



Literacy Has Empowering Effect on Women: A Study With Reference to Novel 'The Waves'

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ABSTRACT

Today, none can deny the tremendous advancement of women in social, political and economic fields or even at education or at professional growth. Undoubtedly, it can be claimed that the growth of literacy rate of 65.46 % (2014 census) among the women is one of major reasons for the significant growth. This paper focuses on how an educated woman attains autonomy in leading her life along with performing her roles as wife and mother as well without shadowing her own self studying the woman protagonist, Sarada, in 'The Waves' (Tharangalu) written by Nandula susselsa devi, an eminent Telugu writer. This paper also examines how the woman moves forward beyond her traditional role to contribute for the socio-economic development of society.

KEYWORDS :

"If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family".

Jawaharlal Nehru

Introduction

Literature as the mirror of contemporary society reflects the social, political, moral and economic life of the people. Kali Das' *Abhijnana-Shakuntala* or Shaw's *St Joan* are to a great extent mirror of the society of India and England. In early Indian literature women are portrayed as symbols of patience, sacrifice, suffering etc. But with rise of feminism in literature followed by movements and ideologies aiming at defining, establishing, and defending state of equal political, economic, cultural, and social rights and education for women have brought a significant change with each women's liberation movement bringing a sensible reform aiming at an upliftment of women in society. The first voice in favor of women's right was raised by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) demanding equal opportunities for women in the field of education, economics and politics. The strong male supporter of women liberation, John Sturt Mill, showed serious concern about women's oppression in his *The Subjugation of Women* (1869). He felt the need for improved education for women and condemned women oppression as domestic slavery. It has greater influence in Indian women movements, unlike western feministic movement, eminent male personalities like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar emphasized on women's education in India. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Baba Saheb Ambedkar were leaders and took various initiatives to make education available to the women of India. However women's education got a fillip after the country got independence in 1947 and the government has taken various measures to provide education to all Indian women.

The increase of women literacy rate has brought a remarkable change in terms of political, economic and social rights. It has reflected in the works of Indian English fiction: especially Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharthi Mukherjee, Githaariharan, Kamala Markandaya, Shobha De, Suniti Namjoshi, Arundhati Roy, Mahashweta Devi, Nayantara Sahgal etc at national level as well as in regional literature also. The Indian women Novelists have studied deep into psyche of their characters and projected various images of women and their status in society and portrayed women's issues both realistically, psychologically and emotionally.

Staying Composed

Smt. S. Suseela Subrahmanyam, popularly known as Nandula Suseela Devi, is a well known Telugu writer and social worker who has penned about 200 short stories relating to various problems of Women. She not only portrayed various inner struggles of women but also depicted solutions at large. The effect of literacy on empowering the main protagonist of the novel 'The Waves' is subtly depicted. The entire story is intertwined between mother (Sarada) Krishna (son) and Niraja (wife of Krishna). Sarada who is school teacher lost her husband. Like Margaret "Marmee" March the girls' mother in the novel *Little Women*, Sarada has led the household after her death of her husband. Working as a teacher, she has brought up Krishna by inculcating rich values and principles in him. Sarada as

one of the stereotype characters with traits portrayed in literary works, she embodies elements of motherhood greatly reduced the possibility of self development in her. But, by gradual self critical analysis, Sarada behaves wisely and handles every situation with lot of understanding. Controlling her mother's love, she encourages and supports Krishna to go to Singapore when his company offered him project for year there. In Singapore Krishna meets Niraja his colleague and fell in love with her. Being an educated woman, she was able to balance the situation without disturbing the harmonious relationships in the family. After returning from Singapore to Hyderabad, Krishna stays in his uncle's house. When Sarada sees Krishna, she feels a great feel of satisfaction and happiness. Krishna slowly introduces Niraja to Sarada. Niraja visits Krishna's house often. Wise Sarada shows her ascent for their marriage. She is ambitious of performing Krishna's marriage grandiosely:

"On Sunday Krishna answered Niraja over phone "I'll meet you in the evening"

After lunch, Krishna rambles here and there"

Krishna what happened? asked Sarada.....

He hauled his voice and said

Niraja demands register marriage not even prefers reception.....

Sarada to see her son happy she replies: "It's ok Krishna! We can save marriage expenses, moreover reduces our fatigue". Niraja's insist of registers marriage pulls her very low. The situation reminds Marmee words in *Little Women*, "I am angry nearly every day of my life". But throughout novel like Marmee, Sarada also remains serene and composed, which suggests that the appearance of a docile woman may hide turmoil underneath. Here Sarada acquiesces the wish of Niraja, reflects her mental flexibility towards adapting to new system. Succeding to marriage, Niraja proposes to go for nuclear family against the joint family. Sarada stared at Krishna who is brooding on how to say about Niraja wish of living independently.

What is your problem? said Sarada asked in consoling manner

Something has stopped Krishna to say

Niraja.... Niraja..... he ceased

Krishna, why do hesitate? Tell

Niraja wants independent life, but

Sarada has an acute pain in heart. But thought of Krishna's plight.

Sarada with pleasant smile said to Krishna that there is no perversion in Niraja's desire and soothes Krishna. She comes back to home town, Rajamundry carrying a lot of agony in her. She has nurtured Krishna but soon, however, her offspring takes advantage of her benign nature. Sarada is the fulcrum around which the novels unfold wisdom of her. By all means, that all women in India especially, are traditional and ignorant; even educated women are performing professional duties, and feel satisfied to the core. Therefore it needs to be addressed why and how women are sensible unnecessarily. However Sarada smashes the stereotypes elements of mother hood and engenders new avenues that make her life upright.

Attaining Autonomy

Sarada, slowly starts home tuitions to children in nearby slums and

also runs womensef helpgroups in the village. She educates them on house hold, and financial management for better life. Within less time Sarada becomes so busy in conducting tuitions, and meetings to the women addressing their problems that at times she could not answer Krishna's call. He observes the new angle in her mother. "Amma (mother) don't engage in too many works, your health may cramp" says Krishna. Then Sarada replies "no my dear son, now my health is in good condition. Last month I got viral fever, when I am struggling at least to receive your call these children and women has taken care of me. I doesn't do much for them, just oral advices. These works provides me a great satisfaction". Krishna has no words with him. As days proceeds Sarada becomes very busy with her own 'Ma Seva Organisation'. She even has not gone to send Krishna off when he is going to London. Krishna is blessed with a baby boy. On hearing of the birth of grandson, her eyes are filled with tears, her heart wishes to see the baby boy. She rushes to Hyderabad and stays for four days. Krishna requests her to stay back "I have Ma Seva Organisation audit" she says. Astha, the protagonist of Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, says "A woman should be aware, self-control, strong will, self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense." Sarada wants to a break her traditional responsibilities of a typical mother and proceed on the path of full human status ignoring the request of her son as well as daughter –in –law that can even destroy their harmonious relation. She finds herself trapped between the pressure of modern developing society and shackles of ancient biases. She sets out on her quest for a more meaningful life rendering her services as teacher to poor students who live in nearby slum areas and guiding the women who work in farms on financial management as well.

After a few months she receives call from Krishna, "Amma (mother), Niraja loves Babu very much and planned a grand celebrations for the first birth day, when are you joining us?" she says "every mother loves her baby" Krishna becomes silent. "As I have monthly audit of Ma Seva Organization, I may not come". He doesn't even dare to request again because he failed in fulfilling her mother desire by accepting Niraja's register marriage collapsing Sadara's desire of performing grand marriage. Sarada moves beyond the motherhood love constructed by patriarchy and attempt to alter and enlarge the feminine arena. Betty Friedan relates the true essence of motherhood: "Motherliness is a way of life. It enables a women to express her total self with the tender feelings, the protective attitudes, the encompassing love of the motherly women. (*The Feminine Mystique*, 58)

Empowering Herself

She receives a phone call from Krishna that Babu is suffering from fever; he has to attend office work in Mumbai. Niraja has to address urgent client allegation, so asks Sarada to come Hyderabad. She observes worry in the voice of Krishna and obeys his call. Niraja receives her with love which was missed in all earlier visits. Sarada, takes care of Babu as well as house hold works. Babu recovers from fever. She cleans kitchen and organises everything at home. Niraja feels happy and concentrates on her work and receives compliments from her officer. Krishna comes back in two days completing his task in Mumbai successfully. After two days at dinner, Sarada asks Krishna, to book return tickets to Rajumandry. Krishna and Niraja suddenly becomes upset and request her to stay with them. Niraja who preferred to live independently now realised the values of joint family. Sarada's mind

has become a seat for thoughts and emotional feelings. The wandering senses kept her mind in turmoil. Her attachment to her son and desire to live independently in turn subject her mind to conflicting emotions.

Here the question is what is to do whether to stay along with son or to go back to Rajumandry for serving the needed. As verses 14 and 15 in Bhagavad gita in the second chapter unfold, "From the world of the senses, Arjuna, comes heat and comes cold, and pleasure and pain. They come and they go: they are transient. Arise above them, strong soul." Sarada has decided to serving the people who are in dire need that gives her great satisfaction. According to the Country Report of the Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power." Education of women is the most powerful tool of change of position in society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family.

Empowering Society

Like Chopin's Edna In *The Awakening*, Sarada affirms that she would give "her life up for her children but she would not give herself up". Though Sarada loves her son, she is unable to accommodate both motherhood and autonomy and conceives an independent existence of her own. Sarada says "your belong to present generation, your views are different, you have created your own world, in the same way I too need independence, for that reason, I created my own world". Both Krishna and Niraja keep clam. Sarada leaves to Rajumandry with lot of satisfaction. She is very happy. After receiving the village she enlist all works she has to attend and walks with future vision of serving the society at her level.

Conclusion

Education in a holistic perspective is not simply holding degrees but gaining wisdom that helps in leading a meaning life with satisfaction as well as doing service to society. The nineteenth century writer, Kate Chopin (1950 - 1904), Sarada, discharges both the roles meticulously - the role of a mother and the role of a altruist. One role didnot disturb the other. In *The Awakening*, Chopin's masterpiece Edna Pontellier, Edna, the protagonist is "not a mother woman" Sarada thinks that she cannot efface herself and treat motherhood as the ultimate destiny of essential motherhood and set new path for herself .

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