

Minor Research Project on
EVOLUTION OF WOMANHOOD IN THE FICTION OF MALAYALAM
WOMEN WRITERS

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It is not even a century since the voice of women was heard in Malayalam Literature. Despite the long tradition of mother God worship and matriarchy, it took a long time for the women to acquire a place for herself in the seven century long literary history of Malayalam. This project titled “Evolution of womanhood in the fiction of Malayalam Women Writers” is a detailed study of the women writers who ventured beyond the gender-disparity of the age, and their works.

Almost the first female voice heard in Malayalam literature is that of Kuttikunju Thankachi (1820-1905), the daughter of Irayimman Thampi. But she failed to raise a voice, that stands out from the bandwagon of the age. It was Ikavamma (1865-1916) who first upheld the view that women has creativity and that they too should be recognized.

But going through the works of this period, we can't find the assertion of identity of any woman that rebels with the general norms of male-dominance. Yet, the second half of 19th century is important as it saw the rise of woman's voice and recognition for women writers. It was the environment of colonial modernism, which has by them overtaken the Kerala society, that set the ground for unique and original portrayal of women.

The prominences of poetry in literature gradually diminished. Prose acquired importance. This is, in a way, related to the spread of democratic ideals. It was in this backdrop that short stories became prominent. It gave room for female writers. During the first decades of 20th century, works of many women writes like B. Kalyani Amma, M. Saraswathy Bhai, T.C. Kalyani Amma, Amabadi Ikavamma found space in periodicals. But they lacked a uniquely feminine stand and nuances.

The situation changed after the first two decades of 20th century. Social reformations, freedom movement and spread of communist ideals started affecting the cultural arena. Not only were there works which realistically and empathetically portrayed women workers, subaltern groups and non-Hindu community, but also there were writers from these classes too. It was during this period that works which asserted the identity of women appeared for the first time in Malayalam. Lalithambika Antharjanam heralded this change, followed by K. Saraswathy Amma.

V. T. Bhattathiripadu and his colleagues had attempted to revolutionize and reform the Namboothiri clan which was deteriorating with extreme anti-women practices. As a woman, Lalithambika Antharjanam penned down these realities with the authenticity of experience. K.

SaraswathyAmma portrayed the rebellion of wronged womanhood and her characters range from silenced women who have not yet achieved self-esteem to spokespersons of radical feminism.

We see a triumph of Malayalam short story in the works of Madhavikutty. There was an obvious deviation in the attitude towards life and style of presentation during the beginnings of 50's. Madhavikutty was at the forefront of this transformation.

The main figure after Madhavikutty during the modernist period, was P. Valsala. But she advanced distancing herself from modernist trends.

Though SumitraVarma and Mariyamma indicated the rise of a new generation during the beginning of 1970's, they were silenced soon. Similar was the case of K. J. Nalini.

Sara Joseph inculcated the ideological aspects of feminism and initiated the change in feminist concepts. Her short stories rebelliously presented the political injustice that existed in a male-dominated society.

Before this trend, which was centred on the social self of woman, the works of Manasi and Ashitha were more of a personal and introspective nature. Though Ashitha's latter works have a spiritual aura, at its very core we find the socially generated and inevitable conflicts of womanhood manifested there.

Along with the abovementioned writers who enriched Malayalam Literature, we should bracket story tellers like K. R. Mallika, K. P. Sudheera, B.M. Suhra, C. S. Chandrika, Sarada, K. R. Meera and the list goes on. They adopted a different narrative style which inscribes or criticizes the not yet portrayed aspects of women.

The new life premises have made the human life unnatural. Life has shrunk to a mechanical and anti-ecological style. Vijayalaxmi is the most apt representative of women writers who deals with these issues.

Malayalam literature has progressed much during the last twelve years. A favourable cultural environment has evolved here. It has produced excellent works as well as sub-standard ones. Only excellence can stand the test of time. This is applicable to the feminist writing in Malayalam too.

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