

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LITERATURE: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MARGARET WALKER AND BAMA

DR. L.KULANDAI TERESE FATIMA

Abstract: The presence and commitment of women in the field of literature opens up new avenues where their intellectual beauty coupled with self analysis and social concern is displayed, creating a great panoramic view. One among such repercussions of post-colonialism is the emerging trends in feminist literature.

Keywords: Effects of post-colonialism, Racism, sexism and casteism, Women education and liberation, Women Oppression.

Introduction: The purpose of this study is to highlight the similar attitudes of two different women writers totally belonging to different race and culture: The African American writer Margaret Walker and South Indian writer Bama.

Though the term post-colonialism is generally known as the study of culture and literature of those countries which were colonized by the European imperial domination it includes in wider range the study of the marginalized sections of any society too. In that way it focuses on race relations and the effect of racism, particularly on women.

This work first focuses on Margaret Abigail Walker, an undaunted African American writer of the twentieth century, who through her illuminating speeches and writings ignited the minds of her people. As an African American woman writer her longing for recognition care and concern for her people were revealed in depth, almost in all her poems. The following lines from her signature poem, "For My People" echo the same idea.

".....When in

Memory of the bitter hours when we discovered

We were black and poor and small and different and nobody

Cared and nobody wondered and nobody understood
For the boys and girls who grew in spite of these things to be men and women.

To marry their playmates and bear children and then die of consumption anemia and lynching". (For My People, P-6).

This is her expression of the black's suffering and ignorance; the injustice done to them by the society due to their lack of education and awareness. She speaks about people of all age groups; their ignorance, lack of comforts, the aimless youth, especially women whose youth and abilities exploited. While she focuses on the suffering of women she observes that she herself in spite of being educated woman found herself as 'triple handicapped'. Firstly for being born as an African American and finally a woman, caretaker of her house as well concentrating in her academic side amidst all oppressions and protests.

But still her invisible hope and faith in all power of herself makes her, voice for her people she writes:

"Out of this blackness we must struggle forth
For want of bread, of pride and dignity.

Struggle between the morning and the night.

(The Struggle staggers us P-51)

Despite all her struggle she stridently voices out for asserting herself as Black woman writer, "Black Nationalist".

In her poem, My truth and My flame she declares her self-acceptance and proclaims her superiority as a woman writer.

"I am a Black Woman

And I hold my head up high

For I rise with the masses of mankind

... ..

I rise with the tides of revolution

Against the systems of oppression

.... .. I am a Black woman

And my beauty is my power.

Walker, as a woman writer has inspired, politicized her readers with hope and faith for a better world. In her poem, Solace, her optimism outshines everything:

"I will not darken all my days

With bitterness and fear

But lift my heart with faith and hope

And dream, as always, of a brighter place".

(This is my century P-193)

In recent times, the pluralistic characteristic of women and the multiplicity within each woman are depicted through the writings of women. Especially Indian women writers portray the inherent understanding of the human, that is the female psyche. Writers like Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Nair are some of such writers to recall. They deal with the situations, questions and unanswered answers that every woman would have faced on her life. As it is cited earlier, while an African American woman writer is triply handicapped due to the oppression in sexism, racism and fascism, in the South Indian scenario, Bama a women writer too feels that she and her people are equally oppressed through, communal, religious and social rituals and activities.

Bama, an eminent Dalit woman writer brings out the contemporary issues in caste and gender. Her two novels *Karukku* and *Sangati* deal with the day to day difficulties and age old ever prevailing casteism. *Sangati* is a record of her own community which encompasses the multiple stories of different individuals of her caste.

The author is the narrator of the novel *Sangati*. In the first quarter of the novel, she portrays the incidents through the eyes of a twelve year old girl. Starting from home, the different biased treatment meted out to the girl child in comparison with her young brother, and how the females whether a child or a grown-up is subjected to oppression are described vividly. Even to the babies in the cradle the prejudiced treatment is carried out.

Women in the community are sexually harassed by the upper caste men. They are humiliated, beaten up and exploited by their own husbands and even sometimes by their own fathers. Bama portrays the collective experience of all the women of her community. Through her description of the women with realistic notes she insists the fact that though they are oppressed in many ways unjustly they have an unbeatable spirit with which they move on. The women's courage in confronting with their problems and their ability to manage difficult circumstances portray their indomitable self will power.

Through the characterization of children like Maikkanni, the pathetic condition of child labour and the joy of innocent pranks and small enjoyments and comforts denied to them are presented with the undercurrent sense of pathos.

Some of the women character take a kind of hysterical refuge in feigned possession are depicted with a sense of humour and stark realities. Exploitation of political parties and leaders leave the women in ignorance. At the end of the novel, Bama tries to make them aware of the situation in which

they are placed by the other negative social elements.

These Dalit women are triply handicapped, economically, politically and religiously too. But the consolable fact is, they are not afraid of their situations; but try to find out solutions.

The same view is expressed by Bama, the writer: "My mind is crowded with many anecdotes: stories not only about the sorrows of the Dalit women, but also about their lively and rebellious culture: their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them, but rather to swim vigorously against the tide: about the self-confidence and self-respect that enables them to leap over their adversities by laughing at and ridiculing them: about their passion to live life with vitality, truth and enjoyment: about their hard labour. I wanted to shout out the stories."

The characters like Vellaiamma kizhavi, Mariamma, Kaaliamma, Rendupalli and Raakamma bear witness to the strong and indomitable spirit of the oppressed women.

Conclusion: Whether it is the African American writer or a South Indian writer, what the women of the post-colonial times claim is, freedom and dignity for their people. Economical independence and intellectual freedom alone could save them from being oppressed sexually, politically and of course religiously too. Inculcating good values in children, like respecting and loving women for their merits should be taken in to consideration. Changing times and future should make the world a possible place for women to unfold themselves in a much more secure and civilized world.

To end with the positive note of Bama: "We should educate boys and girls alike showing no difference between them as they grow into adults... Then there will come a day when men and women will live as one, with no difference between them: with equal rights. Then the injustices, violence, and inequalities will come to an end."

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Dr. L. Kulandai Terese Fatima
Associate Prof. of English
C. Kandaswami Naidu College for Women, Cuddalore-2