

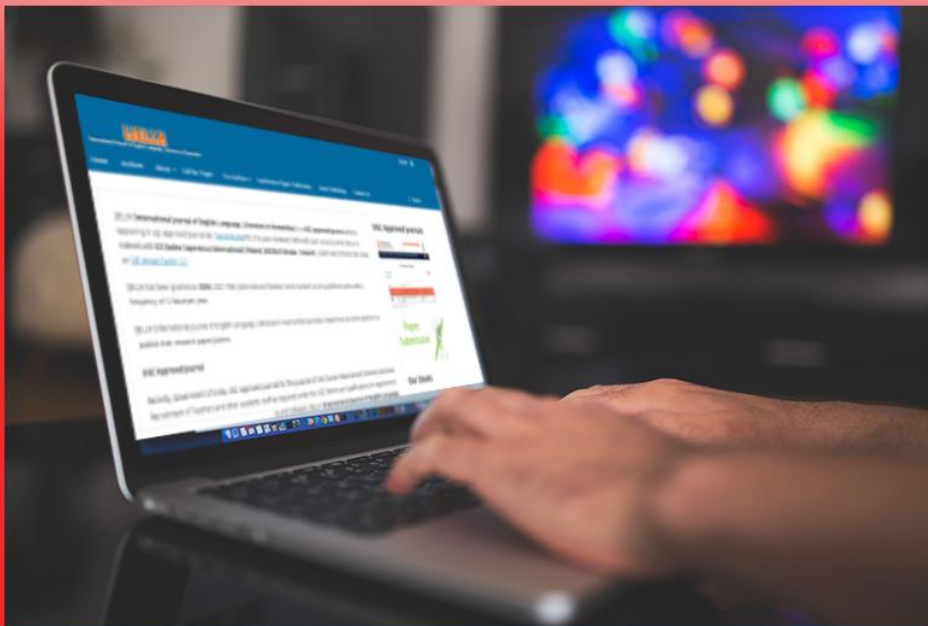
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The Impact of Patriarchal Ideology in Jayakanthan's Sila Nerangalil Sila Manithargal -

An analysis of characters of both genders of the novel.

Abstract

Patriarchal ideology is an ideology created by man to keep woman under suppressed level. It is no doubt a global issue which has its root right from the attitude of man. This dominant ideology has been reflected in literature across languages and cultures. Education has created awareness among women to a great extent about their suppressed state. But still there is a question going around among the elite circle that whether the gender-inequality has been fully uprooted or not. Though literature has contributed a lot to deconstruct this ideology, the researcher is of the view that it is the attitude of the people (both man and woman) which has to change. Both man and woman ought to treat themselves respectfully and work together like comrades.

(Patriarchal ideology, dominant ideology, deconstruct, gender-inequality)

Mr. D. Jayakanthan, is a significant writer of novel and short story in Tamil and has won the hearts of multitudes in the literary circle. He is the recipient of the Sahitya Academy award in 1972, the Rajaraman Award of Tamil Nadu University in 1986 and

the prestigious Jnanapith award for his creditable contribution to Tamil literature. He is well known for his controversial and revolutionary ideas on various issues related to the individual and the society and in the marginalization of women in a patriarchal Tamil society.

The summary of the story

Ganga, a college going girl was raped by a rich man in his car. She could not fight him. She disclosed this matter to her mother. But her mother made a hue and cry reprimanding her loudly. As a result, her brother, Ganesan drove her out of home. She was treated as an outcast by the members of the society. Both she and her mother sought refuge in Venku Ayyar, her uncle. Her uncle funded her education. There, Ganga empowered herself through education and became economically independent by settling in a well-paying job. As per the instruction of her uncle, she searched for her ravisher, Prabhu and met him. She blamed him for her sorry state and sought to have a companionship with him but in vain. He expressed his wish to settle her in a marital life with some other man. Finally, out of depression, she became drunkard and degenerated due to the impact of patriarchal ideology.

The researcher has chosen Jayakanthan's, *Sila Nerangalil Sila Manithargal* (Some People at Sometimes) in order to view patriarchal ideologies from an Indian point of view for a better understanding of the male and female typologies in Indian societies. British canonical fictions of the Victorian period also make the perspective of this researcher meaningful. In this novel, he portrays a woman protagonist who is the victim of patriarchal ideology and shows how she breaks away the clutches of ideological barriers and emerges as a non-typological character. She dominates the entire story posing a foil to typological women characters of this Tamil fiction chosen for study. Ganga in *Sila Nerangalil Sila Manithargal* remains a typological character till she is raped by a stranger (Prabhu). Jayakanthan has always effectively portrayed the self and consciousness in women through

his characters like Ganga in *Sila Nerangalil Sila Manithargal*. He strongly believes that the function of literature is to throw light on the greatness of change and progress in society. In one of his interviews, Jayakanthan comments “I am a part of society and through my writings and works, I attempt to refine myself first and then the society” (Jayakanthan 2006: 14); this is taken as the key note of this research paper and forms the basis for analyzing the shifts in character attitudes that go to form canonical and liberal human types. For, unless change for the better comes from within an individual person no progressive change can be expected in society at large.

The male ideology has brought the society to the imbalanced level. As it did not allow woman her legitimate space to realise her potential for several centuries, there is still an impact of that dominant ideology in the society. Patriarchy is often deemed as a term to explain men's prejudices and behaviour toward women (Anju, 2012). For example, the behaviour and attitude of a boss towards a worker is the intrinsic problem. So, the gender relations are some of the symptoms of the cultural, economic, social and ideological system of oppression, exploitation and power; the power of Patriarchy. Patriarchy dictates norms according to which, material and symbolic resources are unequally distributed to men and women. These norms are put into practice through social institutions like family, economic status, culture and language and literature in Tamilnadu. Hence, it has a phenomenal impact on the collective psyche of the society.

Ganga, the protagonist of the novel is a complex formation of both typological and non-typological features. When she is discovered to have been “raped” by a stranger, the society including her mother denounces her and treats her as an outcast. Instead of timidly deciding to end her life as most typological Indian women do, she rather resolves to empower herself through education and economic advancements to set right her wrongs. She manages to erase out the memory of her seducer and lives a composed life. Her uncle Venku Ayyar

preaches Ganga that she cannot marry anyone as it is a sin, but she can be a concubine to someone. He tells her,

[English translation: If you opt out of marriage with any man and accept to be a concubine to someone, you will be saved from the curse out of committing a grave sin of causing blasphemy to the canons of our religion] (Sila Nerangalil 68)

This coercive statement of Venku Ayyar is the reflection of the attitude of the patriarchal head of the family. He dictates her to lead her life as per the norms of the male-centred society. The same dominant society does not allow a 'spoilt woman' (in a patriarchal sense) to decide on her life. He points out to religion and customs to justify his stand:

“namba saasthirangalum, namba vazhkkaiyoda dharmangalum pen makkaludaiya

ozhukkathaiye) adippadaiyagakkondathu” (64).

[English translation: The longevity of such rites and canons of Hinduism is solely based on morality and disciplines of woman.]

On learning that Prabu, her seducer is already married, she is made to abandon the idea of marrying him. She respects the social norms at one point of time, at the same time she appears to be keen to fight for herself against the biased dominant ideology. Ganga's struggle continues as she is being oppressed by the male-centric society for her plight but the same perpetrator (Prabhu) goes unpunished. This kind of gender differences are vehemently opposed by radical feminists. Radical feminism promotes the basis for many of the ideas of feminism. They opine that society must be restructured from the grass root level in order to eliminate patriarchal ideology. They view that the oppression of women is still pervasive across the world. They completely object to the rigid gender roles the society has imposed on

man and woman and all aspects of patriarchy, and in some cases, they reject men as well. (Daly, 1990)

Ganga accuses the society of its dubious stand on woman's life and behaviour as compared to men. As long as Ganga leads an ascetic life, the society remains unconcerned about her, but when she seeks companionship with a man, she is denounced. Ganga bemoans:

[English Translation: (Will a life of a girl be ill-fated like this? Why don't they all ever treat me as a woman? He (Prabhu) is very much concerned about my future, whereas my mother never bothers to think about it. They all feel happy and comfortable till I have been leading an ascetic life so far.....

(The author's translation from Tamil into English- Sila Nerangalil 259)

However, when she is introduced to the reader, she is a woman of a strong radical feminist notion. She condemns the behaviour of co-male passengers and male conductor who take delight in teasing women out of taking advantage of a crowded bus as well as rainy days. She could not tolerate their vulgar behaviour. She tries to channelize her mute anger in the creative direction of putting an end to the audacity of males and their vulgar taste of teasing women in public. She writes a letter to the columns of "Letters to the Editor" in a newspaper with her plea of plying separate buses for women. At that time, there was no separate bus operated for women in Tamilnadu. It is here Ganga toes the line of typical feminist women who want exclusion from the male world rather than fight for their rights for equality and dignity along with men. She goes to the extent of calling them worse and cheaper than a man trying to force a woman in the street to satisfy his carnal pleasure.

In that connection, she also remembers her brother Ganesan's temperament. After seeing her rise in social status from her despicable fall of seduction, he sees her as his arch enemy. Bent on stigmatizing her character, he along with his wife spreads vulgar gossip about her that she is a cheap woman without any virtue. It is important to record here that

most times, the Woman herself acts as a custodian of this dominant ideology by speaking ill of other women. At the same time, Ganesan's male typology on the line of patriarchal norms is the cause for Ganga to break her type and evolve as a brave woman. She has to fight not only the outer world but also her own family to establish her stand. She struggles to have a space for herself against a culture that taught her to be timid and passive and obedient. Her culture taught her to accept that men are born to dominate and women to remain ever subservient.

It is recorded that as Kanagam, Ganga's mother was brought up in a male-centred society she also thinks like a patriarch. As a result, she feels miserable that her daughter has broken the male code of chastity levelled on women. Hence, Kanagam falls into the typological mould of women supporting and strengthening the male dominant ideology.

Venku Ayyar supports Kanagam for her stand of making everyone know about her daughter's moral lapse. He equates her conduct to that of ostracizing a child suffering from a contagious disease from the rest of "healthy humanity". The loud mouthed expressions of her uncle reflect his male authority and domination he always practices at home. Ganga knows that he keeps his wife Pankajam as a subservient being who would not be allowed to talk even with male servants. Kanagam calls her a living serpent in Venku Ayyar's house. As a woman born in such a heritage and culture, Kanagam finds no scruples to call a devoted wife like Pankajam as a living serpent who is always beaten up by Venku Ayyar. This clearly shows the typical temperament of a conservative minded woman ever picking holes in another woman's character. It may be out of jealousy or her clannish practice of slighting the character of Pankajam. Kanagam also remains like a snake at her daughter's house, watching her daughter's conduct and assessing it with her prejudiced views. The researcher is of the view that women like Pankajam strengthen the male-centred ideology and perpetuate it further by patiently accepting their underdog existence.

While talking about the celibacy of woman, Venku Ayyar advocates persons like Ganga to imbibe the essence and not the incident narrated in the epic like The Mahabharatha. Dhrowbathi being a wife of five men and Kundhidevi giving birth to three celestial sons with the efficacy of the sage Durvasa's "manthra" are all contextual matters related to perpetuating their progeny. From his way of argument, he always stands as a symbol of male authority and ever supports the view that man's law is totally different from the woman's.

[Translation: That there is a different law for both man and woman is his tall claim.] (Sila Nerangalil 66).

Further, Venku Ayyar argues with Kanagam that her intention to find a bridegroom is beyond the means of cultural adherence. Remarriage of a girl who is yet to attain puberty would be allowed if the husband died. This had happened in the case of young bride aged eight who did not attain puberty at the time of marriage. According to sastras (canons of religion), once a woman who, out of marriage lost her virginity should not get remarried on account of the death of her husband. In Ganga's case, her virginity has been lost and the rapist has absconded. So, her status could be equated with that of a widow. Widow's remarriage would be a departure from the cultural vedantic concept at that time. Thereby, the only solution for Ganga is that she has to search for her molester and make him as her legitimate partner. These are the views of Venku Ayyar who is the typical patriarchal head. His views prompted her to search for her molester.

Prabhu would have taken many girl friends in his car. Out of such women, many would have been married. Many would have extended to him marriage invitation. For many marriages, he would have attended with gifts and blessed them. That is the way of the male world which takes things easy (Sila Nerangalil 144). When Ganga meets him for the second time after twelve years, she chastises him for that ill-fated evening that wasted her from which existence she has never revived.

Ganga's education has given her a critical outlook. Her education provides her with a job. Her education shapes her to look at things in the real perspective. Jayakandan rightly pointed out that in the 20th century only education is the positive value for liberating women from their meagre status. With education, women can get jobs and become economically independent. This economic independence is essential for a woman to plan her life, share her feelings, move freely with all, lead an independent life, and to become a beacon for other suppressed women.

From Prabhu, Ganga learns that he had missed motherly care, love and affection at a very early age. His father, out of fear that his second wife would neglect his son, did not marry at all. Such was his affection for him. As a doting father, he made him tie to his apron strings and spoilt him irretrievably. It is understood that Prabhu's father exhibited the temperament of a typical man who would excessively dote on his children in the absence of his wife. Prabhu also took advantage of his father's leniency and liberal attitude and so he became a human waste. Jayakanthan clearly alludes that a rich and caring tradition is necessary for the weaning of a child into a socially responsible adult. Here, in a way he seems to toe the line of a patriarchal Indian system of family, but all the same his focus is on the maternal care that is essential for a child's holistic development into a caring adult.

The noteworthy aspect of Ganga's character is that she has come to shift her perspective to a female representative where she becomes unbending in nature, seeks no support, and has least concern for male social norms. She does not care about her "family honour". Ganga, though appears to be a non-typological woman by following the western concept of female liberation, still holds the Indian traditional outlook of one man one woman and hence sees Prabhu as her male companion. Here she becomes degenerated due to the attributes of patriarchal society.

When she fails in her attempt to convince him into accepting her as his companion, she decides to lead her life like a man indulging in smoking and drinking. By this way, she tries to be equal to man in all respects. Radical feminists believe that man and woman are equals irrespective of the biological differences. They view that woman can do all that man can do. This type of feministic perspective highlights the importance of individual feelings, experiences and relationships of woman with other members of the society (Daly, 1990). Her taking to these habits of smoking and drinking which are normally done by men, shows that she is trying to imitate men. This researcher is of the view that Ganga gains this liberation through her economic independence to fight against dominating men.

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