

A STUDY OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE MOVIES OF SEKHAR KAMMULA

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Abstract

Women in India always had an inevitable role in society and in families. But the status enjoyed by them varied drastically down the ages. From matriarchy to patriarchy, women in India saw a radical downfall and were subjected to several discriminations. As a result they were limited to the niche of home-making and were made as muted dependents on the male members of the family. But as the ages passed, her situation started improving with the allowance of education, equal rights and opportunities in almost all fields. Yet, women in 21st century are still victims to several obstacles and evils which are an outcome of several social, cultural and phallocentric maniacs. The persistence of women to grow from being a victim to a victor is an ongoing process which showcases to the world both the opportunities and challenges awaiting a modern day women. This saga of rise, fall and rise of women is well documented and presented in literature which is a reflection of society. In modern days, films, an extension of literature does the task. This paper is an attempt to examine the challenges and opportunities of women through an analysis of women characters in the movies of Sekhar Kammula.

Introduction

India is a land where it is believed in an often-quoted saying of Manu from Manusmriti (3.56) that "**Yatra naryastu pujanya ramante tatra Devata, yatra itaastu na pujanya sarvaastatrafalaah kriyaah**" - which when translated says, "wherever women are given their due respect, even the deities like to reside there and where they are not respected, all actions remain unfruitful". This quote of Manu reiterates the status women are supposed to be given in any society.

In the ancient age of Rigveda, woman in India was given a high status and her identity was revered. But with change of era, attitudes, beliefs and philosophies which the society believed also changed. The fall out of such change was a paradigm shift in the treatment towards the role of woman both in family and in society. Under the impact of patriarchy, women lost the glory and the elevated status which they enjoyed during the Vedic period and were confined to a **four-fold role of a daughter, a wife, a home-maker and a mother**. In this new confinement, woman became a helpless, muted dependent on the men of their family.

The growing intensity of patriarchy twined with the social evils like **Dowry, Purdha, Child Marriages, Jauhar, Sati Sahagamana** have stolen women of their opportunities of education, exposure to society, decision making and a possibility to live on par with their counter parts. All these resulted in decline of woman to the lowest rung of the society. Subsequent to the depravity,

women were also considered to be a liability and thus birth of girl child was considered to be a bad omen. The bottom line was that from the first breath to the last, woman suffered **discrimination, subjugation** and ill treatment of highest degree robbing them of their confidence and self-respect.

Women in Pre-independent era:

"You can tell condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women."

-Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru

True to the above opinion, Pre-independent India saw several like-minded people who fought both for the liberation of country as well as of women. The contributions of several crusaders and social reformers like **Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Phule, P.C. Sarkar** from North, **Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu, Durga bai Deshmukh, Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy** from South betted their lives for reformation in status of women in Indian society. **Education, equal rights and abolition of social evils** were their thrust areas to bring in improvement in the condition of women.

The efforts of these Indian reformers were well complimented by British missionaries like **Martha Mault nee Mead, Eliza Cladwell** who worked for women education and administrators like **Lord Bentinck** who implemented the **Widow Remarriage Act**. Women activists like **Savitribai Phule, Rama Bai** also contributed to bring the change.

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Women in Modern India

"It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing."

— Swami Vivekananda

This thought of Swami Vivekananda seems achieved some significance in Independent India. With independence achieved and a constitution in vogue, the rights of every Indian were well-framed and protected through various laws, by-laws, articles and amendments. The highest book also framed rules to improve and protect the rights of women. The various statutes governing the status of women designated them the **rights to equality, dignity and freedom from discrimination**. Also several constitutional acts banning social evils like dowry, child marriages, sati gave an impetus for the implementation of rights provided by the Constitution.

The reconstruction policies of both Government and NGOs ushered women towards an independent and liberated life. The national policies like **42nd Amendment, 1976, NPE 1986, RTE 2009, Sarwa Siksha Abhiyaan, Beti bacho, Beti Padao** and several other national and state level strategies opened the doors of education for women leading to their opportunities into employment into organized sectors. Education and employment led women towards empowerment and a revival of their status. The empowerment and revival has erased the gender roles fixed by age-old conventions and women have entered into almost all niches of social, political, economic and cultural aspects of society.

Opportunities and Challenges faced by Women in 21st century:

"Women are not born, but made".

- Simone de Beauviore

21st century with all the opportunities proved to be a fertile ground for women to prove their talent and gain the lost significance enjoyed by them in Vedic Age. And women of 21st century has raised to the occasion and started holding high offices like **the President, the Prime Minister, Ministers of State and Centre, Defence Ministers, Speaker of Lok Sabha, Opposition leader in the Centre, IAS, IPS, IFS, CEOs of National and Multinational Companies** and off late they have got into the most dangerous of **Armed Services** like **Fighter pilots and BSF**. Women have also glorified nation in international arena by winning medals in global events.

Even in the domestic front, the education standards of women have improved considerably making nearly lion's share of educated women employed and contributing towards the economic empowerment of their families and their mother land. Thus, women have fortified their

positions in the modern society.

21st century which seems lucrative for women to flourish also brought along with it myriad challenges. With the change of era, the challenges also have changed their faces, but exist to bother women incessantly. The following is the list of those challenges.

- In the past women were subject to the male chauvinism and today they are victims of male ego and inferiority which they develop as a response to the promising performances of women in all their activities.
- In the name of Gender equality women are welcomed to take up responsible careers, but they are not exempted from the daily chores associated to them because of their gender. The dual responsibilities create stress to women and are frequently blamed for pride and hypocrisy if the household duties suffer at times.
- At work, women suffer "**Glass Ceiling effect**" wherein though things appear transparent, women are subjected to discrimination, harassment and abuse for being women. Women suffer undue sexual advances from men at work, in schools and colleges, in public transport and are put down drastically damaging their self-respect.
- Women at work and at home are two different entities. An intersection of both creates havoc in the families as well as at work in name of inefficiency or arrogance.
- Equality of genders, a catch word of this era, appears rosy. But the reality proves different from its appearance as it seems to provide a greater equality to men.
- **Gender discrimination, Acid attacks, female infanticides, dowry killing, domestic violence, honor killings, rapes, abduction, human trafficking** are few more to add to the list of challenges which a woman has to face amidst the opportunities provided by the 21st century.

Opportunities and Challenges faced by Women in 21st century: A Case study of movies of Sekhar Kammula.

History and literature have documented the eventful legends of rise, fall and rise of women down the ages. The glory of women in pre-historic India, their subjugation in medieval ages and the chronicles of reformation and the subsequent rise in their status in modern days has always been communicated in the form of literature. In fact literature had a pivotal role in bringing the change.

In modern era, **Movie or the motion picture** can be considered as '**alternative literature**' which took the

place of written documents and conveys the content through the silver screen. Movies have also done their part in voicing the wrongs done to women as well as put before the world what a woman can do if given an opportunity. Time and again film makers ably utilized their hold over 'the most powerful media' for the cause of women.

Sekhar Kammula, an ace film maker from Telugu film industry is known for his out-of-box and realistic movies. As a person too he is a man who is closely knit with the society in which he lives in and tries to amalgamate the contemporary realities into his feel-good and meaningful movies. He won the **National Award as the Best Debutant Director, Six Nandi Awards** in film making and also represented Indian Cinema at **Cannes International Film Festival**. Apart from all the positives of his films, one point which draws attention of observant audience is his heroines. **All the heroines of all his films are the ones who steal the attention and represent the womanhood of 21st century.** In an interview, he himself declared that **he had a feministic approach to all his films.**

The heroines of Sekhar Kammula's films always are **strong and round characters** as referred in the literary context. All of them are **independent, self-reliant, employed, can handle crises** and above all they carry an air of **self-respect** towards which they can never compromise. **These women from Sekhar Kammula's films are the best representation of the opportunities and challenges which the women of 21st century face.**

In this study, a detailed analysis of the heroines of Sekhar Kammula's will give us a transparent picture of the status of contemporary women.

Sekhar Kammula, till date, has directed seven movies in which almost all the plots revolved round the lives of contemporary young ladies.

"Anand" a 2004 release, written and directed by Sekhar Kammula is movie which revolves round the life of **Rupa**, an orphan who is well-educated, employed and self-reliant. She loses her parents and only brother in a tragic accident in her adolescence. From then she leads her life individually with the help of her neighbouring Granny, **'Bamma'** and family. She conducts music classes and works in a nursery for further financial support. She is an able young lady who can earn, manage her finances as well as can handle events like her own marriage. Yet, she faces several problems in her love life and process of marriage. Her marriage into a conventional family forces her to forgo her job, her life style, her preference of dresses and succumb to illogical prejudice of her would be mother-in-law. Her preference

was of least importance and was subjugated to the level of a muted spectator in the wedding procedure in the name of tradition. After the cancellation of wedding too, she was forced and harassed several times in the name of love by her boy friend. Even the neighbours blame her of being arrogant, proud for cancelling her marriage as her choice.

"Godavari" a 2006 release of Sekhar Kammula is movie about **Seetha**, a well-educated, self-employed young fashion designer. She is confident in making decision for herself and can bravely question the wrongs which happen around her. She carries an air of superiority for being what she is. Yet she is several times subjected to several of social evils like discrimination for being woman, rejection by the bridegroom for being confident and modern and undue sexual advancement by a business man who calls her to the guest house in the name of getting familiar to her latest collection. In many occasions she is put down in the name of caste, financial status and suggested by many men around her to heed to the advices of elders and lead a life under the guidance of either father or husband selected by the family.

"Happy Days" is a block buster of Sekhar Kammula released in 2008. The movie is about coming to age of four pairs of engineering students. **Madhu, Appu** and **Sravanti** are all engineering students who perform well in their academics as well as make their mark in the campus through several innovative activities. In their love with their classmates, they suffer taken-for-granted attitude of their boyfriends. They were put down and made fun of for their choices and preferences – just for being girls.

"Life is Beautiful" is another top grosser of Sekhar Kammula unleashed on the silver screen in 2012. This film also presents the life of several teenagers from a middle class locality, B-phase. All of them commonly suffer the prejudice of a neighbouring elite colony, Gold phase. The women character **Paddu**, a student suffers her mother's pressure over her choice of love and marriage. **Lakshmi**, an aspirant to become employed faces sexual harassment from her employer, **Satya**, a student who lives with her siblings in her maternal grandparents' house suffers undue discrimination and illogical restrictions from the family for being a girl dependent on them. **Maya**, fashionable yet humble lady of B-phase is subjected to misbehavior of many goons who insult her through wrong calls and try to take her nude pictures with help of a drone camera. All these characters suffer for being women, though having all qualities of self-reliant and able individual.

"Anamika" is a 2014 release of Sekhar Kammula which is a remake of Hindi Film **"Kahani"**. The eponymous

heroine of the film, Anamika is a well-educated NRI married to another NRI. She lands in Hyderabad in quest of her missing husband. Her confidence and determination during the quest is inimitable. Yet she faces several undue advances and non-cooperation from many people around her. The highest of the setbacks is her realization that her husband maintains different identities in India and abroad – which he keeps a secret even to her.

"Fida" the latest of Sekhar Kammula's films released in 2017 is considered a magnum opus of all his films. The film presents the most confident, versatile, courageous and family-oriented heroine of all of Sekhar Kammula's films. *Bhanu*, the heroine is a student of B. Sc Agriculture who is proud of her rural background; inter caste birth and her abilities of farming and handling tough people. She is very confident in facing all emotional situations. She calls herself 'her father's son'. Yet she too is tamed several times by her aunt in the name of traditions and culture and for being woman. She can never understand the logic of a girl leaving her parents after marriage and so decides either not to marry or to get married to someone who stays in her village to look after her father. The age-old conditioning given to girls is never understood to her.

All these women characters from Sekhar Kammula's films are best testimonies for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century women in India. The situation faced by them is highly paradoxical which is full of opportunities well accompanied by challenges as well.

Road ahead:

To conclude the above analysis, in the films mentioned above, we find that the women characters discussed above attain their goals by the end of the movie. They find their true soul-mate, fulfill their dreams and satisfy their passions amidst all the challenges with paramount endurance, unstinted determination and perseverance of highest scales. Through these qualities usually found only in woman, they are able to nullify the umpteen

challenges and come out successfully, throwing an example to all the women of 21st century. So the moral well understood is that though women in modern age are cluttered with myriad challenges, they can be handled with tact and perseverance.

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