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Research Article

TEACHING LANGUAGE AND LEGAL AID THROUGH LITERATURE

Malavi J*

Department of English Palamuru University, Mahabubnagar

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ABSTRACT

Indian Constitution has guaranteed economic, political and civil rights to women but in reality an average Indian woman does not enjoy her rights, freedom and equality, in spite of the constant struggle for better position in a family and Society. Ironically, even the 21st century's globalized citizens, privileged to enjoy the science and technology, and challenge it when needed fail to understand the uniqueness of the other gender. Woman is being treated inferior to man, in spite of her sincere efforts to obtain better education and employment, at this juncture there is necessity to discuss about the construction of gender biased roles, and raise awareness on gender sensitization among the youngsters within the classrooms too. The present paper focuses on instilling awareness about gender sensitization among the students through Swarnakumari Debi's novel, *The Uprooted Vine*, besides teaching language and Basic provisions for the safety of women. As nineteenth century's Indian English novel depicts Indian society, family and woman's plight in patriarchy, the researcher/ paper attempts to elucidate, how a teacher can explore the content of the novel to benefit the learners.

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INTRODUCTION

Simone de Beauvoir states in her famous work, *The Second Sex* as "Woman has always been man's dependent, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality" (1945). Discrimination against woman, which begins even before her birth, flourishes in every phase of her life. It began with traditional value system and became a deep rooted monster over the centuries due to illiteracy, Hindu notions and woman's economic dependency. Indian society and family system believe in the notion that the son redeems a parent from hell by lighting their pyre; therefore he is entitled to enjoy the property of a family. Though all the women of the family work hard both at home and outside to enhance the riches of a family, they are not allowed to enjoy the property, although women can have their share in the property of their parents legally.

Women, even in twenty first century, do not have economic independence though they work outside their family and earn their bread, this denial of economic independence by the male counterpart, itself is a solid basis for gender inequality. The uneven distribution of rights and obligations within a household, develops conflict between women's new career oriented responsibilities and old domestic roles in both rural and urban India. Women devote a large proportion of their time on unpaid long domestic sessions, childbearing and rearing

consumes major portion of their enthusiasm and energy, which is a major barrier for their career. Not only men, but the elder women of the family, who imbibed the patriarchal patterns, try to construct their girls to be submissive. Even educated and earning women, who were constructed as vehicles of patriarch, impose Do's and Don'ts on their daughters to be homely and acceptable in a patriarchal society.

When English education was introduced to Indian women in nineteenth century, male social reformers wanted girls to have education that would train the women to be compatible wives to their English educated husbands and caring mothers. This idea of woman education is very much alive even in the twenty first century Indian society. Parents often think that women education is an unnecessary financial burden and anyhow she will be married off and moved to some other family. This conservative notion of parents is responsible for gender disparity, although many social activists and reformers carried their crusade against all social odds to restore honour and dignity of the women. Despite of many regulations for gender equality, even educated women in our society continues to be the victims of exploitation, superstitions, patriarchal hegemony and social atrocities. Most of the women being ignorant of their basic rights and the socio-economic and political construction of women, accept all discriminatory practices that persist in our family system and society. They don't even recognize their

*Corresponding author: **Malavi J**

Department of English Palamuru University, Mahabubnagar

potential to be independent due to their conditioned subordination, although our Indian constitution has guaranteed women the social, political and economic rights to empower them.

Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles, not only grants equality to women, it also confers the State with power to adopt measures for positive discrimination in favour of women. India has ratified various International Conventions and Human Rights Instruments, committing to secure equal rights for women, best among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard. The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000): is to ensure survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future. According to Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, both giving and taking dowry is crime and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 is to keep up the self-respect of women. Though Indian constitution provides equal rights and privileges for both men and women, it makes provisions to improve the status of women in democratic patriarchal society, still majority of the Indian women fail to enjoy the rights and opportunities guaranteed to them due to the lack of awareness about the free legal aid from government.

Gender sensitization is basic requirement for the overall growth of an individual. One cannot understand one's self, unless one is being sensitive to the needs of a particular sex, which means to have empathy for opposite gender. Sex is biological in origin while gender is culturally conditioned. *Gender sensitization can be the transformation of behavior by raising awareness of gender equality concerns, and instilling empathy in the views and notions about their own and the other gender.* It helps people to critically examine their personal attitudes and beliefs, also question the 'realities' they knew. Urgency for this sensitivity has been felt and realized at all times and in almost all walks of humans all over India, but in the recent times, a much stronger need is felt and realized after various incidents like gang rapes and girls committing suicide due to ragging on the campuses. It is need of the hour to talk and discuss about this sensitive issue both at home and on the campuses.

One has to understand that irrespective of gender categorizations, humans experience the same range of emotions like happiness, sadness, anger, and frustration, and also equally can have ambitions, dreams and desires for noble and content life. Boys can cry and makeup themselves beautifully, girls can walk on the roads in the nights and establish any business and third gender can love, play, cry, challenge the world with their potential. It's nothing to do with their gender rather with interest and determination. Expecting, third gender, men and women to carry out gender specific roles, is the loophole in Indian society's great culture. Man in patriarchy, deliberately wants to be superior to woman by providing her needs, and this leads to his depression and frustration. Woman is being forced to take up the domestic work in spite of her potential to be an employer or a leader. Mercilessly, today women are expected to do both domestic and official work at a stretch without any assistance, which is modern women's unavoidable burden. Even in the twenty first century, Indian patriarchy sympathizes

with rapists saying, 'Women must be within their limits'. In this scenario, women ought to be more alert and sensitive to challenge those mindsets which damage their identity and existence. This is why we need gender sensitization to sensitize both men and women about these crippling notions. Discrimination becomes a continuum unless women consciously deconstruct their mindset, role and place.

The problems are directly or indirectly related to lack of gender sensitivity, be it the case of eve-teasing, domestic violence, exploitation or brutal rape. But the truth is, whatever has percolated in young minds has been given to them by their socio-cultural environment which mainly includes their family, educational institutions and peers. Now the major part of the responsibility for developing gender sensitization rests on the shoulders of family members and educational institutions. They are the ones who can kindle gender equality in the young minds and develop empathy for one another. It's time to stop shedding tears passively for the injustice done to women, rather act for women's dignity, equal opportunity and empowerment so that they may play a major role in the building of discrimination free nation. These Empowered women contribute for the development of a family, community, society and nurturing responsible next generation.

Educational institutions, classroom, students and teachers are part of society, they may have various problems like poverty, gender discrimination and various other issues hence classroom becomes microcosm of a society. One cannot ignore the reality of gender discrimination there. Gender sensitization within a classroom is a practical tool for analyzing gender biased relations. It also provides adequate information regarding major factors that influence and also responsible for maintaining or changing the structure of gender relations within a family and society. It also becomes a platform which aims at awareness, knowledge, skill and behaviour in gender relations. In order to make students more sensible professionals, as learners they should be sensitized about gender by introducing them to Indian Writings in English. When the students are exposed to the representational literature, especially to the novels, they can have an overview of the culture, construction of gender and traditions of native land. Classroom bears a huge responsibility, inculcating respect among all the genders as the students nurture to be sensible human beings. In the process of shaping personality of the students, gender sensitization is the need of the hour and Literature plays a pivotal role in doing the same, if it is inculcated among the students at this juncture.

Indian Novel

English was introduced to native Indians during British rule and it consequently lead to English literature in India. As the result of English education social reformations and women education had materialized in nineteenth century India. Indian women writing in English began in nineteenth century as the outcome of English education and social reformations, played a major role in the establishment of Indian English novel. Those writings depicted the reality of Indian women in patriarchal family system has attracted widespread interest, both in India and abroad. 19th century authors dealt with significant social issues, their idea of responsibility became an obligation for the writers of the modern novel. The legal and social treatment of married women has been often discussed as a political issue of

the 19th century that was characterized in Indian English novels.

Literature, particularly the novel; can focus on the surface of society, showcasing the hidden constructions by detecting the fundamental trends which may lead to the revolutionary transformation. Literature is a powerful weapon in educating them asses. The social changes are possible through literary works. It is impossible to change the orthodox, traditional concepts of religion, gender and class-division those are deep rooted in the society all of suddenly. It is impossible to change the social inequality and establish equality by revolution rather it could be made possible through literature to let the sufferers be aware of the system.

Novel is 'an invented prose narrative of considerable length and a certain complexity that deals imaginatively with human experience, usually through a connected sequence of events involving a group of persons in a specific setting'(Britannica 2014). It helps to understand the psychological stress and attitude of the mind, historical truths and philosophy of life. Novel also broadens student's horizons by giving them knowledge about the literature and the general awareness of culture, creativity and literary imagination. Novel always exhibits the required changes in individual, society and even in history.

Women writings openly address political and social issues. Swarnakumari Debi's novel *The Uprooted Vine* occupies an important place in Indian Women Writings and serves as valuable document of Indian history of nineteenth century. Its themes like child marriage, woman education, plight of Indian Hindu child widow and women economic dependency, Indian society and its culture, superstitions and notions. This novel showcases the Indian women's struggle, as daughters, as daughters' in-law, as widows and poor dependents in the joint family who were deprived of their rights, exploited as domestic drudges and marginalized to the extent of being denied shelter and maintenance in patriarchal system. It also depicts the Indian Women's political, economic condition, and complexity of man and woman relationships within a family and in the society.

As Duff and Maley (2007) propose 'Easy tasks to stimulate the interest of students, one should proceed gradually from easy tasks to difficult tasks'. The *Uprooted Vine* is the best supporting material to sensitize students about gender and gender discrimination. A teacher should ask the students to go through the given material that is a reader friendly text. The teacher can completely exploit the material by conducting brainstorming sessions, pre-reading tasks etc., for the benefit of students. This novel can be best used to teach graduates the meaning and usage of the strange words, the learner come across, like gender, patriarchy, liberty, equality, feminism, matriarchy and culture etc. in detailed. It helps the students to know about woman education, her construction, her psyche and suppression in a patriarchal society through the portrayal of various characters of the novel. *Uprooted Vine's* setting itself makes the students easily identify their families, domestic work of women and their gossips, religious rituals, festivals and power games, which represent a typical Indian family and society with the story and its setting. A teacher can exploit the entire text, scenes, character's behaviour and dialogues to make

the young brains understand women's oppression through the ages. As Simon De Beauvoir (1945) says: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". Women were not born to be submissive or subordinate.

Learners can be exposed to Indian patriarchal society from the men characters Charu and Kishori who were patriarchal hypocrites and want to be modern for pleasure, traditional to inherit the property. They can be educated about how the patriarchy has been designed to benefit men rather than women. How privileged men's desires can be fulfilled without the consent of women where sex is believed to be a pleasure for man and sacred act for woman. Boys are asked to speak and do anything and everything, reversely family and society finds fault with girls. Girls are never given equal opportunity and support to show their true potential instead conditioned to be subordinate and submissive.

Women characters of the novel help the teacher to bring awareness among girls regarding psychological and social changes at various phases of woman's life. They can learn about domestic violence and sexual abuse so that they counter back these challenges wisely looking at the experience of various characters from the novel. The character Snehalatha, an orphan and child-widow, driven to suicide by the callous behaviour of her own and husband's family. Jiban's mother, a widow character, turned out of the family, in order to prevent her to claim a share from the family property. Kamala dies at young age due to family's negligence and ill treatment. Other women characters like Jagat Babu's wife and daughter were jealous of Snehalatha and torture her to death, as they want to have power over their men folk, otherwise as women they were empathizing with Sneha's plight, the women characters Kamala, Jiban's mother and Sneha were bound strongly as fellow sufferers under patriarchal oppression.

Jethima was the only character wields great power in the joint family as the heir of her husband, although she was a childless widow, men folk respected her decisions. Jethima as a woman or as a childless widow was not respected, but Jethima as a property holder was respected. Characters like Sneha and Jiban's mother in this novel, provides the teacher with subject, place and scope to educate the learners about women's basic rights. The rights including awareness on legal Rights such as free legal aid, Right to privacy while recording statement, No arrest after sunset, Protection of employee's identity & Employer must protect the employee and her identity' also about fundamental, economic and political rights. It also helps the learner to understand Gender based assumptions and social discriminations that exist throughout society, from organizational planning to the everyday interactions at home and at the workplace.

The characters of the story very much represent all sorts of personalities in a classroom and any family that makes the students identify their mothers, sisters and women of the family with the characters of the novel. Male characters like Jiban and Jagat Babu, who were well educated and good hearted people, taken for granted by their wives, as the women fail to understand their construction in a patriarchy. Students would learn to stand in a society with self-respect by understanding and analyzing the fictional characters. This empowering education would nurture them to be more rational and sensible

citizens regarding social and moral etiquettes. A nation's development lies in its human resource along with economic growth and social progress. Hence the need of the hour is to sensitize all about the gender discrimination and further establish a progressive world where every gender respects the other and its significance.

This would not only make the students duty conscious, but also to have empathy for other genders. Boys should be sensitized to empathize with girl issues and also accept the girls as their equals. Girls should also be trained to care and respect their male counterparts without losing their self-esteem. Gender equality is not just a woman's issue or a man's issue, rather it is the responsibility of all the sexes to work for a more balanced society where individuals are free to be what they are, without being stereotyped, harassed or judged rather accepted with solidarity.

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