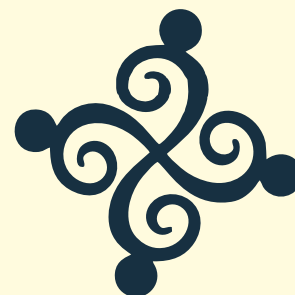
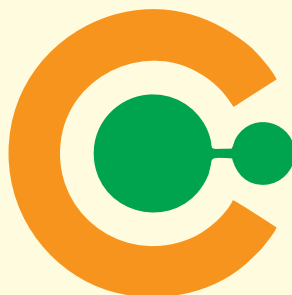


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Women Characters in the Novel of Aravind Adiga

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ABSTRACT

Indian women have been facing challenges in the form of inequalities, mental and physical violence acts and many more from different phases of time in India. The portrayal of feminism in Indian literature is considered to be one of the most debated topics. From the 19th century to the 21st century, Indian writers have expressed their concerns and views through their work. India is a land of multiple languages and different pieces of writing have been published in several languages. The aim of this article is to assess the representation of women and feminism in Indian literature especially, in the novels of Aravind Adiga.

Keywords: *women, inequalities, violence*

FULL PAPER

The portrayal of feminism in Indian literature goes back to ancient Indian history. 'Ramayana' is considered to be one of the greatest epics of Indian literature written by Valmiki in the 5th century BCE. In this epic, the characters women have depicted the real condition of Indian women in the ancient period. On the other hand, another 19th-century Indian author, Pandita Ramabai depicted the helpless condition of Indian Hindu high caste women during the colonial period in her book 'The High-Caste Hindu Women' (Bhog and Bharadwaj). Further in Post-independence era, Indian literature has portrayed the condition of Indian women in new dimensions. As stated by Sharnappa, the real suffering of a peasant woman in rural India can be witnessed in 'Nectar in a Sieve', a novel by Kamala Markandaya. On the other hand, the novel 'Voices in the City' by Anita Desai has stressed on freedom and facing realities in the lives of Indian women .

In 21st century Indian authors, through their novels, depict women characters that have subordinate position toward social and cultural values, for example, Arundhati Roy with her novel *The God of Small Things*. In her first novel, she tells, comprehensively, sensitive issues related to social and cultural system, such as women and caste. In the contrary, Aravind Adiga, through his novel entitled *The White Tiger*, depicts his women characters in a different way. This paper concerns on the representation of Indian women in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger*. The women characters that are going to be analyzed in this study are Kusum and Pinky Madam.

Kusum is Balram's grandmother and Pinky Madam is Balram's mistress. It is generally argued that literary works which present women characters can be analyzed by using feminism. It will be easier to analyze women characters by using feminism approach if we relate them with the men characters, whether they are main characters or protagonist or supporting characters. The readers are shown the utterance and behavior of women characters through the main character's point of view, Balram Halwai. The women characters in this novel are supporting characters. writer focuses their position to Indian socio-cultural values. In her writings, Aravind Adiga argues that "in patriarchal culture, much of women's subjugation occurs in the form of psychological repression enacted through the medium of language. In other words, women live in a world in which virtually all meaning has been defined by patriarchal language. Deconstructing the Image of Lower Caste Women Kusum is described as an old woman from lower caste family. Women from lower caste in India are associated to uneducated, poor, illiterate women since they experience the inequity related to education, health, economical matters. Kusum can be regarded as a victim of cultural and socio-economic system since she comes from lower caste. Moreover,

they are oppressed of inequality of cultural and socio economical system in India because of their subordinate position in Indian society related to their gender and caste.

Through the lens of Balram, the readers are introduced to his grandma, Kusum, who has power to dominate the other member of the family, either male or female. Balram says that she "had grinned her way into control of the house; every son and daughter-in-law lived in fear of her" (Adiga 2008:13). The power she has enables her to control her family over their activities and money so that, they all afraid of her. It is meant that she has absolute power in the family in spite of her position as a woman. It is quite surprising since India is patriarchal family in which the authority is in the male head of the family. In this novel, Adiga portrays a strong woman who has more power than the other members of the family. She dominates the male member of the family, such as Vikram Halwai (Balram's father), Kishan (Balram's brother), and Balram himself. Vikram, as the eldest male in the family, cannot do anything against her will. He says, "I survived the city, but I couldn't survive the women in my home." (Adiga 2008:22). From his statement, it is implied that he cannot resist not only the oppression of one woman, but also many women in the family and Kusum is the superior one. This novel depicts the cultural value which oppresses Indian women, dowry. Kusum, as the most powerful person in her family, unavoidably, get the biggest part of dowry from her in-laws family. Balram says: "After the wedding, Kusum Granny took the five thousand rupees and the Hero cycle and the thick gold necklace" (Adiga2008:42).It means that she gets the benefit of the system which oppresses women from the same position as hers, lower caste and poor family. Women, then, are not only the victim of discriminated system, but also agents of such system by making the other women as victims. It can be inferred that Adiga, in his novel, deconstructs the image of a lower caste woman who has power and strength.'

Another female character described in *The White Tiger* is Pinky madam. Pinky Madam is Ashok's wife and she is depicted as an Indian modern woman who has lived for years in America. After she married Ashok, they moved to India for a while to visit Ashok's parents before going back to New York. She is studying in America and is described as a smart woman. Balram describes her beauty as beautiful as Indian goddess: "Now another face appears, to the side of his, in memory's mirror. Pinky Madam-his wife. Every bit as good-looking as her husband; just as the image of the goddess in the Birla Hindu Temple in New Delhi is as fair as the god to whom she is married" (Adiga 2008:38). She is described as a woman who has temper tantrums. She likes being in her room all day and never joins the conversation with her husband's family. When she plays badminton she always wears dark glasses. Although she is a woman she also behaves like the way other masters do as described in this novel, which is doing verbal violence to Balram. When she finds that Balram's

job does not satisfy her enough, she insults him by saying rude words, such as hick and useless. Since she has been living in America for years, therefore, she is able to speak English fluently. She, together with Ashok, mocks Balram when he tries to speak English words, such as Mall and Pizza. Adiga, through the character of Pinky Madam, shows that an Indian woman can dominate man, particularly Balram, by using her status as a mistress. In this novel a woman's sexuality not only becomes a problem for a man but also becomes a tool to dominate a man. Adiga depicts the unstable relationship between Pinky Madam and her husband; she receives domestic violence from her husband. Yet, Adiga describes Pinky Madam as an assertive woman. Pinky Madam is depicted as a woman who can decide what is best for her life. She reflects the notion of feminism that is the ability of women to have their own rights to choose what they deserve. Seen from social, economic and cultural system, those women characters are positioned as victims of the system; they are regarded as having subordinate position.

Yet, in representing women characters his women characters also have power characters represent ambivalence. Adiga explicitly shows his message that to dominate others. Therefore, the women The character of Kusum is represented as an object because she is an Indian woman, poor, and comes from lowest caste, meaning that she is having multiple oppression because of her position. However, she is described as subject who dominates others, not only men, but also women; she is portrayed as a woman who has power to dominate the other members of her family. As explained previously, Kusum is a woman who is not only becoming the agent of violence over the men but also over the women. This highlight her ambivalence since Indian women particularly Kusum, who come from lower caste and poor family are object of cultural, socioeconomic inequality, but in her object position, Kusum becomes subject in dominating the men as well as women. Ambivalence is also seen in the character of Pinky Madam. She is initially described by Adiga as having a similar representation with Western woman. who, according to Mohanty as "educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the 'freedom' to make their own decisions" (2006:400). On the other hand, when she goes back to India, she has to endure Indian rules hold by her husband's family. It means that she cannot free herself from Indian cultural and socioeconomic system which put woman as an object of patriarchy system. Her position as an Indian wife demands her to be submissive and obedience to her husband. Yet, by going back to America and leaving her husband, she can be regarded breaking the system of Indian patriarchal family. Her leaving is an example of how an Indian woman "dares to speak in her own way" (Tyson 2006:102). She breaks the notion of being a good wife within Indian family. However, her position as an object in the family, in fact, leads her to have power dominate the men Balram and Ashok.

CONCLUSION

Aravind Adiga, in his novel, depicts his Indian women characters in a different ways from the average image of the Third World women that are powerless and victims of socioeconomic and cultural system. However, they are described as subjects who have power to dominate men despite their position of objects of cultural and socioeconomic system. Adiga describes Kusum as a woman from lower caste family who have power and strength so that she can control her family. Adiga describes Pinky Madam as an Indian modern woman who also has power to dominate Balram by her ability to speak English and her sexuality. Her own decision to assert her right to have a better life by leaving her husband, Ashok, makes her a woman who can break the traditional values of Indian family and wife. Moreover, caste, in this novel, is not a set of rules which can burden women from doing what they want. The novel can be considered as a reflection of the author who was born and raised in a society who holds tightly their traditional values, therefore, regard the women as having lower position than the men. Hence, it influences on how the author characterizes his women characters which is ambivalent at one side they are appeared as victims of Indian cultural and socioeconomic values, but on the other side, they, instead, dominate men as well as women.

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