

Feministic Views of Kavery Nambisan's A Town Like Ours

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the suppression, oppression and self-determination of women characters in the novel A Town Like Ours. The author Kavery Nambisan has given voice to Rajakumari, a retired whore to speak on the suppression of voiceless women in the society. She is abused as chudayil by her father; the emotional violence has forced her to follow aunty and later prostitution. The early marriage of Saroja to a dull wit Vasu, made her suffer in domestic and emotional violence in her everyday life. The creative art of Kripa is considered as offensive by her husband who tries to suppress her from exhibiting it in the art exhibition. Women characters in the novel are subjected to domestic violence at their early ages due to lack of education and economic dependence on men either father or husband or in-laws. They wish to liberate themselves from the domination and violence against them but fall as a victim for their survival.

Key words: *Exploitation, Suppression, Oppression and Plight.*

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Introduction

The novel *A Town like Ours* portrays the miserable life of the everyday people in the fictional town Pingakshipura. It is divided in to three parts, Part One is Seedless – Manohar and Kripa remain as a childless couple even after fourteen years of their happy married life, Part Two is Black verses White – The pesticide factory owned by the Sugandha boss has polluted the water which runs black in contrast to the colour of the hair on the heads of children, Part Three is the Department of Secrets – The characters in the novel conceal certain ideas of theirs from others.

Exploitation of Women

The novel begins with the narration of the painful life of the woman of pleasure Rajakumari, who has been abused as chudayil by her father but has been praised as princess by the doctor client of hers. Simone de Beauvoir in *Prostitutes and Hetaeras* states the life of whores,

“The prostitute is a scapegoat; man unloads his turpitude onto her and he repudiates her. Whether a legal status puts her under police surveillance or she works clandestinely, she is in any case treated as a pariah.” (p.613 de Baeauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*)

She has sold herself to the strangers to earn her livelihood, has lost her health and depends on the generosity of others after her retirement. The words of Rajakumari express the exploitation of women in the patriarchal society, “Ah yes, in the queendom of whores where living flesh is pawned every night, Time works quickly. Murderously. Forty means *old*.” (p.05) She has many admirers including the priest, though temple is a place of religious sanctity, the priest has immorally slipped into the beauty of Rajakumari. She has served him and has gained a place in the corner of the temple to rest after her retirement from whoredom. She states that, “Years ago when I became the weekly habit of the temple priest he gave me this corner room where, screened by gunny, I have a shelter, dignity and respect.” (p.05) The trust worthy person in the light becomes unreliable in the dark.

Domestic Violence against Women

Rajakumari is one of the six children to a poor farmer. She is the youngest of the three girls in her family. Her childhood days are marked with the joy of education and rustic life. She works in the field, fetches water, gathers dung, stacks sun-dried sheaves of paddy, and feeds chickens like other children in the village. She prefers to go to school and has studied till sixth standard. Her school is five miles away from home so her father has decided to drop her education on the ground of safety. Education is denied to Rajakumari and poverty has forced her to work in a provision store at her young age between twelve and fourteen to support her family

economically. She is sent to another village to work as an assistant in the provision store owned by one of her distant relatives. She is impressed by a woman in printed black sari, admires the riches and the independent life of hers. She has praised the beauty of Rajakumari and persuades her to move with her for a better future.

Rajakumari enjoys the flirtation from the son of her master but she pushes him aside to defend herself from being molested. "One day when the father wasn't around, the boy tried to clutch at my just – rising breasts. I pushed him away that day and many times afterwards." (p.26) Her cry is neglected by her father who calculates her salary. He advises her not to make silly complaints and meets the shop owner to arrange marriage between his son and Rajakumari. He not only refuses the proposal but also criticizes Rajakumari as a promiscuous woman. Her job as a helper in the provision store ends on the same day. A woman is subjected to criticism but the man who tries to molest her is being defended in the patriarchal society. Rajakumari bears the blame and suffers in pain. Her father expresses his anger on her, "Unable to cope with the shame of refusal from his own relative, my father turned on me. He called me names, blamed me for seducing an honest young lad. 'You will do every bit of housework in order to be fed', he said to me. 'And if our god Mallikarjunappa shows mercy on you, he might send an ageing widower or a deaf-dumb or a cripple who will wed you without much ceremony. And that is important in these difficult times for a father burdened with two proper girls and a chudayil for a third.'" (p.27)

The young Rajakumari learns the meaning of the Hindi word chudail from one of her sisters. "Much later I learned that a chudayil is the ghost of a woman who dies at childbirth. She pursues men and leads them to destruction." (p.27) She faces ill-treatment and domestic violence in her own house by her father for no mistake of hers. He abuses his daughter Rajakumari by calling her as chudayil. "'Chudayil', the father said. You are a chudayil" (p.27) She is a determined woman who has wept for some time and decides to do all the household works on her own.

The author displays the wretched life of a homeless woman through the character Saroja who shelters in Pingashipura with her son Gundumani. Saroja, a short, dark skinned, illiterate but a determined village woman, married to a seventeen year old Vasu at the age of thirteen or fourteen. Vasu belongs to land-owning family who has the habit of chewing his fingers. "His smile is that of a young boy, his mind younger." (p.35) She lives in a joint family with her in-laws. The verbal attacks and the bitter criticisms of her brothers-in-law wound her heart.

"His two brothers bait her from the first day with hurtful remarks and winking innuendos about the size of her breasts and their brother's virility. Saroja does not mind that her husband is a simpleton. What she does mind is the stupidity that makes

him guffaw along with his brothers when they say, 'How skilled are you, Vasu, at picking your nose with one hand and reaching beneath her sari with the other?' and in the kitchen their wives laugh aloud and the mother cracks a smile with her thin lips." (p.35:36)

Saroja is helpless with her idiotic husband who partake his brothers and other members of the family in their criticism but she fights back alone. Saroja feels pity for her husband as he is a playmate rather than a husband to her. He fails to understand or defend her as a responsible husband. The only way for Saroja to escape from the bitter comments of her brothers-in-law is to run away from the home. Always she remembers the goat that has been cut on her wedding day whenever she sees the eyes of her husband. She is a strong willed woman, desires for a dignified life. "At the mature age of nineteen, Saroja feels parched for a life of some dignity." (p.37) They hate her for she is spirited and fights back so her son Gundumani becomes a plaything for them. Giving birth to a child is the right of a woman, though Saroja doesn't wish to bear the child for the second time, she cannot abort the baby in her womb, as she has to depend on her family members for money.

Suppression and Oppression of Women

Manohar and Kripa is a happy couple, both are working. They talk about everything but not about their grief of childlessness. He dislikes her imagination, he calls it as wild. Manohar is an Associate Professor of at a college in Pingakshipura. Manohar doesn't want Kripa to paint according to her wish. In a polite manner he tries to control her. He expresses his dislike towards her paintings. He tells Kripa that, "I wish, I wish you wouldn't paint such stuff, Kripa, there is no need to antagonize people, is there?"

'My paintings are my responsibility.'

'I'm married to you. You must think of my sentiments.'"(p.70)

Men enjoy the patriarchal domination of women and expect them to take care of the family and other domestic chores.

Conclusion

Violence against woman is a global issue. Women are considered as weak, vulnerable and are confined at home that results in exploitation. Economic dependence and lack of education have made most of the woman to play the subordinate role in the society. Women are deprived form their basic rights of education and liberty.

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