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PORTRAYAL OF 'WOMANHOOD' IN INDIAN DRAMA IN ENGLISH: A SELECTED
READING

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ABSTRACT

India is famous for its various traditional practices, vivid cultural diversity, and glorious ancient history. The unprecedented glory of Indian history is unique for its own sake. It is due to the fact that our ancient writers such as Valmiki and Veda Vyas have left an indelible mark in Indian literature particularly in performance studies. In contrast to this, India is notorious for certain unethical social practices such as caste system, social inequality, and superstitions. In India, woman deities such as Shakti, Kali and Saraswati are worshipped regularly. But, the position of women is cumbersome in the contemporary times. They are being oppressed, suppressed and brutalized under the clutches of this typical social order throughout the ages. Feminist movement in the twentieth century has brought a cognizance among women to ponder over their position in the society. As a result, women began a new journey from the self-effacement to the process of self-actualisation. This study delves into the scrutiny of feminist issues such as gender discrimination, female infanticide, child marriage, life of a widow in a patriarchal society, male chauvinism and condition of a bridegroom in-law's family are being discussed in some selected plays. This attempt follows the panoramic surveillance of afore-mentioned issues in Indian context.

Key words: patriarchal order, feminist movement, male chauvinism, panoramic surveillance

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INTRODUCTION

India is well known for its various traditional practices, varied cultural history and glorious past. Generally, Indian literature is blended with mythology and classical influence. During the twentieth century, the impact of the British is more on Indian literature because Indian writers are under the western influence. This inclination has brought tremendous changes in terms of subject treatment, selection of a topic, interpretation of context and what not. The unprecedented glory of Indian history is unique for its own sake because the writers such as Valmiki and Veda Vyas have left an indelible mark on the contemporary writers. In other words, their influence dethroned the tattoos of western impression in their works. India being a multi-religious and multilingual nation, people maintained an inseparable relationship with the Vedas since ancient times. The Upanishads have enabled Indians to maintain Indianans in each and every aspect of their life

India is known for its unconventional social order such as caste system, superstitions, untouchability, and social inequality. The traces of these practices can be found in any form in our day to day existence. In our country, woman is treated as an incarnation of goddess and a special status is being given to Kali, Saraswati in our Mythology. In a country like this, the position of a woman is cumbersome. She is being victimized, brutalized, and oppressed under the clutches of patriarchal social order throughout ages. Her anguish is being silenced for many years and it cannot be taken very seriously. Ultimately, this trend has an end with the emergence of feminist movement in the twentieth century. This movement insinuated the women's creative flavor and evoked a new perspective to challenge the male domination. It gave new impetus for the creation of new canon of woman writing and women boldly questioned the unjust authority of man towards them in society.

After the introduction of western education in India, very significant changes occurred in the perspective of Indian women. It paved way for these women to claim their own right in the light of Indian freedom struggle and helped them to form women organizations and reformation movements respectively. They realized the essence of feminist movement and a sort of cognizance that was developed among them to distance themselves from the idea of passivity, domesticity, and servility. "Womanhood" refers to the condition of being a woman. In other words, a woman who receives respect and how she maintains individuality in every domain of her life.

This study probes into certain feminist issues addressed in seven Indian plays. This scrutiny is a kind of panoramic surveillance to delineate the alienation of woman in every arena. This study also tries to explore the social conditioning of women and their social position. It further elucidates different domains of society to study how women are being oppressed. This enquiry helps us understand the circumstances under which these women are being subjected to and the kind of platform these women choose to fight for their own rights. This further focuses on the shields under which these women used to free themselves from the social entanglement. This attempt looks at the different set of social conditions under which these women are trapped such as : gender discrimination, female infanticide, child marriage, status of a widow in a patriarchal society, male chauvinism. They have been discussed in their respective texts separately focusing on any one of the issues in a detailed manner.

Drama is a body of literature written for performance. According to Aristotle "Drama is an imitation of an action that is serious, having certain magnitude complete in itself." (Abrahams, 72) It registers every element of our society tangibly and records to reinterpret it. The influence of classical texts such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata is more on Indian drama. Now-a-days, Indian drama in English has attained a universal recognition with the emergence of contemporary dramatists on to the literary screen.

Nissim Ezekiel is a prominent Indian English writer produced a play titled "*Don't Call it Suicide*" (1993). In this domestic tragedy, he discusses the helplessness of a widow being caught in the patriarchal order. This play clearly projects the sufferings of a widow in the world of constraints and limitations. She surrenders her will to the condition she lives in. Despite her widowhood, she bravely leads her life. Ezekiel portrays her character with an intension to exhibit the life of a widow in a traditional Indian context. On the other hand, the dramatist gives the account of another woman named Malti who is tortured by her husband daily and becomes the epitome of millions of other women in our country. To her, the life of a married woman will be like "I am nobody and nothing since I go married. I can't call my body my own. I can't call my mind my own". (Ezekiel, 36) With lines we can comprehend the deplorable state of a woman in our society.

Girish Karnad came up with a marvelous work titled "*Naga Mandala: Play with a Cobra*". He blends mythology and folktales in his works. In this play, Karnad wants to project the life of an Indian house wife who failed to win the husband's fidelity. He locks her up inside the room and goes to meet a concubine every day. Rani feels dejected and tries to liberate herself from this bond. Karnad skillfully architects the life of a woman before marriage and after marriage. Unfortunately she becomes pregnant due to certain unexpected events without her knowledge. Having known the fact, Appanna forces her to undergo snake ordeal to prove her chastity. At this juncture, another incarnation of woman is shown in the play. Appanna starts treating her with

compassion and respect. Karnad designs the character so dexterously to make the reader understand the value of woman in the society.

Manjula Padmanabhan is notable playwright in Indian drama received an international acclaim for her novel titled "*Harvest*". Her works deal with real life incidents which have a universal appeal. In "*Light's Out!*", she describes the life of a rape victim being tortured in an apartment in Mumbai. It is based in a real life incident that took place in Santa Cruz in 1982. This drama illustrates the social apathy of a common man towards the social evil. The play is like a wakeup call for all the citizens of India to think about their role in the society.

Dina Mehta, in her play "*Getting away with Murder*", attempts to show the life of middle class people. The play is centered on the life style of three educated women-Sonali, Raziya and Mallika where the playwright tries to show the typical perspective of women in the 20th century with regard to their life. Each character is motivated by her own specific concern. This play extracts the aspect of female infanticide and child abuse as Sonali does not want her daughter to be born as she is haunted by her childhood incident where she has been assaulted by her uncle. Mallika, the boldest among the three does not want to marry any one as she is financially secure. In the case of Raziya, we can see a different perspective where she is obsessed with her religion and blindly accepts Habib's marriage with his friend. She does not dare to question the orthodox dogmas which are totally opposite to human ethos. Dina Mehta gives an account of three different women from different perspectives.

Poile Sengupta in "*Mangalam*" delineates the barbarian attitude of a husband towards his wife who has been raped. Mangalam happens to be the deceased wife of Mr. Dorai. He assaults her every day after knowing the fact. The play projects the typical behavior of a husband and keeps informing us about the duty of man to understand his wife completely.

Mahesh Dattani "*Tara-A Stage Play In Two Acts*". In this play, Tara and Chandan are Siamese children born to Bharathi and Patel. This play tries to display the typical Indian mindset of parents. Patel wants Chandan to lead a happy life and he develops apathy towards Tara even though both of them carry the same health issue. The parents of these children have deliberately separated Tara's organic leg from her and attached it to Chandan. As a result, Tara dies due to some health complications. In fact, that leg suits Tara better than Chandan. Patel is the symbol of male chauvinism in this play. Dattani portrays the mentality of Indian parents in this play towards a girl child.

Gurazada Apparao is a famous Telugu poet heralded a new vision in Telugu Literature. He wrote a master piece titled "*Kanyasulkam* (price for bride)" in 1892. This play is a satire on the concept of child marriage. This entire plot revolves around Luddavadhanulu, a 60 years old man wants to marry a girl who is 10 years old. Apparao cleverly designs this story to show how this unethical concept being practiced in those times.

Conclusion

Indian drama in English has gained momentum with the advent of British into India. It has undergone a lot of change in terms of its subject treatment, selection of themes, narrative strategies. Feminist movement is meant for bringing equality to women in social, political and economic spheres. But, there is no expected change in the status of women even in the twenty first century. She is being tortured, brutalized or subjugated daily in any other form. Therefore, it is the responsibility of every common man to think about this issue and enable a woman to receive her dignity, respect and individuality.

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