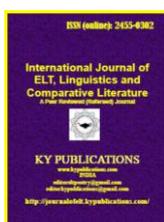




NALINI JAMEELA; THE NEW VOICE OF RESISTANCE

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ABSTRACT

The sexual perversions and moral policing is rampant in the society today. The effects of media on the sexuality of the population, the sexual temperament of the mass and its effect on today's media discourse have a good scope to explore. The peculiar way in which Keralites deal with sex will be discussed in the project. Their hypocritical attitude towards sex workers is being laid bare by the recent study reports that have come up.

The project will in fact look through the work *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* written by Nalini Jameela in the year 2005. This work challenges the pseudo-morality of the people of Kerala by accounting the authors unconventional life where she meets a number of clients different from each other.

The project will try to understand the contributions of the author in posing a feministic quest in questioning the double standards laid by the society for men and women, and how she emerged as voice that has an identity of its own.

Key Words: Slut shaming, Pseudo-Morality, Female Body, Female Sexuality, Feminine Identity.

INTRODUCTION

The state of Kerala which stands out from other states in India with respect to literacy and development however bears with it an air of hypocrisy, be it in matters of education, caste consciousness or gender inequalities. The state is proud of its highest literacy rate but even now the stream chosen by a student for his higher education is decided by his or her parents. Atrocities related with caste consciousness is least in Kerala nevertheless, parents make sure that their kids are in the company of other kids belonging to a desirable class not lower than themselves. Gender equality in the state is so intact to the point that the husband is inevitably the head of the family.

The physical or philosophical violence related to the above mentioned ideas can be least spotted in Kerala unlike the other states in India, as these stereotypes operates differently in the population. The point of interest for the article is the Keralites and their Pseudo-sexual morality and its manifestations in the literary and public discourses.

'Keralites' says a noted Malayalam writer and an activist, Paul Zacharia in an online interview, 'suffers from sexual starvation'. He traces that the tendency is an aftermath of the Christian missionary invasion into the modern education. They propagate the idea that sex is essentially a sin. However, he points out that, "those Christian societies in England, Germany etc from where the Christian missionaries came to Kerala, changed dramatically and nobody has any control over them. Sex is not a sinful activity there. Even when their politicians do it, it is not a sinful activity". (Zacharia)

The sexual frustration among the people has paved its way into heinous tendencies like moral policing and sexual perversions. People appear to be high on moral sense on the outside, while repress a mountain of



instincts in them. The new regime of communist government which has adopted the Stalin model has strategically exerted total power on the individuals, opines Zacharia. (Zacharia)

The sexual liberalism enjoyed by the state during the times of strong Nair women is now a far cry. The sexuality of women is now codified by the society who wants their wives and daughters to be sexually undemanding and passive while they work out their fanciful perversions on other women. The media today has a crippled mentality of exploiting this tendency of the mass by promoting stories about sex crimes.

The voice of Kamala Das, who openly discussed her sexuality and extra-marital relationships, was a strong blow on the pseudo-moral attitude of the Keralities. However she had to claim that her autobiography was partly a fictional account.

The project will explore into yet another autobiography written in the year 2005, by a sex worker named Nalini Jameela. The work is titled *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*, which had a mixed reception among the people of Kerala and other intellectuals across the country and beyond.

The project will discuss the text in detail to deconstruct the 'feminine mystique' prevalent in Kerala and analyse how the voice of 'Nalini Jameela' has emerged as an identity which is complete in itself. The project will also try to explain, what makes the author different from other feminists, especially from the most celebrated figure, Kamala Das.

The Autobiography of a Sex Worker: Emergence of a Voice Anew

The autobiographical account by Nalini Jameela evoked havoc in the intellectual circles in Kerala and also among the common readers. M Mukundan, a powerful literary figure condemned the book by calling it a 'prurient money-spinner'. The spiritual leaders sympathized with the degrading morality of a state where a 'sex worker' writes her autobiography, though she was not the first prostitute to account one's life, in the world. But the alarming readership for the book which went up to six editions and 13,000 copies sold in one hundred days indicates the secret craving of the people of Kerala to read through the steaming pages expecting a surge of sexual content as the author is a prostitute.

The author dealt with sex in an intellectual way as unexpected from a prostitute who has only been up to 3rd standard in school. She accounted her life right from childhood. She talked about how she got into the profession, how she decided to stay in the field with dignity, the men in her life, and how she emerged as a new star in the firmament with a voice that rose for her and for the others who were voiceless.

"I am a sex worker among the intellectuals'-said she, in response to a barbed comment that 'Nalini is now the intellectual among the sex workers' ". (Jameela,167). Through this strong and thought provoking answer Jameela has subverted the ideals of the society and posed a question on the peculiarity of labeling a sex worker.

Jameela's potential identity was obvious from her childhood itself, as she dared to question her own father who lived a hypocritical life by claiming as a communist and not living up to its ideals, he also had caste consciousness and segregated people on its name. Nalini who was an ardent reader of the infamous communist periodical 'Soviet Union' brewed up an ideological rivalry with her father and left the house on that grounds.

Nalini's first marriage ended up in tragedy when her husband died after three years of wedded life leaving behind two children. It was to feed her children, she pursued sex work in the beginning. But right on the first day she was caught by the same police officer who bedded with her that day. She witnessed the actual picture of the double standards for women and men that existed in the society for the first time. She was slut-shamed in her own place and instead of feeling guilty, she chose sex work as a profession and fed her children with the same money she earned selling her body.



The next revolt against the patriarchal ideal was with her client-turned-husband who denied their child saying that she do not belong to the religion he was in. Nalini ended the relationship with him and got into the street with her child as she was not ready to forgo her principles in front of a person's pseudo- religious ideals.

Nalini uses sex as a tool to reverse the power structure that a man exerts on woman on every walk of life particularly on the bed. Sex in the Indian context is the Man's forte where he lays the rules on women's body and on her instincts. It has come to an extent to which women has no awareness about their sexual needs. She has surrendered her body for satiating men's sexual cravings or perversions. Nalini on the contrary made use of the same tool, her body, to exert power on the men who came to her and laid her rules for them to abide. "Who knows what women can be when they are finally free to become themselves? Who knows what women's intelligence will contribute when it can be nourished without denying love?" (Friedan, 176)

The third partner with whom she lived for twelve years was also her client who left her when she was diagnosed of liver tumor. She had to beg for a living in front of a mosque to make money for her treatment and to feed her child.

The pseudo- moral instincts of men in Kerala can be noted from her account of a man who punished his sister for talking to Nalini. The same man was her regular client who came to her secretly. The moral policing the men does on the society and on the women in his family is an indication of his insecurities about his own sexuality itself.

Nalini through her autobiography has strived to lay bare the perverted sexual appetite of the Keralites by talking openly about her profession which is in high demand when the night falls and denigrated in the light of the day. She throws light on how the sexuality of both men and women are undergoing a face of transgression over the years by intellectually analyzing the behaviour of her clients.

CONCLUSION

The most celebrated feminist writer of the past era, Kamala Das opines that, "I feel a woman is most attractive when she surrenders to her man. She is incomplete without a man" (Das, 74). Quite contradictory to this, the voice of Nalini radiates confidence when she talks about herself as a woman from whose beauty men can hardly escape. Here, she considers her feminine identity as a complete entity which attracts men who seeks completion.

Kamala Das who came out with an open discussion of her life which stirred criticism among the people, later corrected that it was a partly fictional account of her life. While Nalini, inspite of the demeaning comments from the nooks and corners of the country refused to withdraw her book instead she perfected the same.

She does not pretend to protect her clients to ensure her business but attempts to analyse them critically and made the autobiography an objective report of the sexual attitudes of the people in Kerala.

She glued the tail 'Jameela' along with her original name Nalini, not because she changed her religion for anyone's sake, but it was a symbol of the struggle she underwent in order to survive. She had to use the Muslim name to be in the family of her third partner who was a Muslim and also to get treatment for her disease from a Muslim doctor. She deliberately attached the name Jameela in the autobiography for those people who identified her as a Muslim to understand that she was not. This again is a fearless act of exerting ones true identity on the society.

Kamala Das on the other hand confess towards the dusk of her life that, "I fell in love with a Muslim after my husband's death. He was kind and generous in the beginning. But I now feel one shouldn't change one's religion. It is not worth it." (Das, 73). Nalini, as a matter of fact was far ahead of Kamala Das, as she made use of religious identity for the sake of convenience and never did she succumb to its mires.



Nalini Jameela's voice inevitably has stood out, as a voice with a difference that has an identity of its own and challenges the society with the power of the same body and sexuality, which is considered as the weakness of a woman and has evolved as a 'femme fatale'.

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