

READING MARGINAL VOICES: A FEMINIST DISCOURSE IN NARAYAN'S THE DARK ROOM AND IBSEN'S A DOLL'S HOUSE

Dr. Rakhi Chauhan

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Bhagwandeem Arya Kanya (PG) College

Lakhimpur Kheri, University of Lucknow, Lucknow

Email Id- rakhi19chauhan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: - The marginalization of women is the result of gender discrimination and violence. People have entered into modern world but still they are not able to come out from their stereotype thinking in relation to women. The world has made progress in every sphere but still people consider women as a secondary object and inferior to men. In Indian scripture the status of 'Shakti' is given to female, so God gave her responsibility to carry the creation ahead. But in reality the situation is just opposite of it and every time males try to dominate the females and suppress their voice. They have framed them within certain limits and boundations and because of it they cannot take their decision themselves. In this patriarchal society, their wishes are controlled by their husbands and other males of the family. The issues of marginalization, violence, and gender discrimination were major challenges and they all combined together made female's condition pathetic day by day. Females could not remain ignorant for a long time against this marginalization and raised voice for their rights. They rediscovered themselves and made their honorable status by freeing themselves from orthodoxies and staunch traditions. The aim of the present paper is to evaluate R.K Narayan's *The Dark Room* and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* from feminist perspective. At the same time this paper tries to show that how the female protagonists of these two literary works rediscovered themselves and emerged from a marginalized being to a strong and self-aware woman.

KEYWORDS: - Marginalization, Violence, Rediscover, Stereotype, Gender Discrimination, Self-awareness.

INTRODUCTION: -

Feminist Theory is one of the major branches of sociology which shifts its attention from the traditional point of view where men were given central place. This theory mainly focuses on women's problems and make them aware towards their social, political, and economic rights. Some persons who are against this theory, they misinterpret it and say that this theory tries to establish the superiority of women over men. But in reality, the aim of feminist theory is just opposite as it has always been about viewing world a place where both sexes, male as well as female play an equal part in the development. Feminist theory says that world cannot be led on the path of progress by leaving world's half population (females) into the pit of darkness. Therefore, the equal progress of men and women is needed for the progress of world. The another aim of feminist theory is to end the social evils as; gender discrimination, violence, marginalization of women, inequality, oppression etc. Feminist theory strengthens females so that they could take their decisions themselves. Feminist theory includes some key objectives-

- It opposes the gender discrimination which was established in the society on the basis of sex and gender.
- It denies the objectification of women and says that women should not be treated like an object or commodity.
- Feminist theory says that the structural system of hierarchy should come to an end and with social and political rights, economic security also should be provided to females.
- It says that there must equal distribution of power so that nobody could think to oppress others. Social evils like; oppression, suppression, and male dominance must end.

- The stereotypes roles which were given to females by society should come to an end and women should empower themselves.
- Feminist theory also opposes the patriarchal system and is in the favor of shift. It says that there should be a shift from patriarchy to matriarchy.

Since the ancient time women were treated very badly in all the societies be it is Indian society or any other society. They were not given even the single rights and their lives were controlled by the male members of the society. They were dominated and suppressed by the males and do not have right to raise their voice. This went for a long time until women became themselves aware for their rights. They demanded equality and in order to get equal status they began to revolt. Feminist theory provided them strength and helped them to raise their consciousness. This theory brought the women in light and helped them in recognizing their inner power. In this society women were marginalized in double sense. At first they were dominated on the basis of their gender. The feminine gender is considered secondary and the lower place is given to them in hierarchical structure. The distinction between the gender discrimination leads to the injustice and insecurity. The second cause of their marginalized condition was the patriarchal structure of the society. Since the beginning of the world, males have the upper most hand and all social and political rights are given to them to make interfere in the important affairs of the society. Women were instructed to be keep quiet like a dumb cattle who can see everything but cannot interfere in anything. They were used like a supporting tool not taken as an important part of the society. In this way they were oppressed twice. Once Fred Dallmayr quoted in his book “Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross- cultural Encounter”:

The true privilege of man is not to be the master of his world, but to be liberated from it; his mandate is not to employ other creature as instruments for his own needs and desires, but to use himself, his own existence, as a vehicle of self- transcendence (132).

Males are considered the strong and powerful sex on the basis of their biological structure. God made them strong and provided them liberty, so they could defend their counter partners. But males used to begin their strength in wrong direction and on the place of defending, they themselves began to exploit and dominate them and in this way defender became the oppressor. The biological structure of males and females is different but it means not that females are lower than males in rational power also. They also have capacity to distinguish between right and wrong and can take important decision of life. Since the beginning of the world, a lot of changes have come in the condition of females. Now women began to recognize their powers. Feminism theory and feminist movement also underwent a number of changes. It has three phases and every phase presents a different image of females in front of the society. These three phase are called the three waves of feminism-

First phase (Feminine) – (1840- 1880): - Elaine Showalter named it ‘Feminine’ phase. During this time, women were not aware from their rights and they were simply imitating to males. There was no separate identity of females. The female writers who wrote during this time, they imitated the work of others. Therefore, it is called the phase of imitation. In this phase, women were not self- aware, so they did not see their writings as an expression of their female experiences. The writing of this phase was the result of the repressed desires which came out in the form of creative works of art. The continuous repression gave way to innovativeness and the writers like George Eliot and Jane Austen expressed the daily lives of women. They also discussed the inner lives of women and values of women within a family and community.

Second phase (Feminist) – (1880- 1920): - During this phase, women became politically conscious and they began to show their involvement in politics. They began to question about the stereotype traditions and challenged the languages which was used in lower sense for feminine gender. The language produces different meaning in masculine and feminine gender. In feminist phase women became somehow aware and began to use their oppression to bring social and political changes.

Third phase (Female) – (1920- till around 1960): - The ‘Female’ phase of feminist movement was marked by tremendous changes. During this time, women became completely aware from their rights and they began to take decision for their welfare. This phase was the phase of self- exploration and women came to know about the power of their body. They began to use their bodily power as a weapon and rediscovered themselves.

THE DARK ROOM: -

R. K. Narayan is one of the most famous and widely known novelists of Indian English Literature. He is world renown novelist and he wrote a number of novels by making Malguidi as the background of his novels. In most of his novels, he presents the pitiable condition of females where male members of the society try to establish their sovereignty upon them. Narayan exhibits his feministic views by revealing the suppression of females as he did in his novel *The Dark Room*.

The story of the present novel revolves around a woman Savitri who is the mother of three children. Savitri is very gentle and docile by nature but her husband is just opposite of her. The name of her husband is Ramani who is office secretary of Englandia Insurance Company in Malguidi. He is dominating and whimsical type of person and never cares for the feelings of others. He does everything according to his own wishes and does not like the interference of others in his affairs. Due to this habit of Ramani, the atmosphere of house generally remains gloomy and the members of the family remain in a state of fear. Even children don't share a mutual relationship with his father because they don't feel the freedom to express themselves in their father's presence. They get more abuse and rebukes from their father on the place of love and affection. Ramani somehow behaves affectionately with his son Babu because he is a male child but had a kind of grudge against his two daughters Kamala and Sumati. Ramani gives the proof of his male chauvinism when he scolds Babu for shedding tears. He says that weeping does not suit to males and its indirect meaning is that weeping is meant only for females. The seed of discrimination which were sown in the mind of Babu during childhood period gradually grow up and he begins to see himself as superior being to his two sisters.

Savitri is a traditional woman and presents the true picture of Indian womanhood. She never dares to raise her voice in the presence of Ramani and bears his abuses silently. Fifteen years have passed away to their marriage life but still she does not have the right to give her advice in any matters of the house:

“How impotent she was, she thought; she had not the slightest power to do anything at home, and that after fifteen years of married life” (6).

All the decisions of the house from the important one to domestic one are taken by Ramini because he is considered the pivot and all the members of the house will have to revolve around him. As it can be seen in the case of Babu when he becomes ill, Savitri appeals to her husband not to send him to school but he does not pay heed to her beseech. He warns her not to poke up in his business. He does not stop at this point and makes her feel inferior by saying that her business is to arrange the kitchen not training the children. Ramani never treats Savitri as his wife rather he takes her as 'other'. He never responds to her feelings with great warmth and enthusiasm although Savitri is devoted to him completely.

Savitri neglects every fault of Ramani deliberately. She knows very well about the affair of Ramani and Shanta Bai but in spite of knowing everything, she keeps quite. She behaves in such manner because she had accepted the sufferings as the part of her life and to carried its burden throughout the life is the only option before her. She had decided that it is better to suffer in silence than putting new questions every time. Therefore, she blames herself when Gangu tells her about this affair. Savitri says that its all is happening because she has become old and ugly. She can no more entertain Ramani that's why he is seeking pleasure outside. She confronts this thing before Gangu and tries to show herself strong from outside. She knows that she does not have the right to be angry, so sulks in self-pity. She weeps inwardly on her state and does not allow her tears to come out from the deep core of her eyes. She feels sympathy for herself and begins to decorate herself with this hope that may be she will be able to win his love back and he will love her with same passion and intensity as he did in the very beginning of their marriage.

In Indian society, the metaphor of doll is used to describe the piteous state of females. As dolls are used by children for the sake of entertain, in the same way people especially the male members of the society have made the tendency to use females whenever they needed them. They take them merely a play thing not more than anything else it. They play with their feeling and emotions as in the novel Ramani does with Savitri. But this time Savitri does not keep quiet and confronts Ramani by coming out of her Indian women ideal image:

“I'm a human being. You men will never grant that. For you, we play things when you feel like hugging, and slaves at other times. Don't think that you can fondle us when you like and kick us when you choose” (85).

A DOLL'S HOUSE: -

Henrik Ibsen, one of the famous Irish dramatists and playwrights of 19th century. In the field of dramas, his name comes just after the name of William Shakespeare. As Shakespeare earned a lot of fame and established himself as one of the famous dramatists of Elizabethan age, in the same way Henrik Ibsen established himself in the field of drama during nineteenth century. His play *A Doll's House* bestowed world-wide fame upon him and made him a famous personality. *A Doll's House* consists of all those attributes which are needed to evaluate a literary piece from feminist point of view. This play primarily deals with the desires of Nora who wants to establish her own identity in the world by coming out the dominance of males. Therefore, Nora, who is the main protagonist of the play is the representative of all women and her life story is the story of every woman.

A Doll's House is the story of a complicated relationship between a husband and a wife. Nora Helmer is the female protagonist of the play and her husband named is Torvald Helmer. Torvald is presented as a typical male of the society who like other males does not believe in the freedom of females. Nora is presented as a

dutiful wife since the beginning of the play till the end. She even sacrifices her happiness in order to make her husband happy but in return gets only disgrace. Even her husband treats her like others and never care for her feelings and emotions. Nora faced this since the beginning of her childhood when she was at the home of her father, her father treated her like a doll. Her life was controlled by her father and after the marriage the place of father was taken by her husband and now he controlled her life. As Nora herself realizes it and says:

“ When I lived at home with Dad, he fed me all his opinions, until they became my opinions.....He used to call me his doll-child, and he played with me the way I used to play with my dolls. And when Daddy handed me over to you. You arranged everything according to your taste, and I adapted my taste to yours....Now looking back, I feel as if I've lived a beggar's life- from hand to mouth. (103)

Nora's self- realization shows that she has suffered a lot by the hands of male members of this patriarchal society. Whenever Torvald Helmer expresses his love for her, he never calls her by her name rather he uses beast imagery to address her.

“.....my frightened little singing- bird. Be at rest, and feel secure; I have broad wings to shelter you under. I will protect you like a hunted dove that I have saved from a hawk's claws: I will bring peace to your poor beating heart.” (100)

Nora herself accepts this that she has never been happy in this marriage and she confesses it before Torvald also. She says that till now she was living under this misconception that she is happy in this marriage but the reality was something different from it which she has realized now. As she says about her marriage:

“Our room has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll- wife, just as at home was Papa's doll- child. I thought it great fun when you played with me.....that is what our marriage has been, Torvald.” (104)

Since the beginning, as a devoted wife and mother, Nora performed her all duties in well manner. She did everything for Torvald even without caring for her feelings and emotions. But Torvald never cared about her emotions and always remained busy in making her a proper wife for himself. This all made her frustrated and finally she decided to think about herself before anyone else. She realizes her duties for herself as an individual self and refuses to keep the duties as a mother and wife which Torvald calls most sacred duties. She decides to desert the home, husband and children. Torvald tries to make her realize her moral duties and says that what people will say. On which she says:

“I am a reasonable human being..... I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.” (106)

Torvald says to Nora, that she is still his wife therefore, as a husband he will always have right on her. Nora replies:

“Listen, Torvald. I have heard that when a wife deserts her husband's house, as I am doing now, he is legally freed from all obligations towards her. In any case I set you free from all your obligations. You are not to feel yourself bound in the slightest way, any more than I shall. There must be perfect freedom on both sides. See, here is your ring back. Give me mine.” (110)

Thus, to conclude, it can be said that gender discrimination, gender role, marginalization, and violence are issues related to the females. Now time has changed, so all these social evils should also come to an end. World is making progress and every day new discoveries are discovered, so all such types of polluted ideas should also be buried. The introduction of feminist theory or feminist movement marked the end of this marginalization and presented the women under the shadow of a new and celestial light. The two women protagonists of the above novels are presented under this celestial light of enlightenment and they both cover the journey of their lives from marginalized state to self- discovery. They both come out from that rooster coop in which they were fixed by the male members of the society. The very first time they take decision for themselves and see themselves as an individual self.

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