



Social Issues on Woman's Life

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ABSTRACT

Mayamma is an uneducated so she does not know the reality of life according to the new generation. She lost everything in her life. Mayamma believes that women should always support and surrender her opinion and duty to the men. She does every thing like the old generation people. Without knowing the value of woman and their strength she spoils her whole life. Mayamma is the real gem of old age culture follower.

KEYWORDS : Illiteracy, Scope of new life, social issues, barrenness and humiliation.

Painful life of Mayamma:

Devi finds a good friendship with Mayamma, Makes's family retainer. Devi listens to her life experience because she had allowed occurring all and everything on her, never, complained because she felt that success of life for woman depended on her ability to endure and go on. Whenever Mayamma is free she will tell the story of her life or Devi's mother-in-law's life. Through Mayamma only Devi comes to know the whole history of Makes's Family. According to Mayamma women should always depend on man. She also tells Devi to get pregnant soon. Then only the marriage is fulfilled. Her thought and emotion are belongs to the old generation. Mayamma is not a good friend but even sometimes she played her role as a mother too in Devi's condition. Pradeep Trikha reveals on male gender superiority as

She often thinks of herself as a floating island detached from the solidity of the mainland. She realises that in a male world it is very difficult for a woman to exist and find an objective-correlative for her emotions in her partner because for man woman has always been primarily an object of sex and pleasure (171-172).

Uneducated Woman:

Hariharan creates a narrative that shifts the ideology of womanhood starting with menarche, which is tacitly assumed to be celebrated only because it means future womanhood, and thus means nothing for barren women. Mayamma are quite different in terms of caste, education, age, and marital situation; however, they share the plight of barrenness, for which they have been forced to feel worthless and useless. The two women communicate, sympathize, and support each other, thus breaking "the proverbial silence" on the issue among women in Indian society. (Desai 192).

Mothers of sons who can preside in the rituals indispensable to Hindus are highly respected in Indian society; however, an unavoidable physiological condition for motherhood, menstruation and the blood of delivery are paradoxically considered contagiously defiled and dangerous. The dialogues between Devi, a newly married innocent wife and Mayamma in the Prelude show how Mayamma survived her long-suffering life as a wife and mother through her bleeding body in Hariharan's own style full of comical pathos.

To Devi's question about "why Mayamma had put up with her life, she laughed till the tears rolled down her wrinkled cheeks" (Prelude I). As she tells her story, she teases Devi about her childishness: "When I lost my first baby, conceived after ten years of longing and fear, I screamed, for the only time in my life. Why? . . . She [my mother-in-law] slapped my cheeks hard. . . . Her fists pummeled my breasts and my still swollen stomach till they had to pull her off my cowering, bleeding body. She shouted, in a rage mixed with fear, 'The barren witch has killed my grandson.'" (Prelude II).

Mayamma's Scope:

Mayamma has failed to reproduce a son, an heir necessary to sustain the patriarchal system. Mayamma herself does not doubt this system, nor does she resist it, as Devi, another childless wife, will come to do. Mayamma finally breaks a "proverbial" silence through her scream, "Why?", while

Devi has asked her grandmother, a storyteller of childhood fables, "Why?" thousands of times. Though she is told to be careful by Mayamma when she next asks a question, she promptly asks Makes, her husband, a taboo question, "Why do you want a baby?" (87).

Mayamma's painful story of her survival is told repeatedly. After Devi leaves her husband, Mayamma's memory goes back to her own marriage. One day, when Mayamma is hanging her new sari to dry, her mother-in-law mocks, "What has your beauty done for you, you barren witch?" and "she pulled up my [Mayamma's] sari roughly, just as her son did every night, and smeared the burning red, freshly-ground spices into my barrenness. I burned, my thighs clamped together as I felt the devouring fire cling to my entrails" (113). Mayamma, we learn, was married off at age twelve after her "blood flowed freely" and she became "a woman" (115). Her mother-in-law, being unable to "check Mayamma's insides . . . had to content herself with the astrologer's promise that Mayamma would bear her many strong grandsons" (80). She watches Mayamma's "slim waist intently for the first year," and in the second year she breaks into complaints (80).

The torture of Mayamma's mother-in-law

Her mother-in-law's abuse is habitual throughout Mayamma's married life. She forces Mayamma to fast every other day and to do penance to change the evil course of her horoscope. "Mayamma welcomed her penance like an old friend" and did everything she could do: she woke up at four in the morning, walked to the pond, prayed and "dipped herself again and again in the pure coldness" (80). One day the goddess she has prayed to blesses her womb and joy rushes through her "blood" (122). However, then "the blood came, too soon, too soon. . . . He [the new village doctor] shoved his greasy hand into my swelling, palpitating womb. I could feel the pull, the excruciating pain of the thrust, his hand, my blood, my dying son" (122). This scene, beginning with joy in the blood and ending with tragic bleeding, is inscribed in Hariharan's own style, combining strangely jaunty rhythms and concise diction.

Social Treatment:

Mayamma's whole body is thus reduced to a womb, something which is celebrated if it can reproduce sons and cursed if it cannot in a society where a woman's value mainly depends on her reproductive ability. From the viewpoint of her mother-in-law, who internalizes this patriarchal Indian culture, Mayamma is a dangerous witch, a killer of her grandson.

The village doctor also suggests that barrenness results from one's sins in a previous life. Devi's experience with the doctors at a modern fertility clinic is equally bleak, for they "bristle with impatience" see her as "a stupid woman who couldn't even get pregnant, the easiest of accidents" and seem to say, "Look at the obedient, dutiful wives around you" (91). Thus we see how providers of medical care do not really care, for they share the ideology of womanhood as a matter of reproductive capacity.

Sin of Barrenness:

Furthermore, the barrenness connotes sin, danger, disobedience, stu-

pidity and guilt in a barren, revolting womb. The mother-in-law's verbal assault makes Mayamma feel guilty, worthless and desperate to a degree that she imagines her "womb slips down, sagging with the weight of my greed for motherhood," and she puts her hand up, pulls and tears it out and "throws it on the garbage heap to rot" (122–23). Mayamma's self-tormenting day-dream is generated from her suppressed rage and estrangement from her own uncontrollable body.

However, as Devi secretly changes the plots of her grandmother's stories, she begins to assume a defiant attitude toward the traditional role of women, as evidenced by her asking her husband the taboo question, "Why do you want a baby?" (87). Nevertheless, she begins to make desperate penance for her unborn son, following Mayamma's advice. She sits day after day in a prayer room in front of brass and stone images of gods, who seem to dance round and round in a frenzy, chanting stories of sacrificial wives, and whose maniac rituals intrude into her dreams night after night. Mayamma, Annapurna, Parvatiamma, the maidservant Gauri, Devi's cousin Uma, her grandmother, and the transgendered Amba whiz past, chanting stories of revenge. Out of these fragmented scenarios and other stories running in her head, she chooses one and leaves home on a journey with Gopal, a singer of ragas. She follows Parvatiamma, her mother-in-law, who has left her husband and violated Lal says, "the law of threshold". (12) which restricts women within the boundaries of home. With this step, Devi is not a passive rebel any more.

Mayamma's Humiliation:

Mayamma is more directly humiliated mentally and abused physically when her menstruation begins in a temple: "The blood . . . flowed down my bare leg, hot and sticky, that afternoon when I prayed in the temple. . . . Go home, he [the priest] hissed, and before I could turn around to run, his heavy hand marked my cheek with a stinging slap. . . . I had stained the purity of the temple with my gushing womanhood" (115).

Womanhood for Mayamma is thus inescapably connected with this gushing blood of menstruation and of stillbirth bleeding, which both leave traumatic memories of pain, abuse, humiliation, deprivation, the loss of joy and pride, and the death of her first son. The stinging slap on her cheek by the priest, which crushes her pride in her womanhood, for the defilement with which a female body is burdened in a male-dominated society. Clearly this traumatic experience influences her subject formation as a woman; self-debasement is inscribed in her bleeding body.

From this bleak background, Hariharan takes pains to project a womanhood among women who share the same existential crisis, to offer a new bodily image different from the bleeding female bodies defiled, isolated, or exploited for reproduction. She shows desiring female "bodies met in blood and sweat" (77) through intoxicatingly erotic rituals. She presents diverse metaphorical mother-and-daughter narratives besides the real mother-and-daughter narrative between Devi and Sita, including the relationships between Devi and Parvatiama, Mayamma and Parvatiama, Devi and her grandmother, and Devi and Mayamma. And each woman's

story intersects, as do the legends and fables of many heroines and goddesses as narrated by Devi's grandmother; the stories become narratives of friendship between women of different castes, generations, and educational backgrounds.

Many years after her first son is born dead, Mayamma bears a son. After this son dies, she comes to Parvatiamma with only a torn sari, and Parvatiamma gives her a home. From that day, Mayamma tells Devi, "Parvatiamma was my sister, my mother, my daughter" (82). Mayamma, a victim of domestic violence by her mother-in-law, her husband, and her son, all sustaining the patriarchal system, is supported by Parvatiamma, who chooses to leave her husband to seek God by herself and is thus labeled a fallen woman because she crosses "the threshold, the boundaries of home," since for "women, a step over the bar is an act of transgression" (Lal 12).

Parvatiamma is doomed to be punished, but she also becomes a surrogate mother-in-law for Devi, her "guardian angel," a model of a rebel woman far different from Devi's mother, who has sacrificed her dream in order to be a good wife. When Parvatiamma leaves the house, Mayamma "felt destitute" as if her "mother had died

again" (63). But Mayamma then finds she can live again, not only through Parvatiamma but "even through" Devi (136).

Long-suffering Mayamma supports Devi because she is also sterile and feels humiliated by busy gynaecologists and her husband's gaze and because she finally decides to leave home like Parvatiamma. Devi's late grandmother had similarly given deserted wives and impoverished widows a warm refuge.

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