

WOMEN IN THE SHORT STORIES OF SAROJINI SAHOO – WAITING FOR MANNA AND THE RAPE

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Abstract

Ever since the beginning of writing by the Indian women, the trials, sacrifice, hurt etc. faced by the female section of the Indian society, started getting an expression because of the effort of the female writers. Women writers like Sarojini Sahoo, Shashi Deshpande, Jai Nimbkar, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai and many others have written novels and short stories which highlight the predicament of the Indian woman. Sarojini Sahoo, one of the most widely celebrated Indian woman writer in English voices her concerns about women issues through her novels and short stories. This present research paper is a humble attempt to examine how a woman's mindset operates in two of her short stories.

Keywords: Women, Feminism, Self-expression, Domination, Subjugation

INTRODUCTION:

Sarojini Sahoo, an MA and PhD in English Literature, was born in a small town of Dhenkanal in Orissa (India). She also possesses a degree in Bachelor of Law from Utkal University. Presently she is teaching at a Degree college in Belpahar, Jharsuguda of Orissa. The second daughter of Mr. Ishwar Chandra Sahoo and Mrs. (Late) Nalini Devi, she is married to Mr. Jagadish Mohanty, an expert writer of Orissa. She has two children- an elder son and the younger one as daughter.

A well known writer and critic, Sahoo has been writing her creative writings in Oriya and her critical appraisal in English. She has eight novels to her credit and nine anthologies of short stories some of which have been translated in English and Bengali. She is the recipient of Orissa Sahitya Akedemi award and Jhankar award.

Many publishers have widely published her works in different Indian languages. She has had the honour of getting her stories included in compilations put out by Harper Collins, National Book Trust and Sahitya Akademi. Sahoo is the only Oriyan woman writer who had the courage to deal with lesbian sex in her story, '*Behind the Scene*' (*Nepathya*).

On October 26, 2008 , which was a fine Sunday, *The Sunday Tribune* of India wrote: “She is considered the Judith Butler and Virginia Woolf of contemporary Oriya literature. And yet for her, feminism is not just about battling male hegemony. For Dr Sarojini Sahoo, an award winning Oriya writer, feminism is linked with the sexual politics of women. She refutes the limits that patriarchy places on female sexual expression and identifies women’s sexual liberation as the real motive behind the women’s movement.”

One of the most celebrated Asian feminist writers , Sahoo is known for her greater cognizance of women and their structure, generates an honest openness and always understands the feminine receptivity from teenage to menopause. The feminine experiences like limitations in the adolescence, pregnancy, abortions , the terrible experiences of the society like being raped etc. are always the themes she has exposed in her novels and short stories and has been very comfortable with them.

The anthology *Waiting for Manna* consists of short stories, ten in number, out of which six are related to feminine world . Sahoo also has protagonists of all ages in her stories. Right from a little girl to a middle aged married woman, they are all a part of her literary world. Sarojini talks about pregnancy, rape, girl child, stalkers and about the social set up we all are trapped in and about the mindset we can't get rid off.

In the two of her short stories, "Beyond the reach" and "Sorrows unending", the main characters are school going girls. In the other two short stories, "Threshold" and "Few pages of vacant lot", the protagonists are unmarried young girls while in "Rape" and "Waiting for Manna" we meet married women and mothers as the central characters.

The other four stories in the collection do not have the main characters as women and have gender neutral themes and commitments. These are *Smoke*, *Wall clock*, *Flies* and *Burden of Proof* a reader can find the gender neutral social commitments.

1. *Waiting for Manna*:

The first story is about a childless woman, Paramita who is obsessed about having a baby and then wonders about motherhood once she gets it. Since she is admitted to a hospital for few days before delivery, she gets a chance to interact and observe people from close quarters. Her father, mother and husband are all there to look after her. Unfortunately, due to lack of space and non-requirement of so many people there are rifts between the members. The mother once reacts by saying, “I don’t want to stay here” but continues to live there due to the fear that what will people say if she leaves her daughter in such a state. Jayanti, another woman on the next bed, who has been deprived of the joy of motherhood, is in conversation with Paramita when the latter gets to know that she had to marry a half-educated man due to her dark complexion. Jayanti continues to share that she is constantly ridiculed by her own mother and husband simply because they feel they are more powerful than her. Paramita feels that everyone suffers a self-exile. Paramita then meets one old couple. The woman got an operation done but unfortunately their son and daughter-in-law just never bothered about them. Children who were once central to parent’s existence get engrossed in their own life and forget about them who brought them up so lovingly. She sees children who leave parents and are indifferent about their needs. The old couple finally goes and a woman named Hema replaces them. She is able to make out that Hema is very lonely too and she tries to cover it up in different ways. Hema, unable to conceive, is dead

against her husband. She says that her material wealth is enough and he could go ahead to marry another lady as per his plans.

Even for Paramita herself, this motherhood had come after years of infertility. She considered herself, "a barren land, where no seed could sprout". Now was the time when she was admitted in the hospital much before time due to her declining health. She felt like a prisoner there. 'Paramita wanted emancipation, but when?' There was a strange transformation in Paramita as soon as she attained motherhood, "the laws and customs, values and validities of this new world were totally different. She had so far been hiding her breasts thinking that it was the most secretive part of her body. Who took away all her shyness? Strange were the feelings and experiences of the world, where all obscenities were decent. She wonders about the motherhood and its rewards. She thinks of it as a meagre and trifle attainment. She thinks of Jayanti before leaving from the hospital and hopes that she attains motherhood soon but that will be only to realize how futile it is.

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2. The Rape

In "Rape" she tells the story of a female fantasy. The story brings forth a question that can't a women give a flight to her sexual desires even in her dreams? A youthful woman has a dream in which she dreams about having sex with a doctor. Her fault? She confesses it to her husband!

Till Suparna shared her dream with Jayant, they had had a very normal regular relationship like that of any other normal couple- fights, arguments etc were very common. One fine day, she shared with her husband that she had a very strange dream. Though her husband pretended that it did not matter, she could make out that he was really disturbed. From then on an acquitted relationship between husband and wife changed; the change actually was elusive but a simple dream affects their marital status. She recollects how she had once been a rebel and did not care about anyone. But off late, things had changed. This time, when Jayant reacted by getting upset, she just did not want to argue. She recalls the time when she was a free bird even for the first three years of her marriage. Looking for the jobs that she wanted, she refused to settle for anything that did not make her happy. It was motherhood that changed her. The birth of her two children made her forget all about 'freedom'. She found all busy and caught up in her routine life. She would take care of the household chores and the two little children in the house. Her husband went to office in the morning and returned in the evening. By then, she would still be occupied in the things to do at home and for home- cleaning, scrubbing, cooking, shopping for grocery- all of it and more, kept her busy.

She had often wondered if she should hire a servant again. But she realized that getting the work done with the help of the servants was even more cumbersome and decided against it. The only problem that she could not address was that she had no one to take care of the little children. Otherwise, she was alright doing the household chores as she realized that they were helping her in getting back in shape.

This particular day, Jayant had asked Suparna to stay ready as they had to see a doctor for their daughter. She took time to get ready as she was occupied in chores. Ultimately, even her shoes had a thick dust layer which she dusted off on the floor. They went to the doctor and had a long queue to wait in. She went in with her daughter and the husband and son decided to wait outside. She was greatly relieved when Doctor Tripathi told her that all was well with their daughter after a thorough check-up. As she felt uncomfortable accompanying her daughter in the medical examination room, she wished her husband would be by her side.

As she moves out of the doctor's clinic and reaches home to wind up her day, her husband tells her, "So you met Dr. Tripathi today, did your dream come true?" It was extremely embarrassing for Suparna as she felt that she was getting raped by her husband. She faces the consequences of being truthful to her husband.

CONCLUSION:

The stories woven by Sarojini Sahoo are extremely lucid and relatable. She takes everyday common characters and introduces them in regular settings. The story is built around a central character and gradually the pain and the trouble of the protagonist is unmasked. These characters along with thinking aloud, make you think and relate to their problems. We can easily identify with the characters and understand their dilemma and problems. Sahoo makes her readers look directly at the face of the real problems and ensures that the reader experiences the same emotions as does the protagonist. Her women are strong but somewhere give into the traditional societal norms and commitments.

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