

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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Abstract

Sarala Devi is the first Odia woman to have attempted in bringing a renaissance in the social, cultural, and political life of women, living in Odisha. Throughout her life she fought hard for the rights of women in a completely male-dominated society. She was the first Odia woman to have received the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award twice. Her sacrifice for the society would not be successful if the present generation did not realize her achievements and idealism. Here I take the opportunity to translate one of her important essays, “The Portrayal of Women in Contemporary Literature”, published in 2004, much after her death. Here the writer has shown her anguish and frustration towards the way women of the present generation are being portrayed in contemporary literature and cinema.

A close study of Indian history and literature helps us to reach the glorified description of legendary women characters like Yoshada, Kunti, and Gandhari etc. The past of Rajasthan during the tenure of Tudd Sahib has witnessed step-mother Panna’s great patriotism and commitment towards the royal family. She sacrificed her own child to save the stately child. This depicts her unquestionable loyalty. In a similar instance, Krushnakumari the princess ended her own life by consuming poison to save her father’s kingdom and the subjects from the Mogul king. Padmini, the queen of Chittor, took poison and committed the divine suicide along with her fifteen hundred inmates with a promise not to face dishonor at the hands of the victorious enemy. But today, the contemporary literature has projected women as an element of desire through news, magazines and cinema. Readers having a strong taste for vulgarity, not only take interest in such books and magazines, but influence women to follow the footsteps also. Modern day cinema songs are full of vulgarism but create a kind of illusion to have elements of entertainment. The credit goes to commercial litterateurs since they have invented a new theory to entertain the society leaving the social and cultural values and ethics far behind.

The so called entertaining songs are recited by people from town to village. For today’s youth the songs are amusing just like cultured people are entertained by *BhagabatGita*. Now the Indian Government is gradually awakening after a spell of deep sleep like *Kumbhakarna* after 1970. Only recently, the Indian minister of parliamentary affairs has told to the parliament advisory committee that movies prioritizing sex and violence should be dealt with serious action. The committee has understood that the film-makers add explicit materials related to sex and

violence only to get financial benefit. Therefore the Censor Board has been empowered to delete scenes containing elements of sensuality and violence.

Just before the nation received independence, some of the ministers of Odisha Congress took serious action against the magazine, 'Satya-Katha', for promoting explicit issues and materials. The Utkal Women Council also drew attention of the Government in this regard and it worked to some extent. My active participation in this revolution also led to the seizing of important portions of newspapers. After independence and with the change of Government, vulgarity opened its arms and held closeness to advertisements, literature, industry, music and dance, magazines etc. Books, related to stories like detective, desire, lust, and illicit relationships crowded the market. Accordingly women developed acquaintances with the new world and new taste at a tender age. During this period the Hippies and the Beatles were on a world tour. They also visited India. With their arrival, in came the baggie trouser, long hair, beard, wide sideburns, loose dress, half sleeve kurti, loose hair, ladies watch fixed with bracelet, slippers with thin silver anklet, short blouse exposing body parts into our movies. Sarees hung down from the shoulders and showing the back side of the body became a fashion. Nose ring had lost its charm but once again brought back into fashion by the cinema heroines afterwards though. Different cosmetic products starting from nail-polish to powder came to market. At last our domesticated and docile ladies led a life of their own after being separated from their family. Sweet homes, once considered to be a peaceful shelter, lost its charm. All household works were only done by cook and servants.

So, modern writer left the idea of portraying Indian women of current generation as a homemaker, a cultured mother, dedicated, dignified, decent, and disciplined wife far behind. Now the art of beautifying women has been lost. Literature, once had distinctly glorified women, now is identifying them as a creature of hell, a destroyer of little, innocent children like *Putana*, a mythological lady demon from the epic called *Ramayana*. So in modern day literature there is no place for home or homemakers. We do not find a place having parents and children together. They are now living under the open sky facing rain, sun and cold, sleeping on roadsides or under trees and lead their life. Men and women have become homeless and nomads. State policy, literature, and journalism have their social responsibilities. All of them are equally responsible for this change in social pattern. Women cannot bring happiness to a family or settle down in a home only by getting good administrative jobs or making money. Like chameleon, these unfortunate human beings will lose their goal under the chariot wheel of modern civilization of science and new culture. Considering the world in which the present day women are wondering, contemporary writers have lost the goddess like character in women and left them alone to fly like a free bird.

Every nation has some distinctive features and traditions that settle on people's way of life. A slight change may arrest our attention to some extent but cannot be acceptable wholeheartedly. Girls in our country learn household works under the guidance of their mother and aunt. They practice to have perfection in domestic duties. Now women education is entangled with issues related to their jobs. The state has implemented laws towards their right to property and children but our society is far away from accepting the new laws. As a result women have become aimless, violent and unstable. Thirty years back, sustainability never bothered them but now after taking the lifeless society into serious consideration, they have become restless. New ways of life are whistling and tempting them to run off the conventional pattern. Under this circumstance, the traditional pattern of domestic life seems to be a burden. Old and customary characteristics of women seem to have been thrown at the far away dustbin.

They are not anxious to take up responsibilities in discharging household duties. They have become lazy and therefore have lost interest in everything. They rather prefer a self-centered and selfish life. After being inspired by their pathetic display of dignity, the modern day writers with their additional quality of making imagination colorful hardly manifest women as invincible characters. They rather prefer to portray them as an object of lust and desire. Both our country and society is heading towards destruction. The boat of our life is sinking and not finding a harbor to anchor it. Finding themselves in a 'nowhere to run' position, they are wandering in the world of ignorance and darkness. The conventional pattern they were following long back has become a futile idealism.

Now the million dollar question is how can women bring their lost glory back and retain their overvalued culture in a simulated, secular, and insensible society with artificial traditions and modern science and technology at its highest point? In the developing age women are aspiring to be administrative officers, doctors, engineers, and lawyers etc. Therefore they hardly get time to focus on their family members. They are into business or jobs, so cannot desire to be ideal mothers, wives or citizens. Some feminists think that the succeeding women should be good mothers and wives who can eventually develop their own home and society as well. This can be possible by combining both modern developments with traditional feminine convention. But this is impossible and only a disillusion. As a little blaze can burn a heap of cotton so a farmer surely dies if he takes betel in the hand on which a drop of pesticide pours. Likewise girls are prioritizing the study of lifeless science by discarding the essence of their own culture in epical works like *The Gita*, *The Ramayan*, and *The Mahabharat* etc. Since they are sailing with the tide of prosperity they will be drowned and their life will come to an end.

Modern literature does not contribute immensely towards the inner growth of men and women. Our leader Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru made everyone superficial by adapting secularism. Later on the Hindu code was formulated at the cost of education and culture. The foundation of the nation and its society was tumbled. Things took a u-turn. The agricultural based country became machine based. This led women to step outside than to remain inside at home. They started taking care of men not vice versa. Unemployed and lowly paid boys got married to educated and employed girls. Women were forced to serve government officers at village. The rich did not marry the educated poor boys. It was thought to be tedious to do domestic work and maintain family life by marrying a low earning boy. So girls preferred job and remained single. Widows were cheaply remarried to average people and lived a normal married life leaving all those customs and beliefs far behind.

There is no home or homemaker. Since people have stopped visiting temples and not paying attention to worshipping God, ornaments are being stolen from temples. Like government trustee is forming temple custom so also government employment agency is controlling the traditional lifestyle of women. The shadow of the city women had tremendous influence on the women, living in rural areas. The desire for living a new and fashionable life led them to a different place. Little children, after being deprived of their mother's affection, became diseased, illiterate and abandoned. They were regularly beaten and scolded in school. These underprivileged children developed relationship with useless company and afterwards became jealous, violent, rebels. They got adapted to antisocial activities. Different elements were inserted into the body of women in the name of birth control measures.

Vulgarity in literature and cinema, co-education, late marriage for girls, remaining single lifelong, such social conventions and practices have destroyed the peace and safety of Indian life. Activities like exposing sexual desire, drama of birth control have not been able to achieve peace

and progress. Women are going to office to earn. They have also become selfish and an object of desire. This is perhaps the outcome and contribution of modern literature. Literature has become a source of film-making.

Now it is difficult to find a way of prevention. An editor of a newspaper has portrayed women as a source of inspiration in the Utkal Women Committee. Is it possible for them to find a way after a weak foundation? Our men and women are following the footsteps of the European culture enthusiastically. Therefore, our people are welcoming destruction and death. They could have been divine creators and worshipped like goddess *Bhagabati*. But, however, they have lost their way and become managers in hotels. Some of them have even turn out to be pickpockets, and members of naxalite organizations carrying guns and bombs. One can say they have run away from terms like motherly love and affection. In such a difficult situation only the Almighty can save our motherland.

The soul of India is alive because of the presence of some dignified women. Otherwise India and her culture would have been wiped out from the world. On the other hand the tightfisted women contribute to the beginning of a corrupted society. Children carry the nature of their mother. One can easily imagine the future then.

The present day movie songs have made a mockery of women characters for instance a particular Odia song describes how the newly married lady, coming under the influence of modernity, has developed a habit of having bed tea without even brushing her teeth. The million dollar question is whether people are born with such kind of thoughts or have movies and novels inspired them to live an unhealthy life like this? One may take notice of how hostel-living girls prefer a cup of tea in empty stomach forgetting their breakfast and stay tuned up to 10 o'clock. This is not the case of those college going girls rather the situation is the same everywhere. Women have taken this life style for granted and as a part of their destiny. One should blame improper education for this outcome. Bad habits contribute to ill health of self and their children. Untimely death becomes their final destiny.

Works Cited

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