

Portrayal of Women in Kavery Nambisan's *on Wings of Butterflies* -A Psychological Analysis

Padmavathy. G*

**Ph.D Scholar, LRG Government Arts College for Women, Tirupur,*

Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

*Kavery Nambisan is an Indian English writer and a surgeon, who practices in rural India. The novel *On Wings of Butterflies* depicts the struggle and trauma of women in the society. The psychological analysis of characters traces the instance of suppression or depression or oppression at various stages of life. Evita is the central character of the novel. She is the daughter of a fallen woman turns to become an organizing secretary of WOW, WOMEN OR WOMEN. Her childhood memories and her mother's struggle in the hands of strangers are the root cause of the organization. This young determined Eva aims to unite all the women, despite their background and rise as one force to fight against injustice. The members of WOW are from various fields, Pushpaben, a psychologist and social worker; Tara, a Deputy Commissioner of Police in-charge of crime; Kripa Kagal, owns Swargalok Jewelers; Heera, a seamstress; Lividia King, Organizer of WOMB; TLS, an activist; MeghaDasi, a Fortune-teller. They succeed in organizing a convention for five days in Delhi. The delegates share their personals to encourage the spectators to take brave decision at the time of crisis. The convention creates awareness and agitates wide range of people that lead the leaders to sign the treaty to end the exploitation of woman. Evita's achievement marks the beginning of Independent woman in every walk of life.*

Key word: - *Exploitation, Suppression, Depression, Oppression and Transformation.*

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Introduction

The novel displays the plight of Indian women in the patriarchal society. Women are considered as weaker sex and are suppressed by men. She struggles for identity both in the family and in the society. The daring aspiration of the Panjim girl Evita, causes a revolution through WOW to unite and rise their voice for equal rights. Kaveri Nambisan focuses on the assertive nature of women and their success in the novel *On Wings of Butterflies*. The Part I of the novel deals with the sufferings of women, Part II is about the demands of WOW and Part III is the result of their struggle.

The Exploitation of women:

Many women are deprived from the basic needs of their life in the male dominated society. They are puppets in the hands of manipulators. They suffer throughout their life as they lack education and are unaware of their latent potential. The author depicts the exploitation of women in the family and in the society through the portrayal of Maria, Panna, Heera, Trilokasundari, Milar, Lydia, Kripa, and Megha Dasi. Maria is the unwed mother of Evita, works as a waitress in a roadside café during the evening shift. Her beauty allures men, on whom she depends for her livelihood. She submits her life to the strangers without realizing her health and future. "Maria was a confused woman who could not tell the difference between men who flattered and men who abused her: she was used by man after unknown man." (P.17)

Panna's life is shattered by her drunkard father. He pawns her for money. Panna is innocent at the age of thirteen to resist her father and the pawnbroker. After a long struggle, she manages to escape with her two children Heera and Shiva. She continues to live as a flesh trader. When Shiva discovers his mother's business with the strangers, tries to possess her which ends fatal to him. Heera dreams a happy life with her dhobi husband, but soon confirms that he is useless as he believes in wild sex for the birth of son. Panna chains and threatens her drunkard son – in – law to safeguard her daughter Heera. Panna beats Shiva to death, when he tries to molest her.

Trilokasundari's wish is to become a politician. Besides objection from her family members, she joins politics at the age of nineteen. She faces bitter criticisms as her name doesn't match her appearance. The name Trilokasundari stands for the most beautiful woman in the three worlds (Heaven, Hell and the Earth). Her marriage to a Party member ends in divorce within five years. Then she overthrows her husband and the Party and determines to become an activist.

Every Sunday during inspection, Milar, a pretty girl, is tormented by the lady warden for her wrinkled clothes and ugly plait in the orphanage. But the male warden is social to her, irons her clothes, plaits her hair neatly and compliments her with chocolates. So the eleven year old Milar escapes from the corporal punishment and seeks refuge in the favor of male warden. Then only she realizes that she has leaped from a frying pan into fire. His cruel nature is revealed when he tries to molest her. "Now I shall iron your underclothes' and reached for her chemise". (p.114) When a rich business man Sam Billimoria offers to marry her, and also agrees to pay the pension to the old couple who adopted Milar. She accepts his proposal, their beautiful married life begins in the white mansion in Goa but soon it ends because of her unfitness for married life. At the age of 15 she has got married and within one and a half year she becomes a widow. Though many offer to marry her for her beauty, she remains as a widow. This makes others call her as 'the mad goddess'. She lives alone and stitches women's innerwear for her bread and butter. She has a good collection of books as her husband always gifts it. She is a voracious reader prefers to read and write books on history.

Kripa, a jeweler is the wife of a politician Dinakar Kiran Kagal. "He accused her of being responsible for all the problems in his life; she did not give him more children." (p.45) So giving birth to more children seems to be an icon of potential for men. Dinu, who seems to be a typical and common man known for his dominance, expects the total submissiveness of Kripa as a conventional homemaker, and gets disappointed when it is failed. Hence he threatens and to the core divorces her. She is determined to be the leader of the Party, for the remaining of her life.

Dr.King wishes to marry the teenage Lydia in his late thirties. He readily offers a fat reverse dowry to win her hand. He reminds the readers Baroka, the sixty year old bale of a village, the symbol of lion and who owns and molests an eighteen year belle, Sidi, the symbol of jewel, in Wole Soyinka's masterpiece, *The Lion and the Jewel*. Lividia King remains a happy wife with her two children until she learns about her husband's adulterous nature. When she finds that Dr.King yearns for the company of young girls, her anger becomes aggression. "Lividia was an unhappy woman, shamed by the infidelities of her husband..." (p.95). She hides her sorrows in the smile.

The widow Megha Dasi collects funeral ash, sells it to the hotels, to feed her sons and daughter Torulata. But she becomes a burden for her sons in her old age. They want her to die soon, so they fail to feed her properly. When Megha Dasi learns about her son's expectations, she decides to leave Howrah to spend her last days in Vrindhaban. Evita meets her to know about the future of WOW, which

makes her to realize the purpose of her life. She decides to search her granddaughter in the slums of Howrah and finds Jyotika. The young girl does odd jobs to her neighbors and prefers to draw either women or butterflies, because she remembers her dead mother as a “magnified butterfly”. (p.130) Jyotika’s painting “... women running, with their eyes fixed on a faraway”. (p.136) is the symbolic representation of independent woman in the novel. Megha Dasi confirms Jyotika’s blissful future from her drawings, dies happily. The female characters in the novel experiences injustice as men exploit her to satisfy their economic, social and sexual needs.

The Transformation of women

The Exploitation of all the women in the novel leads to their self – realization, which strengthens them towards transformation. However the Prolonged suppression, depression and oppression thrust them to be lost in the crowd, they upraise for equal rights.

“Karen Harney prevailed and continued her pioneering efforts for women. She argued convincingly that

women must be given the opportunity to find their own personal identities, to develop their abilities, and pursue careers if they choose.” (Wood, E Samuel, Green Wood, R Ellen, *The World of Psychology*, p.412)

Evita realizes that many women are helpless, meek and submissive like her mother, they easily fall a prey to the men. She is the victim of her mother’s promiscuous life. At an early age of fifteen decides to leave her home to earn her livelihood. She travels through many places for job and starts her career as a waitress, later becomes a receptionist in a chain of hotels. She chances to meet various people with social, cultural and psychological problems and decides to start an organization for the future of womankind.

“As a child I had to watch my mother suffer. She was so helpless. I waited seven years to start WOW. I want to see change”. (p.106) Evita sketches a proper plan about the members of the organization, All Women Political Party and its goal. On her twenty- second birthday she uncovers the details of WOW to her mother and friend Maria, and then posts the envelopes to the members. The members are selected from Magazine, Television, and Newspaper. She tries to build confidence and empower women through WOW.

Pushpaben is an elderly woman with the leadership quality. She designs pamphlets, plans workshops to motivate the members of WOW. Her husband supports her in all her deeds. She extends her selfless help to the poor and needy through Nari Adalat in the villages of Rajkot and solves the family disputes. According to her

India needs WOW for, “We witness injustice every day, everywhere. Two – thirds of the illiterates are women. The men find it easy to divide and rule.”(p.39)

The members of WOW and other women join to support Evita in organizing the meeting. Tara Amar is the Deputy Commissioner of Police in charge of crime. She is a spinster, known for her promising nature. She helps Evita in all her ways and provides protection to the public during the meeting. Heera is practical and down to earth, stitches clothes for living. She shares her problems to Kripa, and becomes a member of WOW. She establishes Swargalok Sewing Centre with Kripa’s help to teach sewing for the poor and illiterate women. Though she is poor, bravely fights her economic problems alone. Trilokasundari becomes an activist and publishes papers on social evils in the conferences. Milar reacts bravely and punches the male warden on his face and then leaves the orphanage on her own. This exhibits her potentiality and self –realization. Kripa is defiant, joins WOW, and starts All Women Political Party in Mumbai with string of jasmine as the Party’s symbol. Though Dinu hurts and criticizes her, she conducts workshops and meetings for the downtrodden women. Lividia King establishes The World Organization of Male Bashers WOMB and stresses on “Adam – bashing” (p.96). She always shares real incidents to the gathering to motivate them to be bold. “We teach women to unlearn outdated virtues like timidity and submissiveness”. (p.96) At last, Lividia King admits her defeat in the violent approach to the gender bias. When a woman realizes her strength, she learns to oppose injustice and set as an example to others.

Psychological Impacts of Women

Every one dreams due to his or her persistent wish. If her dream gets shattered, she feels a vacuum in her mind. She finds no driving factors for her life and feels stressed. When she is found stressed, she becomes an easy prey to the people around her, who may be her husband or family members or the society.

Dreams are all forms of “wish fulfillment” — attempts by the unconscious to resolve a conflict of some sort, whether something recent or something from the recesses of the past. Because the information in the unconscious is in an unruly and often disturbing form, a “censor” in the preconscious will not allow it to pass unaltered into the conscious. (Freud, Sigmund *The Interpretation of Dreams the Illustrated Edition*, p.09)

Then she is suppressed and ultimately gets depressed. Such a depressed woman, will choose any of the below choices, she will surrender herself, or she will leave her family, or she will commit suicide or she will kill the suppressor. These are the ultimate options of a suppressed woman. Kripa, Trilokasundari and Milar leave

their families after divorce or became widows. All the above women find refuge in WOW and get support mutually for each other.

The Achievements of WOW

The confident Evita leads the convention of WOW in Delhi. The growing number of members marks the initial success of the organization. Their demands include “Every child should bear the name of the mother and father, and inheritance laws should be the same for sons and daughters”. “Panchayat, parliament and assembly seats must be impartially shared. When fifty percent of all political leaders are women, there will be true democracy”. “House wives should be paid wages” etc... (p.91) The last day of the convention marks a drastic change in the view of the conflict between men and women. To the surprise of its members and others, the children play an important role in bringing people together. Their secret mission is to kidnap Evita to pacify and lesson the folks that a healthy relationship between men and women are essential for the future generation. “... thousands of children with their hands linked together formed circles around the building. Boy – girl – boy – girl - boy – girl”. (p.248) At last the demands of WOW are accepted and treaty is signed by the leaders to end the suffering of women.

Conclusions

The transformation of woman leads to the emergence of WOW, with the underlying motive to fight against gender discrimination, inequality and exploitation. It succeeds to bring a new dawn in the life of women and a change in their attitude towards life. After the convention Evita and others resume to their work with gaiety. The novel implies that every woman is born with courage to fight her problems and bring a fruitful change in her life. The title *On Wings of Butterflies* is symbolic in nature. The butterfly undergoes transformation from the stage of pupa to fly independently with its colorful wings. Similarly a woman struggles, molds and strengthens herself to march forward with her dreams of life.

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