

Dr. Hemanth Kumar Mekathoti, Assistant Professor

Malla Reddy Engineering College (A), secunderabad.

LOOKING BACK AT THE LONGING HILLS

Abstract:

Indian Women writers portray the hissing discontent that they have allowed their victimization and paved way ultimately to reach their goal of self-assertion. She also learns to help others in the similar state and becomes conscious of her respective problems. Indian Women writers portray the hissing discontent that they have allowed their victimization and paved way ultimately to reach their goal of self-assertion. Among all the women writers, Kavery Nambisan provides a pattern for the projection of feminist concerns in the contemporary Indian women writings.

Nambisan's novel are tools of communication that projects the positive image of Indian women who are enlightened with education and refuses to accept the stereotyped roles that are headed by the patriarchy. Her novel *The Hills of Angheri* (2005), deals with the issues of women's education and liberation of women from the bondage of the culture and traditions etched by the Indian patriarchy. Nambisan's Angheri is different not just because of changing times but because of the fading away of her memories which she had leisured through the test of times. It is about the life of a doctor, who succeeds in maintaining a complete balance in her life by asserting her individuality within the boundaries of community bondages.

Key words: women, education, Indian patriarchy, gender, unity, culture, tradition, transformation.

Introduction:

Indian woman masters the skill of enduring the oppression be it physical or emotional, lives with the assertion of being herself. She also learns to help others in the similar state and becomes conscious of her respective problems. Indian Women writers portray the hissing discontent that they have allowed their victimization and paved way ultimately to reach their goal of self-assertion. Nambisan, of all, provides a pattern for the projection of feminist concerns in the contemporary Indian women writings.

Nambisan's novel are tools of communication that projects the positive image of Indian women who are enlightened with education and refuses to accept the stereotyped roles that are headed by the patriarchy. They show aversion towards staying in the mire of dependence or subordination syndrome. Nambisan's novels recognizably contain her distinctive style of writing backed by her strong voice of advocacy of women empowerment. Her novel *The Hills of Angheri* (2005), deals with the issues of women's education and liberation of women from the bondage of the culture and traditions etched by the Indian patriarchy.

Journey of Nalli:

The novel *The Hills of Angheri* is about Nalli, a village girl who has a dream of building a hospital in her village, working with her childhood sweetheart Jai, who leaves the village to

become a doctor. It is a moving “Bildungsroman” about the young girl growing up in a joint family in the village and her burning desire to become a doctor. This dream takes her to a medical college in Madras and then to England and then on to surgical practice in rural northern India.

The story unfolds in three sections set in Angheri, London and Northern India respectively. Angheri has earlier been called *Noorumane* (hundred houses in the Tamilian context); a hundred houses-in the shade of forested hills near Mysore. The first section is about the protagonist Nalli’s childhood and her study of MBBS. The second section deals with Nalli’s FRCS (Fellow of Royal College of Surgeon, London.) in England. The third section shows her come back from England to do rural practice in Northern India.

Patriarchal society:

In Kavery Nambisan’s novel *The Hills of Angheri*, Appa the father of Nalli is the Head Master in a school. He wants to make his daughter to study medicine, but Ajja does not accept the proposal as he believes in old traditions and customs like a true patriarch considering a woman to be confined to a kitchen. The same is reflected in Anita Rau Badami’s *Tamarind men* (1996) in which the protagonist Saroja wants to become an Ayurvedic doctor like Chitragandhey, the Malayalee doctor. But her parents never heed to her and she is forced to marry.

Man has always looked down upon women as the weaker sex. Whatever the conditions are but women are supposed to be excellent home makers. Her individual self has no recognition in the patriarchal society. Gayatri Spivak writes in her article *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1998):

Between patriarchy and imperialism subject Constitution and object formation the figure of a Woman disappears, not into a

pristine nothingness, But into a violent shuttling which is the displaced Figuration of the 'Third World woman' caught Between Tradition and modernization. (Spivak 306)

Appa is called as Mastaru by the villagers and he is admired by all of them. He is highly knowledgeable. He teaches them what is good and what is bad, apart from the concerned syllabus to the students. Ajja is astonished when he hears that girls are taught the same subjects as boys. He believes that girls should get married after their schooling and not allowed to go for further education.

In his view going to college is waste of money and time”

“Life is my College and there is nothing wrong with that.”

(14)

Ajja tries to divert the mind and thoughts of Nalli and her crazy thoughts to become a doctor. He teaches her how to do domestic work and cooking.

Ajja tried to divert Nalli's mind from the crazy idea of studying to be a doctor. He taught her to milk cows without hurting them, to end sick claves, cut sugar cane and husk paddy. (16)

Gender is, undoubtedly, one of the most important factors that shape one's lives and woman's experiences are generally believed to be of interest only to woman. In this novel, Ajja

is always showing his inner consciousness through his words like about Nalli's dream, if you want to become a doctor God may be given birth as a boy instead of girl:

If God wanted you to be a doctor, you would have been a boy,' he said. Nalli kept her mouth shut. Appa had not been angry with her; that was enough. Her scalp screamed but she was stubbornly brave. (THOA 7)

The patriarchal society levied its biased attitude even in the field of woman's education. It never allows women to take up certain branches of study as they are reserved for men. It was the brilliant Vedic era, when Indian woman was honoured as goddess like Lakshmi, Durga and Saraswati and put on the pedestals of glory. And so went the saying '*Yatra Naryastu Pujyante, Ramante Tatra Devta*' - where woman are worshiped, God resides. In other words it was the matriarchal society with woman having her own prerogatives or better to say there was hardly a line of demarcation between man and a woman. Walum in *The Dynamics of Sex and Gender* (1977) states it thus:

From before the cradle to beyond the grave, a person is supposed to be extricable and forever a male or female. A distribution of traits for both sexes within one individual does not appear natural. Indeed, we refer to sexes as opposite rather than different. (TDSG 5)

Nambisan admits that such words were said to her when she wanted to become a doctor. She says that in conservative Indian family setup; girls (do not permit) are not allowed to opt to seek admission in medicine, they do something easier. But Nalli was determined to be a doctor

and set up her goal, her determination that empowers her to reach her dream. Hence, she is able wanted to work in rural areas. Similarly in Anita Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977):

Sometimes women play their roles not so much because they want to, as because they have to, in order to survive economically or psychologically and virtually all women engage in the feminine role playing. (FOTM 59, 62)

Unity of Angheri hills:

The novel is a straight forward narrative, telling the story of Nalli's, journey that requires her to leave the village of Angheri, the protagonist remains bounded by its sprawling Landscape, alternately turbulent and gentle all her life. Nalli, always idolized Ajja for lot many things. But Ajja disagrees and tells the story of Angheri hills. The Hills of Angheri made the place famous, because without the hills there would be no Sunrise or the rising ball of the Moon at night. He beautifully compares his family members with the hills, and says:

Even the hills have families, he told her. 'See...the three hills with the rugged peaks, sturdy shoulders and hard knees- Doddabetta, Hulibetta and Kadubetta- and Donkubetta with the crooked flank, they're the men. That rounded hill, Jenubetta, is the grandmother. She likes to be warm and the sun pampers her for a while longer than the rest. And there's dark sister, Chinnabetta, standing little apart from the rest of the family. (13)

The hills indicate how to unite and be like a whole family. The unity of hills signifies the unity of the women folk in particular and the unity of the nation in general. The names of the hills mentioned in the novel imply the family relationships in the Indian tradition. Later, Nalli understands the importance of hills through Ajja. Nalli by her own finds and hears from the magnificent peak Doddabetta's voice "She heard a voice that was very much like Appa telling her what to do." (14) He tells that the three hills Doddabetta, Hulibetta and Kadubetta are three men. The rounded hill Jenubetta is the grandmother and Chinnabetta is the sister. He also tells that how the mother hill Gilibetta, is divided from the rest of the family and the way they are united.

Nalli has a special adherence towards the village especially for the hills. Every myth or story that originates or forms in Angheri has solely to do with the hills. Even the title justifies that the whole story relates to the hills of Angheri and the village and also about the fulfilled and the unfulfilled dreams of Nalli. And it ends with how she fulfils her dreams and shows the significance of "She would sit on one of the branches look at the hills and dream her impossible dreams." (10)

The story of the hills and the village gives the impression of the beliefs of the people in those days and the hills being unite and teaching a lesson to be united.

Strength of a woman:

The novel opens with Nalli, who is busy in her elder sister, Sujju's marriage. At the time of her sister's marriage, Nalli, is twelve years old who looked beautiful too. During marriage, Ajja, a two-in-one grandparent to Nalli, his younger Gappu Mava, who turned at Nalli and said it, is next her turn to get marry. He says: "So, it will be you in a few years" (7). She expresses her

unwillingness with Gappu Mava words and says; “I’m going to study to be a doctor first” (7). She refused to marry at that time, told them that she will marry after her education. In the words of Paulo Coelho:

When you want something, the entire universe conspires
in helping you to achieve it. (Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist* 1988)

So, the dream may or may not be fulfilled but one must make the effort and may achieve the desired success. Anita Nair, author of the novel *Ladies Coupe* (2001) opines about inner strength of a woman: in an Interview with Bindu Menon:

There is a lot of strength in women that doesn’t come out naturally, it has to be forced out of them, could him circumstances or a change in life style. (Anita Nair)

The role of Nalli is compared with Sita in Anita Desai’s *Where shall we go this Summer* (1975), a common trait in Anita Desai’s all major characters is their longing to be free from all kinds of social familial involvement. Kavery Nambisan is always ahead in giving an energetic force to her characters in all novels, particularly in this novel *The Hills of Angheri*.

Transformation in Nalli’s live through Education:

Education seems to be a gateway to survival for women. Kavery Nambisan considers in this novel, that the value of education is a factor that empowers a woman. The novel *The Hills of Angheri* is based on Nambisan’s personal experiences of working in rural health care system in India. Nambisan says in an interview at Lonavala dated 24th May- 2009:

Medicine (and surgery) is my other great passion. Naturally it affects my style. Not just that I often have medical character but that my descriptions are often very visceral. (Nambisan)

The villagers always appreciate Nalli, who being a village girl surrounded by the people that are steeped in the age old culture and traditional beliefs, Nalli tries hard to escape into a new world of modernity. She has a dream of building a hospital in her village, but in reality her choice of selecting medicine is not accepted by her family members and even by her relatives. Her father rejects her choice by stating that her health condition is poor to work for the sick people. He adds that it is quite impossible for her to strain in the field of medicine. He says, “Six years of study and then a life time of hard work. You are not strong.” (30) But the questions related to her identity raises in her mind for the first time.

Nalli’s disillusionment by discovering about her village does not need her services anymore and at realizing that the medical profession is not all glory but with shades of black and grey as well, is only incidental. The point is that she has achieved what she set out to do. With that she must be satisfied until she can set forward once more. During her stay both in England and Keshavganj, she maintains her relationships with various people, irrespective of creed, gender and colour. Nalli, depicts the life of the people, colour and life to an otherwise prove prosaic subject.

‘*The Hills of Angheri*’ by Kavery Nambisan gives readers the life and work of Nalli, a surgeon from a small village called Angheri, near Mysore. One can witness Nalli’s transformation from a shy village girl to a doctor before the gods and asked for;

That thing, not knowing what it was (she) asked for, to a confident surgeon who diagnosed with her "eyes, her hands and her mind, and confirmed with X-rays and scans". (398)

Conclusion:

Nalli in *The Hills of Angheri*, is like Shari, Evita of course like Nanji and her effigy Neelu. Nalli chases her childhood dream of becoming a doctor who turns as a crusader for curing physical and psychological maladies of her people, but also learns to help herself to be an individual with dignity and wide spectrum of professionalism. Nalli is on a mission makes her go in search of her roots, that leads to her to self-introspection. She allows herself to emerge out as full bloomed individual of self respect and emotional values juxtaposed with social commitments.

Nambisan's *Angheri* is different not just because of changing times but because of the fading away of her memories which she had leisured through the test of times. Her desires, efforts and failures in the traditional Indian society highlighted of the novel. Nalli is a modern, self-sustained girl; she bounds by the traditional norms of the society. Hence, the novel *The Hills of Angheri* is about success and failure in the life of a doctor. Kavery Nambisan is a writer whose heroines like 'Nalli' succeeds in maintaining a complete balance in her life by asserting her individuality within the boundaries of community bondages.

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