

The Development of Women Characters in *Maveli Manram* By K J Baby

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Abstract: The life of tribal people in Wayanad are intertwined with the richness of myths, stories, symbols, caricatures. And even the visual representation of the hope of survival have been converted as significant images in their myths. The novel *Maveli Manram* was written in the year 1991, portraying the *Paniya* and *Adiya* communities in Wayanad district of Kerala. The word *Maveli Manram* literally means, a place where no one is inferior to one another, a place where everyone is treated equally. The Portrayal of female characters is done magnificently by K J Baby. The oppression, the double marginalization, and the vulnerabilities are sketched in such a way that the readers become one with the characters. There are three main female characters in this particular novel through which we get a glimpse of the female lives. The novel forces us to think about the double marginalization of the women in the *Adiya and Paniya* community: how they are being ignored and forgotten while we talk about the gender issue and how they are discriminated within the community which faces severe caste discrimination. Gender and caste are not something that cannot be alienated and analyse separately when it comes to the tribal community because the women of these communities take the brunt of this to the full extent.

There are two types of history around us: the history of the elites and the history of the subaltern. The history of elites being taught and highlighted everywhere including textbook. K J Baby uses the native tongue throughout the novel to tell their story to the world. By recreating their stories in their native tongue which is shunned upon by the elitist language users, he gives it the identity it deserves. He Understood the importance of preserving cultural and linguistic identities and gives more emphasis TO the themes in his novels.

Keywords: *Feminism, Myths, Gender Studies*

I. INTRODUCTION

K J Baby is a writer in Malayalam, he has written NOVELS like *Maveli Manram*, *Bespurkana* etc. *Maveli Manram* won the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award in 1994. *Maveli Manram* talks about the hegemony, gender discrimination, colonization, and slavery that existed among the *Adiya* and *Paniya* along with the exploitation of the feudal lords of that time. It portrays the hierarchy in the power structure concerning gender roles. From the viewpoints of the female characters, the novelist is able to give us different perspectives on the lives of different people from all over the society. He portrays the paradox of dialectical roles of *Adiya* or *Paniya* man that is he is slave in the society whereas he is master in his aboard. The same role is different to the *Adiya* or *Paniya* women, they are slaves in community, in tribes, and in their aboard.

The factual and basic relationship between women and nature begins from the portrayal of women hood and

mother earth. The whole purpose of nature and being a woman had been so is to nurture and care all the while portrayed as selfless. The double-edged blade of being portrayed as the nurturer halts the positive growth and the treatment. Vandana shiva talked a lot about ecofeminism and through her continuous narration and portrayal it is evident that, women identify even the slightest changes in the nature as it was going to affect them directly. For them the survival of the nature was their own survival. Here in the novel *Maveli Manram*, K J Baby portrays the plight of 'Mannu'(land) and 'Pennu' (woman). The land was exploited and overburdened by land lords using submissive communities, *Adiya* and *Paniya*. Meanwhile the women of these tribes were exploited and abused by both land lords and tribal men. The land and the women were easily disposable at the whims and fancy of the male dominated tribal patriarchy as well as male governed wider society. Despite of being flattered womanhood and motherhood even in myths that are depicting moon goddess and earth goddess are the basic cause of richness of nature and fertility, the tribal women who are the living counterparts of mythical goddesses are treated very badly.

The feminist approach is not always about finding solution to the problems but also representing and bringing out harsh realities regarding problem in society. The sustainability and the survival were the genesis of every struggle in the history. The connections between eco-feminism and different aspects of female lives, just like war or a calamity in which where women are the first and foremost victims. The oppression of women and nature goes harnessed. Here the author succeeds very much in doing so by giving it a platform to do so. The title itself is talking about the long-forgotten past of the *Paniya* and *Adiya* tribe and Kerala.

II. THE MYTHS BEHIND MAVELI MANRAM

The term *Maveli* is related to the former asura king *Maveli*. He was a king liked by everyone and people were ever nourishing under his royal rule. Whenever the name *Maveli* is mentioned, it is usually associated with the myth of Vamana sending him to the underworld, as he was a great king and Indra was jealous of him. All the people were considered to be equal and prosperous in the particular kingdom of *Maveli*. So, it is not surprising to see that the promised land of the *Paniya* and *Adiya* community is named after the Dalit king whose era is renowned for establishing perfect socialism. The myth of promised land is cherished not only by the tribals but the whole people in Kerala. In memory of the Asura king Kerala people celebrate their national festival as Onam. Onam is the only one festival that the people of Kerala sans religion sans caste sans gender celebrate whole heartedly. The celebration is to welcome *Maveli* the Asura king that for one day to visit his subjects after being exiled to under world by Vamana one of the incarnations of *Mahavishnu*. The implication is that, just like then Asura king established a

perfect socialist kingdom for Keralites, *Paniya* and *Adiya* communities are bound to dream of a 'Manram'(Habitat) for them.

Mali was considered as the guardian deity and the myth of Mali is significant as it depicts the real picture of religion being used as a tool to control and enslave people. The myth goes like that there was a 'Manram'(habitat) called the 'Maveli Manram' where all the people were considered as equals and they welcomed everyone with open hands, but then three evil outsiders came and gradually enslaved them. Throughout history, this was the beginning of all colonization. During World War II majority of the men were forced into the army and the rest migrated to the northern districts of Kerala namely Wayanad to defeat poverty. *Adiya* and *Paniya* community were one of the original inhabitants. Due to their partial nomadic lifestyle, lack of education, and no knowledge of any weaponry, it was easy for the migrants to have the upper hand. Any resistance from the tribal community was dealt with sheer brutality. Even so with less man power, it was impossible to rule them over for a longer period of time. That is when they have introduced the guardian Mali. Mali is a deity from the tribal myth, but instead of portraying her as a guardian for the tribal community, she was more of a punisher and thus inducing fear in them. Mali was ordered by the feudal lord to chase and punish anyone who dares to be free of enslavement. The Order was to chase them, take them back and punish them forever. The women are again stereotyped either to be the nourishing mother figure or the punisher. The roles were already predetermined for them.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN CHARACTERS

The three main female characters in this novel are *Ira*, *Champi*, and *Jevani*. All three of them were born as slaves under the feudal lord. They recall the past when every tribal woman should give birth to as much children as that the slave world of the lord will expand and he can have more and more labour power. The agony of women after seeing their children being sold off like cattle in front of them haunts the readers. The trio later decided that they would not give birth so that their children will also not be in the same predicament. *Champi* was brutally raped by the landlord. when he heard about the oath, stating "you dare not to give birth". She was later raped by the feudal lord and conceived. After conceiving she said that she would kill the child at birth, but later her maternity succeeded over the protest and decided to raise the child. Even though the child is the product of a rape the paternity is to the landlord and *Champi* found her revenge in raising his offspring as slave Infront of him. But the simplicity of a poor tribal woman has got nothing to do with the brutality of casteism where own blood lineage would not be approved if it is born in lower caste.

The double marginalization of women can be seen in J M Coetzee's *Disgrace*. Lucy a white girl is raped by the native boys of the African origin as a revenge against years of oppression by white men, whereas her father, David, a white man thinks he had all the privileges to rape his student a native South African girl Melanie. It is evident that irrespective of race, in both scenarios, women are the victims of gender discrimination. For men in that society, women are created just for their sexual desires. There is a lot in common between Lucy and *Champi*. When Lucy realized that she is pregnant, she accepts the pregnancy in a way of repentance and penitence for years of oppression over the other race. She believes that she deserves what had happened to her. Even as the daughter of two well-educated parents, being a modern

woman of the 20th century, Lucy is unable to stand up, she is guilty of the colonization and decides to suffer in silence. When *Champi* was raped, again and again, she didn't make a sound any time. She knew that the repercussions will be far worse. Lucy and *Champi* are two different women. Lucy was born and brought up with all the privileges and had parents who accepted her sexuality and her partner. *Champi* was born in the *Adiya* colony and she doesn't even remember her parents. *Champi* lived in an age when the Britishers gradually started to gain control over India. yet again, how far these two women they could get away from the abuse.

In Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's own* she talks about the necessity of having a room for every woman. A room or space to be herself. *Ira*, *Champi*, and *Jevani* are known as the 'Adima pennungal' (slave women). That is the only identity they can ever have in their society, given by the customs and the hegemony. Even with their men, the situation isn't different. They have no other identity than an instrument to satisfy men. In short their sex, delivery, child rearing and all such things are not for them but for others. That is why all three women characters express the bitter truth that women are just for sexual pleasure and to take out their frustration.

Jevani vowed along with *Champi* and *Ira* that she would not add any contribution to the world of slaves. But *Joggy* entrusted her the duty of cleaning paddy yard without knowing that it was a trap set by *Ambu Thamburan* (the master) she went for her job and been raped brutally by *Ambu Thamburan*. Coming back severely injured and even unable to walk she encountered *Joggy*'es lustful eyes and words. He begged to her for yielding to him. taking it a chance for revenge, at least on the pimp, she put the condition that she would marry her. Getting the assurance from *Joggy* she yielded to him dispassionately.

Ira, the third one in the trio, was the only one who was not a victim of any kind of sexual abuse. When she runs away with *Kaippadan*, it is just not about a romantic fulfilment of hers. She is in search of the long-lost *Maveli Manram* so that she can be free, the freedom that doesn't come with countless conditions or obligations. She was seeking for the space where she can be herself, to have her identity.

The development of women characters in *Maveli Manram* by K J Baby is compared to a plant, starting as a sapling to a giant grown tree. They endured all the difficulties and become emotionally stronger characters. The Development is from victims to survivors. In the beginning of this novel, all three women were always the victims. They were victims of gender discrimination and victims of sexual abuse by both tribal men and land lord. It says that it all takes a tiny moment's courage to make a change. For *Champi*, it was the moment she decided to love her child. For *Jevani*, it was the moment she put her condition of marriage to *Joggy*. *Ira* took the advantage of that moment when decided to run away with *Kaippadan*.

CONCLUSION

Ira and *Kaippadan* reach the Panamaram riverside, where they are encountering women who are enamoured with bows and arrows. The women who stood beside their men to fight against the colonizers. For *Ira* it was like an awakening seeing women who are headstrong and independent. Towards the end, the *Adiya* and *Paniya* community has realized that it would be better for them to be under the Britishers rather than the *Thampuram*. *Champi* and *Jevani* for the first time stood up to their men and told them that, yes, we need to change the things. We need to take sides and get out of this enslavement.

More broadly, it is just never having complete freedom. But years of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse they have endured throughout the years made them accept anything new. Even though *Ira* was not a victim to the sexual abuse, emotionally she was failed by all the male characters in the novel. She was just escaping from the bigger evil to a lesser one. The forest awaited them with obstacles, sometimes it was the animals, sometimes the Britishers searching for *Pazhassi* or at times, the lords themselves in search of the escaped slaves. The women characters in the novel gradually evolve stronger towards the end. The men started to recognize the new land as the world discovered by the women and a land of equality. The environmental movements dealt with social conflicts throughout the centuries, and even here, the women characters who are the main propagators of this movement, the environmental and gender conflicts went in hand by hand.

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