

Ashwini, a Victim of Tradition Bound Society

Dr. BATHULA SRIHARI RAO

Associate Professor, Dept of English
NRI Institute of Technology, Vijayawada. India
Email: bsrhari@gmail.com

Abstract: Women, throughout the ages in the world history, have been subordinators to men. Most cultures have treated women in so called inferior status. The image of woman was created such a way that He never wanted her to be equal sharer of the opportunities that he enjoyed. Thus, patriarchy undermined woman's self-respect and made them believe that their inferiority was pre-ordained. The same situation was often justified as being the natural result of biological differences between the sexes. Woman has lost her individual self-respect in the human society. Adhering the situation of the status of the women, specially Indian society, there have been a large number of women writers who express themselves. This article deals with a girl's issues in a tradition bound society in India.

Key Words: women issues, understanding, customs and traditions, sacrifice, love, Lavanya Sankaran, Ashwini...

1. Introduction :

Lavanya Sankaran's *The Red Carpet* (2005), is a collection of short stories, which project women characters namely Ashwini, Missy, Sita, Priyamvada and Mrs. Chowdhary, who want to establish their own selves as individuals and who opt for freedom to live in dignity. The author establishes women characters, who are not succumbed to societal and familial obstacles. But they live with no complaint on their side. The women try to seek for a life of their own. They take their own life unperturbed and nonchalant way. It is suitable to quote Virginia Woolf who asserted her independence in her book with the title *A Writer's Diary* (1953)

I will not be famous, great. I will go on adventuring, changing, opening my mind and my eyes, refusing to be stamped and stereotyped. The thing is to free one's self: to let it find its dimensions. (WD 206)

2. Literature Review :

The women in *The Red Carpet* experience many hurdles such as mental, physical and sexual abuses. Ayesha Bhalla, who in her PhD thesis, titled *Between History and Identity: Reading the Authentic in South Asian Diasporic Literature and Community* (2008) rightly analyses short story book

The stories imagine the effects of economic globalization on the urban inhabitants of Bangalore; a city that has recently undergone considerable growth and development... Sankaran's stories are populated with characters from a range of class and caste backgrounds, with varying access to mobility and with diverse affiliations to the city of Bangalore. (BHI 110-111)

The writer, Lavanya Sankaran is of the opinion that women still need their economical and personal freedom. Jaya, in the novel *That Long Silence* (1988) of Shashi Deshpande, is the writer, who dares to break the silence to write her own story as a heroine. It was not an easy task for her to accomplish. She says the following in order to create her own horizon by breaking her silence as

Self revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real 'you' never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different faces show you ten different faces. (TLS 1)

Each woman character struggles to maintain her identity in the short stories of *The Red Carpet*. One may remember Andrea Dworkin (1946), a radical feminist who has sought in her book *Woman Hating* (1974) for a clear picture of identity for women because she says,

The culture predetermines who we are, how we behave, what we are willing to know, what we are able to feel. We are born into a sex role which is determined by visible sex, or gender. (WH 34)

Lavanya Sankaran seeks to establish equal opportunities for women on par with men economically, personally and socially. It is apt to quote the author, John Dalton, who reviewed *The Red Carpet*

Throughout these fine, articulate stories, Lavanya Sankaran brings to life the new and old social worlds of Bangalore. More importantly, she uses the quiet dignity of her characters to reveal what's universal in the wide rift between generations. It's an unusually elegant and nuance portrait ([www.Amazon.com/Re-Carpet-Bangalore- Stories](http://www.Amazon.com/Re-Carpet-Bangalore-Stories))

In the very first story with the title, **Bombay This**, Ashwini is the protagonist. She is a young beautiful girl in her teens with modern outlook. Lavanya Sankaran has concern for her 'traditional value' system. The protagonist, Ashwini has just arrived in Bangalore as her father gets transferred due to his job. She has learnt the Mumbai ways of living as she has been brought up in Mumbai. Her life in Mumbai has made her easy going

One saw her everywhere however, in all the pubs and all the parties, because in addition to her list of nostalgic complaints, she was also armed with a lot of verve and fun. She was up for anything, a good-time Charlie, a bustling ball of energy and laughter, a squeal and hug and kiss for everybody, her lips grinding inadvertently but pleasantly against the men she talked to as her bottom swayed happily to passing bits of music. (BT 2)

Ashwini, irritates her listeners with her talk of Bombay this and Bombay that without realising what the listeners would mind. Ramu, her friend contemplates Ashwini as a wife. He changes his mind after learning that she has donated a kidney to one of her cousins. But Ramu's mother is pessimistic about his marriage with Ashwini. His mother says

I mean, I realize she has one left. I am not a fool. But what if that fail? It has been known to happen. Then you will be left widower, and my grandchildren will be motherless.' She answered the question in Ramu's eyes. It happened two years ago. Ashwini gave away one of her kidneys to a cousin. For a transplant. (18)

Ashwini is like that of Tara in Mahesh Dattani's Two Act Play *Tara* (1995), who donates two of her legs to her conjoined brother Chandan. In Ashwini's story, the organ donation is voluntary. But in Tara case it is forced and convinced by her grandparents. After all Indian women are famous for making sacrifices. Women, by birth are emotionally bonded to their loved ones. A critic named Ajit Kumar Sinha, who in the book title *Women Empowerment in New Dimensions of Women Empowerment* (2008) opines as "Women have certain characteristics gifted by nature, particularly physical and emotional, which are different from men in many ways" (WENDWE 55)

Ashwini, with the same gift of sacrifice goes to the extent of giving away one of her kidneys which means life to someone and death to her. From the birth of the girl child till the end, she has different respective stages that she had to deal with, which often humiliate her in their own ways. Manjit Kaur, the article titled, *Breaking the Stereotype: Women in Indian Fiction in English*. (iosr-jhss/papers/Vol-19-issue6,2014) rightly points out the sacrificing attitude of women like Ashwini as

Society lays down the patterns of life for a woman much before she takes birth by conceiving fixed identities for her. It confines her existence through binary divisions between the general conception of men and women defining her as feminine as opposite to the masculine, the characteristics marked in the formation of gender by society..... In order to earn respect in society, it is essential for a woman to belong to the preferred category of wife or an ideal woman and be oriented towards being obedient, devoted, self sacrificing as the mythical figures of Sita, Savitri and Draupadi. (BSWIFE 49-52)

On the other side Ramu and his friends always wait for any girl for sex. Ramu and his friends are really flirting. "I've been and gone and done it. To say: I found a hole and dived right in. To say: I fucked her" (BT 11)

One gets the impression that women are meant merely for sexual satisfaction. “driving one’s car furiously to dark corners of the city for dessert: a half hour spent in industriously attempting to explore the Inner woman, Any inner woman.” (11)

Woman is treated just as a satisfying creature. All over the world, gender disabilities and discrimination are wide-spread. Women are considered to be the weaker section of society almost everywhere and in every culture. Neera Desai in *Woman in Modern India (1957)* observes

Ideologically woman who was considered a completely inferior species, inferior to the male, having no significance, no personality; socially, she was kept in a state of utter subjugation, denied any right, suppressed and oppressed; she was further branded as basically lacking the ethical fibre. (WMI 29)

But Ramu, being an educated and ideally good man decides to end all his previous acts of flirting and loves to marry Ashwini even though his mother is against the proposal. But Ramu is more convinced of marrying her because “for him she is a heroine more a human being” (BT 19). Ramu has an opinion about Ashwini as “Someone with courage. Someone with conviction. with principle In short, someone with a Depth of Purpose Ashwini was a heroine.” (19)

3. Conclusion:

Ashwini is, no doubt a goddess, who without thinking her own health, has taken a bold step to help her cousin to save him. She is not an ordinary woman. She is the symbol of sacrifice. Ashwini does not have any idea of marriage because she would not like to spoil a man’s life. She may become sick and she cannot look after him. Lavanya Sankaran treats her as a symbol of sacrifice. Ashwini likes to keep away from the traditional point that women should be obedient to the patriarchal society or order. To make her individuality, she pledges her own health.

REFERENCES:

1. Andrea, Dworlin. *Woman Hating*. Penguin Books; New York, 1974.p.34
2. Ayesha, Tamara Bhalla, *Between History and Identity: Reading the Authenticity in South Asian Diasporic Literature and Community*, (A Thesis submitted to the University of Michigan, 2008), PP 121-122.
3. Desai Neera, *Woman in Modern India*, Asia Book Corp of Amer.1977, pp. 29.
4. Deshpande, Shasi. *That Long Silence*. New Delhi: Penguin Books. 1988.
5. Kaur Manjit, *Breaking the Stereotype: Women in Indian Fiction in English*. (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 19, Issue 6, Ver. VII (Jun. 2014), PP 49-52 e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845. www.iosrjournals.org .
6. Lavanya, Sankaran. *The Red Carpet*. Headline Book Publishing; London. 2005.
7. Mahesh Dattani. *Collected Plays*. Penguin; New Delhi.1995.
8. Sinha, Ajit Kumar , *New Dimensions of Women Empowerment*, New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2008, p.27.