and we consider them as leading a happy and successful life. When they are interviewed by the media they highlight and boast of their happiness. In this story the protagonist frankly states that women like her have to choose between the two – freedom or happy married life. This poses several questions such as 'Is there no freedom in married life?' The protagonist clearly states that isolation and alienation are not the solutions for the agonies which female encounter in their lives. "What is the use of your achievements when you have no one you can call 'dear'? (My Dream - - -).

Very strongly and plainly the protagonist states the fact that one needs family to share and bear the things or situations in life. This reminds us of Anita Desai's 'Fire on the Mountain' and 'Cry the Peacock'. She cautions the modern women not to opt for either isolation or alienation. Women have sexual needs and place priority to sensitive feelings like 'warmth', 'love' and 'care' from the husband. The anguish of Kamala Das is put forth by the narrator in one sentence 'I wanted to share my joys, sorrows, hopes day life and everything which I can say mine with him.' (My Dream ----)

Though there is a change in the outlook of women over generations yet certain basic beliefs and ideologies remained same even among educated women. "After all you don't get married every other day - - - in India a women is considered as husband's property - - - after she is married. They said they could not find another girl whose horoscope matched with mine" (My Dream -----).

A women belonging to older generations adjust to the new situations and circumstances in the father-in-law's house and it is a common thing for her. But the educated woman of today feels that she would jeopardize her married life if she stays with her in-laws. Who should be blamed for it?

The protagonist returned home at the second week after her marriage. She is totally depressed, out of tune, lost her hope and faith in God. Probably or simply due to culture and tradition and the simplicity of her character prevents her from taking revenge or fighting for justice. She does not take recourse to 'law' or 'lathi' to force her husband to live with her. What she craves for is 'I want a person who wants me - - - - I don't want to just give my body. I want him to take my mind, heart, feelings and everything that is mine' (my Dream - - - -).

How many persons share these feelings? If they share they fear they would sever their relation. So it is difficult to accept that most of the relations begin and end in body relations or bloody relations. The protagonist has a seasoned mind and so resigns with the probable idea in her husband's mind "May be – he wanted someone more educated, more sophisticated than I" (My Dream - - - -).

She decides to start her education to make him happy or acceptable in the eyes of her husband. Bearing these psychological strains, facing many financial problems and sharp flings from the society, she completed her computer education. All these efforts, her patience and restraint are just to clear the distinctions between her and her husband. She got a job offer in Canada so she decides to meet her husband and tell him of her achievement. When her husband paid no heed and turned a deaf ear to all this she was depressed and sank into despair. Acting upon the advice of her family members, relatives and near and dear ones she landed in Canada full of gloom, with a broken heart and shattered dreams. After some time she visited home for a brief visit and informed her husband about her achievements. Very strangely her husband asked her to come back. The protagonist wanted to know why her husband did not appear at the office of Subbamma, just time before she left for Canada. He did not furnish her with a proper and straight answer.

Her parents and relatives told her not to be disappointed and lose hope, feel alienation and end her life. "These people just see the smiling me" (My Dream - - - -).

This shows her attitude towards life and the attitude of the society towards her. Can she allow any other person to enter her life? Did she ever try? She answered these questions bravely and courageously.

"I tried - - -- but failed miserably" (My Dream - - - -).

Society wanted her to live happily and take her own decisions. They feel that now she has taken up a job, her difficulties are over. They have their own view points for thinking in this manner. But the protagonist herself poses the question: "They say my hardships are over. Are they? I'm in a position where I cannot go back or forward (My Dream - - - -).

Every gossip about her, every inquisitive look at her, thoughts of past, rakes her wounds and wrings her body and mind. These things occur due to lack of understanding about life, about what constitutes life. When there is understanding between man and woman life moves smoothly. 'Understanding' has always played a vital role in human life. As Shakespeare says "This world's a stage, and men and women merely players. We play our part in this spectacular world. Women should be courageous and face odds bravely. It is necessary to follow the course of life. The concept of women's human rights has opened the way for women to articulate against the wide spread discrimination and violence women experience every day.

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