



A Progressive Journey of Ranganayakamma from Pekamedalu (House of Cards) to Janaki Vimukthi (Emancipation of Janaki)

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ABSTRACT

This paper shows the difference and development in the actions and reactions of the protagonists Bhanumathi in Pekamedalu (House of Cards) and Janaki in Janaki Vimukthi which reflects the progress in the thought-process of the writer. Ranganayakamma, the living dynamic woman writer in Telugu Literature, occupies a prominent position in the galaxy of contemporary feminist writers. The middle-class women are her protagonists in her novels. Janaki is the most dynamic woman of all the protagonists whereas Bhanumathi is very passive.

Keywords: woman writer, feminist, middle-class

INTRODUCTION

"Beware; for I am fearless, and therefore powerful." - Mary Shelley

This quote of Mary Shelly is very much suitable to Ranganayakamma, a leading Marxist-Feminist writer and critic in Telugu. She wrote a very controversial popular book 'Ramayana Vishvriksham' which made many readers atheists. Her diction is very simple for the readers to understand easily. Her satires are so sharp, very strong and highly humorous. Ranganayakamma was born in Bommidi village near Tadepalligudem in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh on 21 September, 1939. She stopped her education with S.S.L.C. and studied for Hindi examinations of Dakshin Bharath Hindi Prachar Sabha. Her father used to run a caste-related magazine, 'Padmanayaka'. She has been a voracious reader since her childhood and used to write stories for children for her father's magazine. In an interview, she says about the beginning of her writings as:

"As I was reading books all the time, my father had asked me to write something for that magazine. I used to write stories about the prince on the horse, who saves the princess from the monster's capture. My father published those silly stories very happily in that magazine." (Interview for Gamanam)

She is a hard-core critic of the religious scriptures Ramayana, Mahabharata and Vedas. She received the *Sahitya Academy* Award of the state of Andhra Pradesh for her novel 'Balipeetham' in 1965. But after her connection with Marxist theory, she refused the offers of honors and awards from various organizations and individuals. Her major work, the first volume of "Introduction of Capital", appeared in 1978.

As in the words of a Telugu critique Vallampati *"Study of women's issues based on historical and sociological grounds started with Ranganayakamma."*

A PROGRESSIVE JOURNEY

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." — Simone de Beauvoir

Ranganayakamma has understood the fact mentioned above very well in her endless journey of writing. She has interpreted the recurring female experiences in her writings. She has become one of the most popular writers in Telugu. She has emerged as a progressive thinker and writer.

Ranganayakamma wrote her first story, "Palletooru" (The Village) when she was eighteen years old. She wrote her first novel, "Krishnaveni", when she was nineteen years old. She wrote more than twelve novels and many more books. This study concentrates on the two novels Peka Medalu and Janaki Vimukthi.

Bhanumathi, the protagonist in "Pekamedalu", is forced to stop her studies due to the poverty of her family. She marries a person called Rajashekhar. She wants to stand by her husband in all the crises and shows love and sympathy and expects the same from her husband. She is the symbol of faithfulness and submission to her husband and maintains discipline in the house which is essential to lead a peaceful and normal family life. She prepares and serves the meals for her husband and keeps the house perfectly. Bhanumathi never bothers to take up the role of a traditional housewife.

In contrast, her husband, Rajashekhar, never takes care of her. He thinks men are generally expected to be strong, aggressive, and bold. He starts dominating from the day of their wedding. His brother-in-law Keshav laments over it as: *"Brother-in-law used to command Bhanu to give him the comb or to fold his shirt sleeves or to polish his shoes. Bhanu feels shy to do those works accurately. If it is delayed, he will scold her. Then the bright face of Bhanu becomes dull and dark."* (Pekamedalu, P.14).

He has all sorts of bad habits like smoking and playing cards which cannot be tolerated by Bhanumathi. He opines *"The man who stays away from bad habits is considered as an incompetent and coward."* (Pekamedalu P.22)

Bhanumathi puts so much effort to make him change his habits and attitude and waits patiently. She is vexed with his reluctance and indifference and suffers a lot. He is proved as an insensitive husband and a detached father. She laments over her wrong marriage and broken bond in the letter written to her brother after deciding to commit suicide with disheartenment.

"The persons living in this house are nothing to each other. They are not relatives. They are not friends. They are not even acquaintances. They are not the co-passengers. Enemies."

"The emotional bond which should tie two persons and two bodies was broken." (Pekamedalu P. 76)

Finally, Bhanumathi commits suicide leaving the responsibility of her baby boy for her brother Keshava Rao. The novel ends with the declaration that the reason behind the plight of Bhanu is a patriarchal country.

"Banu was born as a woman in India!" (Pekamedalu P. 89)

The purpose of the novel 'Janaki Vimukthi' is to tell the status of the man and woman relationship in society and the problems for women in the country and show a better solution for those issues. The opening of the novel Janaki Vimukthi reveals Janaki, the protagonist of the novel, has problems and she is not happy with her husband and mother-in-law. The traditional Indian women are nurtured on hope. So is Janaki. She enters into that marriage which is arranged by her father. In the first week of her marriage, Janaki learns about her husband that he is not a friendly man like her father and brother. Even the early days of her marriage are not happier than the later days. Janaki's husband Venkatrao is a typical Indian husband, complacent in his patriarchal bliss. He is an orthodox man and always troubles Janaki along with his mother. Initially, Janaki thinks that her mother-in-law is the main cause for her unhappiness in that house. But she realizes the role of her husband in the torture she faces every day.

Ranganayakamma exposes the reasons behind the domination of mothers-in-law over daughters-in-law in this novel as:

"The society which makes a husband a boss over his wife, the same society makes all other relatives of her husband bosses over her. Because, in a wife and husband relationship, a husband is in a higher position than his wife. So, his parents and other relatives will be in a higher position than his wife. That's why the mother-in-law acts as the boss over her daughter in law. If the husband loses the power over the wife, automatically mother-in-law will lose her power over the daughter-in-law. If the husband and wife are equal, then mother-in-law and daughter in law will be equal."

(Janaki Vimukthi p. 21)

Janaki develops a great respect for and attachment with her neighbor, Vishalakshi, who endures a feckless and reckless husband. Janaki is very fond of her amiability and shares her thoughts and regrets. The presence of Vishalakshi gives solace to Janaki.

Her brother Sathyam comes to know the despondency of Janaki's marital life when he visits her. He compels Janaki to leave her husband and encourages her to live her own life. But she is unwilling to go with her brother. Janaki undergoes many agonies because of her husband and mother-in-law who harass her for more dowry. With the exhortation from her brother, she quits her husband's place once, but after few months she turns back to her husband when he approaches her. Her brother Sathyam expresses his views on the women who don't want to leave the cruel and cunning husbands. He deplors as follows:

"She hasn't given me the value which she gives to her husband. I can't take it so easily. She doesn't have any self-respect at all. She always cries and she doesn't get angry with him. I hate such people. How does freedom come to those people? They don't deserve anything. No one can save them" (Janaki Vimukthi p. 36)

Janaki is reluctant to escape from her distress even though her brother Sathyam stretches his hands to back her to finish that problematic marriage but she waits patiently for her husband's transformation. He feels that living with a husband must not be the ambition for a woman's life. Women should not feel shy to reject the oppressing husbands. Finally, Janaki realizes the nature of her husband and understands the clutches of patriarchy. She thinks in the way that the husband is not the lifesaver of a wife and she should leave her emotional slavery. She accepts the reality that this slavery is common for all wives. She decides to break the walls of patriarchy. She determines to leave her husband and waits for the chance. With full of detestation, she denies the behest of her husband for sexual satisfaction one night. He feels that she has insulted him with her disobedience. Her rejection makes him more aggressive. It makes Janaki more frightened. She leaves the house at midnight expecting more dangerous things at home than outside of the house. She flees for her mother's place with the help of Murthy, a friend of Sathyam. Like all traditional Indian women, Janaki's mother, Sundaramma, is worried and makes prayers for the safety of her daughter's marital life. She hides the news from others and asks one of the relatives to settle the issue. But Janaki nixes her mother's attempts as she realizes that the back pedallings shame and damage to her self-respect.

Janaki gets enough courage to break her marriage even after she gets pregnant. She boldly starts living on her own feet. She drops the idea of terminating her pregnancy and gives birth to a boy, named Bruno, after the great scientist. She enters into a bold and beautiful relationship, a marriage without any formalities, with Prabhakar, a good friend, who makes her a rationalist. Ranganayakamma portrays Shantha, beloved companion of Sathyam, as an epitome of women empowerment and paints the fascinating companionship between that couple. Janaki astonishes at this alluring comradeship.

“Janaki wonders at every aspect of theirs. The greatest awe is that they have never been changed even after the marriage. They are the same as they were before the marriage.” (Janaki Vimukthi p. 371)

CONCLUSION

“I do not wish them [women] to have power over men, but over themselves.”

— Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Women sacrifice their pleasure and ambitions, sets for the benefit of other family members like father, brother and husband. They relieve the stress, strain and tension of husbands and maintain peace in the household. But they receive insult and insecurity in return.

Women have been striving to liberate themselves from the traditional power structure, patriarchy for decades. Many feminists always try to secure equal rights for women and to remove gender discrimination from laws and institutions. Writers like Ranganayakamma play a prominent role in this process through their writings.

Bhanumathi in Peka Medalu believes in ‘God and Karma’ whereas Janaki in “Janaki Vimukthi” learns and follows atheism after her separation from her husband. Bhanumathi never thinks of working outside the family and earning her bread and butter, even though she has the chance to take help from her caring and loving brother. Janaki restarts her studies with the help of her brother and starts working in a biscuit factory. Janaki is a newer version of Bhanumathi, but a revised and upgraded one.

Bhanumathi commits suicide as she does not have the strength to live even for her loving kid. But Janaki smashes all types of ignorance. She understands that she can support herself. She completely rejects the man who dominates her and accepts a man who understands and loves her. There is a clear growth in the knowledge as well as in the personal life of Ranganayakamma from Pekamedalu to Janaki Vimukthi.

The motto of her novels is to understand the predicaments of women in society to explore the status of man-woman relationships and express the ways to solve the nodi.

Ranganayakamma, like her protagonists, faced so many complications in her marriage, which was traditionally arranged by her parents in 1959. She came out of the marriage in 1970 after so many struggles with her husband. Ranganayakamma clearly showed the route to the women like Bhanumathi to react like Janaki in ‘Janaki Vimukthi’. Ranganayakamma suggests all women through her novels to live with self-respect without depending on men for their livelihood.

“Where there is dependency, there won't be freedom and personality. Self-respect has been buried in the worst state under thousands of fathoms and it can't be raised its head”.

(Janaki Vimukthi p.15)

Ranganayakamma believes and firmly says that women’s complete emancipation emerges in the society of equals which will be achieved in the light of Marxism. She ends her novel Janaki Vimukthi with the following statement.

“If there is no knowledge of Marxism, there will not be the emancipation of Janaki. There will not be the emancipation of any woman.” (Janaki Vimukthi p.467)

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