



CELEBRATING THE EMOTIONAL CONCEPTS OF WOMANHOOD

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Abstract: Undoubtedly women are oppressed in the society despite their intelligence and prudence. It is an often debated topic yet ends up with a conclusion that women are treated equally. But the painful truth is the unheard voice of many women are still echoing somewhere and it goes unnoticed and unanswered. The society is always skeptical about the emotional strength of women. Women are always meant and expected to be behind men and to take care of others forgoing all her desires. In spite of all oppression, pressure and multi-tasking women are able to move forward and in fact her love and sentiments on her near and dears make her more strong. Women are defamed as weaker sex but the truth is they have evolved more stronger. The paper attempts to highlight the women who adumbrate Self-Empowerment referring the novels of Gloria Naylor and Shobhan Bantwal.

Key Words: Oppression, Unheard voices, weaker sex, love, sentiments

African-American literature often deals with the theme that is related to their culture and the issues of freedom and equality is also dealt with. African-American women writers mainly focus on the women community who face triple oppression. Naylor skilfully portrays such women characters, how they suffer as a prey of sexism, classism and racism. On the other hand Shobhan Bantwal an Indian settled in the U.S.A touches a similar theme where women community is oppressed. Both the authors vividly show how the women toil under the male-oriented society and how they evolve into empowered women.

The authors exhibit the female power through a series of well-made female characters and the characters are usually the protagonists of their novels. Apart from the allocated role of women as mother and wife in the society, the characters have their



own dreams and desires. Women are treated as individuals who have their own likes and dislikes. They depict the female experience of oppression and exploitation in a male dominated society. She provides women with new directions to overcome the constraints of the personal and the political and evolve their own modes of resistance. Women are not able to exercise autonomy in the patriarchal society. The authors vehemently oppose such treatment in the society. The transformation of the protagonists is beautifully shown in their novels.

Naylor was adept in portraying female characters realistically in her novels, *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Mama Day* and *Bailey’s Café*. The relationship between the characters, their roots, description of the places are skilfully brought to the readers’ minds through Naylor’s writing style. As Paule Marshall says,

The group of women around the table long ago. They taught me my first lessons in the narrative art. They trained my ear. They set a standard of excellence. This is why the best of my work must be attributed to them; it stands as a testimony to the rich legacy of language and culture they so freely passed onto me in the workshop of the kitchen.(11-12)

Shobhan Bantwal depicts a character who escapes becoming a victim of dowry in the novel *The Dowry Bride*. Megha is a beautiful, intelligent girl. She stands as a best example of empowerment and autonomy who breaks the shackles of so called traditional society. Megha encountered all verbal abuses and ill treatments from the day one of her married life. Amma always has an aversion for Megha as she looks pretty and her behaviour is cultured too. Amma did not possess all these qualities. Amma is a shrew and tough person to handle. The author says, ...the nasty barbs of Amma, getting reprimanded for the most ridiculous mistakes, the way Suresh ignored her most of the time and then how in the darkness of bed room, he would grab her body as if she were a whore. There was no love, no tenderness, not even a kind look or word...he would take what he wanted, roll over and start to snore (313)

Mattie Michael, remains the provider of solace and strength to the other women in the Novel. Etta Mae Johnson is a woman who has her heart on sleeves, she repeatedly gets disappointed because of her encounter with many men in search of a suitable one



but in vain. Kiswana Browne embraces racial pride and works for her own people leaving her sophisticated life. Lorraine and Theresa are lesbian lovers. Lorraine is deeply disturbed when the people speak ill about her relationship with Theresa. She is brutally gang-raped and she kills Ben in that confusion. The strange obsession of Cora Lee for babies makes her go with many men, while Ciel is on a path of self- destruction, having suffered a series of personal disasters. Novel captures the pain, suffering and futile attempts at happiness for a group of colored women.

Mama Day brings out strong female characters and the importance of generational relations between women. The novel also highlights the practices and beliefs of people associated with the history and mystery. According to Wagner-Martin (1988) Mama Day is about “the way one generation of women affects another and the way the strong heritage of gentleness and anger, courage and frailty, can shape individual consciousness through several generations of family” (18). Miranda keeps telling Cocoa the importance of female bond that comes generation after generation. She also makes Ophelia understand their history and heritage by telling the story of Sapphira Wade. Ophelia believes the connection between her, Mama Day and Abigail Day is unending.

Bailey’s Café is another novel speaks about the emotional experience of women.

Assuming his name as Bailey he runs Bailey’s Café with his wife Nadine, people call him Bailey. Bailey sees different customers and share their life with the readers. The recklessness of patriarch lead the matriarch to behave so cruel is been uncovered through the story of Sadie, a poor young girl, who was forced into prostitution at thirteen just to fulfil the needs of her mother. Sadie loves her mother wholeheartedly though there was not any reciprocation from the other side. Sadie wants always to an apple of her mother’s eyes, she suppressed all her likes and dislikes and she behaves too good to her mother.

The journey of Eve to New Orleans was terrifying. “I (Eve) had no choice but to walk to walk into New Orleans neither male nor female...mud” (Bailey’s Café 91). Eve was running a boarding house that many women stay there. Similarly Esther, Miriam, Mrs. Maple have different stories of their own. Though the women faced



unfavourable circumstances they stand sturdy without losing hope. Megha Bharati quotes Roz Kaveney, ... Gloria Naylor described urban African-American life with a graceful vigour that transcended,... she found ways of portraying the lives of individuals, and in particular of women, who were damaged and scarred, but not overwhelmed, racial and sexual oppression (120).

Bantwal’s debut novel *The Dowry Bride* is set in Indian background. The novel was an emotional outburst against indestructible dowry system prevalent all over the nation. The horrible repulsive practice of higher class community in showing off their discriminatory hatred against the downtrodden sectors is also brought to limelight. The other two novels are examined on traditional and neo-modern thematic amalgamations of Indo-Americans. The aggressive feminist view of Feminism that no woman should agree to be treated as the

‘Other’ anymore. Also, the aspect of self is never allowed to be taken for granted by patriarchal domination is supported by Bantwal through the female protagonist Megha in the novel *The Dowry Bride*. Here the matriarch Chandamma Ramnath acts as patriarch to suppress and oppress the poor woman Megha. Nancy Faraday observes: “When a woman, as an agent of patriarchal norms, acts with oppressive power politics and represses her daughter or daughter-in-law, she is resented and feared as a matriarch” (62).

Being a woman of early thirties Meena remains single and battles with her jobs in the novel *The Reluctant Matchmaker*. Though the novel is set in America the characters are blended with Konkani culture as taught by their elders. Prajay sweeps Meena off her feet as soon as they meet but the irony is she was asked by Prajay to find a girl to match his physique and intellect. The poor petite woman, Meena’s emotions towards her one sided love makes her strong to find a suitor for her boss.

Shoban Bantwal’s novels promote the idea through her writings that the suffering of women is due to the ignorance and isolation. She comes up with a clear idea that a woman should know to reweigh her personality and empower herself. Her novels, *The Dowry Bride*, *The Sari Shop Widow* and *The Reluctant Matchmaker* picture the motherland realism found in various generation of Indian Diaspora settled in American



lands and are intensely embedded in enchanting Romance, faith in the religion, progressing feminine discourse, Indian custom and philosophy, and assimilation of Indo-American traditions. Women in diaspora restrict them from writing as they find the new land is strange but soon they break open the shell as settlers and keep them active in all socio-political issues.

... first is one of the nostalgia for the homeland left behind mingled with fear in a strange land. The second is a phase in which one is busy adjusting to the new environment that their creative output. The third phase is the shaping of Diaspora existence by involving themselves in ethno cultural issues. The fourth is that when they have ‘arrived’ start participating in the larger world of politics and national issues (Parmeshwaran 165).

Bantwal and Naylor, through their novels attempt to show the initiation of new women who are courageous and determined. They claim that women could be considered tender and fragile by their biological boundaries, but they are blessed with incredible psychological strength and rational potentialities. These qualities help them to prove their wisdom and courage at a crucial situation. Instead of toiling in the traumatic situations the women learns to be self-dependent out of their experience. The female protagonists of Gloria Naylor and Shobhan Bantwal fall under this category, their sentiments towards the relationship and emotions on inequality and oppression lead them to the path of self- redemption.

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